

BLACK CHRISTIANS ARE LEAVING THE FAITH BECAUSE WE'VE FAILED TO ADDRESS THEIR QUESTIONS

Tamala Ceasar explains why new questions about identity are causing black Christians to rethink their faith



Last October I decided to get my DNA tested. I was intrigued to find out about the my heritage. Being a black Caribbean, I already knew that my DNA would trace back to Africa, but I wanted to know exactly where in Africa.

This quest for identity is important, because my ancestors were enslaved and taken from their homes. Black Caribbeans like me often know nothing about our own backgrounds because of the slave trade.

I'm not alone in wanting to find out more about my origins. In recent years many black Christians have begun to ask new questions about their identity. I know people who have ended up leaving the Church and denouncing their faith because they questioned not only their own backgrounds, but the roots of their faith. This is sometimes referred to as being 'woke' ie waking up to the truth; believing that the only reason they are Christian was because

the faith was used as a tool to enslave their ancestors, and that their cultural religion wasn't Christianity, but rather African spiritualism. People who are woke tend to affiliate more with belief systems rooted in Egyptology, which looks at the history, religion and language of the ancient Egyptians. They are also usually social activists who celebrate their blackness in every capacity, in a way that the media and general society doesn't.

Rather than answering these objections, the Church has often created a culture that has further alienated those who describe themselves as 'woke', by not supplying answers. For example, why is Jesus almost always depicted as a white man when he was born in the Middle East? Historically, were there black Christians who existed outside of enslavement ie the Ethiopian Church? These questions can often be politely ignored, or met with a concerned look.

We've gone very wrong somewhere. We've lost many black Christians to beliefs and ideologies that have catered to their questions about their history in a way which the Christian mainstream has not. We've failed to explain the true context and cultural history of the Bible, neglected the importance of facing some hard truths regarding the Church's part in the slave trade and eliminated any opportunity for a discussion to be had on this matter.

My DNA results confirmed some of what I already knew: that I was from Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Kenya and parts of Europe. This discovery of my pre-enslavement history was empowering for me and helped me to culturally identify with Africa on a deeper level. I am a Christian who is socially aware of injustices, my identity and my culture – and I've been able to critically think through my Christianity. My hope is that black Christians who are currently questioning their faith will feel able to ask more questions around biblical history and misrepresentations of Christ. The truth is we can celebrate our culture, fight social injustice and still be a Christian. These things are not mutually exclusive. You do not have to choose between your culture and your Christianity.

TAMALA CEASAR is the producer of the documentary *Can You Be Woke and Be a Christian?* Watch it online at premiergospel.org.uk/woke

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