

427 The Age of Woke

“Woke” has recently become a very “in” word in public debate, and as Bible-honouring Christians we need to understand what this term means. Apparently the word “woke” originated from African-American vernacular English and literally means “becoming woken up or sensitised to issues of justice”. In practice, “woke” basically involves African-Americans, left-wing politicians and their supporters challenging “whites”, right-wing politicians and their supporters, and the general “Establishment”, over key issues of justice and truth.

We note that there is nothing wrong in that challenge in itself, for such is the stuff of valid political debate and clearly, as in all societies, there are wrongs to be addressed. From a biblical viewpoint however, “woke” does bring problems due to its prevailing attitudes, methods and effects. Dr. Carol Swain, who describes herself as “a black American conservative”, identifies this woke conflict as a “cultural war” which has made American academia “like a cesspool”. The British Prime Minister has said there is “nothing wrong with being woke, but that it is important to stick up for your history, your traditions and your values, the things you believe in”.

We see that several other powerful lobby groups now also adopt the main woke attitudes of anger and struggle, as for example over: black culture itself; women’s issues; green issues; issues of homosexuality and gender; “pro-choice” abortion policies; marxist ideology; mass immigration; Islamic advance. Such lobbying marches to the steady twin-drumbeat of the apparently appalling nature of “white” history, culture and behaviour, and the need to silence the “free speech” of any voices that are contrary to the lobbyists’ agendas.

From our Christian standpoint there appear to be two main lessons for us to learn from all of this. First is the eagerness of social media, radio, television and the tabloid press to “pile in” to such debates and then to stoke them as fiercely as possible to further their own interests. This makes them all highly vulnerable to manipulation by the so-called “influencers” of today, that is, the lobbyists who are adept at using the various media outlets to advance their own causes.

The recent interview given by Meghan, Duchess of Sussex, with a secondary role for her husband, is a significant “woke-type” example which unfortunately requires our further consideration, as its “monarchy-shaking” accusations strike seriously at the British Constitution itself and really have to be addressed.

For instance, all this unhappiness has occurred only since Meghan came on to the scene: was she really the noble bringer of 21st century light into a stuffy, white, out-of-touch, racist monarchy, from which she simply had to escape, as is implied? Meghan's message focussed on herself - her isolation, victimisation, helplessness and suicidal thoughts, caused by Royal Family members, (apart, significantly, from the Queen and Duke of Edinburgh), palace officials, the tabloid press and social media. Now no right-minded people would wish for suffering on Meghan or on anyone else, but the couple's damaging claims in this interview demand careful scrutiny.

We have space here to mention only one or two examples. Firstly, Prince Harry "feels let down by his father", (the fifth commandment comes to mind, Exodus 20. 12), but how about the feelings of his grandmother, father and brother regarding Harry?! Prince Charles apparently stopped accepting his son's phone calls for a time - why would a father do that?

Next in this woke-type situation is how the media have now settled on their ultimate accusation in the interview, that the very worst royal crime of all concerned mention of the possible skin-colour of the couple's unborn child by a supposedly deeply-racist member of the Royal Family. But on examination this accusation verges on the ridiculous, for whenever a couple from different ethnic backgrounds conceive a child the physical characteristics of their child are as yet unknown. Realising that obvious fact, by the many couples and families in the country in such a situation, is plain common sense, with no reason for anyone to assume this involves in itself any unpleasant "racial overtones". But Harry and Meghan have publicly assumed the worst, presumably to strengthen their overall message.

This damaging accusation of "royal racism" also challenges the "right of free speech". A television presenter, Piers Morgan, has used this right to describe Meghan's interview rather colourfully as a "diatribe of bilge", and has now left his job as a result of speaking out. "Free speech" has been hard won in this country and needs to be upheld in the face of the many woke-type campaigns of the day, but of course it also has its very necessary limitations as outlined in God's Word (egs., Psalm 141.3 / Proverbs 16.32 / I Corinthians 6.12a; 8.9; 10.23,31-32 / Colossians 4.6a / James 1.19-20; 3.2 / I Peter 2.21-23).

Thanks be to God, the response of Her Majesty the Queen to the Meghan and Harry interview is a fine example of responsible free

speech - humble, balanced, constructive and loving. What a contrast this is to so much else in this sad, bad situation.

Truly, may "God save our gracious Queen, God save our noble Queen, Long may she reign".

(Two previous Weekly Reflections on themes raised here, numbers 388 and 389 from June 2020, are on the This Week page of the website, for any readers who did not file them at the time)

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