



The Woke Agenda

A guide for pastors

John Benton

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In writing this booklet I am very indebted to the work of the American Catholic writer Noelle Mering. While having many reservations about parts of her theology, her book *Awake, Not Woke: A Christian Response to the Cult of Progressive Ideology*¹ has proved of immense value in thinking through this subject.

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¹ *Awake, Not Woke: A Christian Response to the Cult of Progressive Ideology*, by Noelle Mering, TAN Books, 2021

Introduction: A new way of thinking?

There is a struggle going on right now which has the potential to totally fracture our Western society and to devastate the church. That may sound rather over dramatic, but it is true.

The struggle is ultimately about whether or not we will be guided by facts or by feelings. Do we believe that there is such a thing as truth that is 'out there', separate from us and true for everyone? Or do we believe that the only truth is what is 'true for me' or 'true for you'. In other words, is our culture to operate in terms of objectivity or subjectivity?

Although it is not without its problems, Western civilization has flourished in the past as it took a scientific, factual, objective view of life. But that whole outlook is now under attack in many ways. During the recent pandemic the UK government repeatedly insisted that we must be 'guided by the science' in our response to Covid. But if you took that same position in answering the question, for example, concerning whether a person is a man or a woman – being guided by the science of whether the cells of their body had XX or XY chromosomes – you would not be popular with many people. You may well find yourself suffering vehement abuse, not least on social media. Today we are told that a person's gender is what they decide, what they feel most comfortable with – whatever the science may say.

Language

The difference between being led by facts or feelings has already changed our language. For example, whereas a previous generation understood the word 'good' by reference to some generally agreed norm of what is wholesome, beneficial and right, for many today the word 'good' is synonymous with 'what feels good'. If it doesn't feel good it isn't good. Or again, take the word 'white'. Whereas historically it was simply an adjective which referred to a certain colour, today the word 'white' carries with it a whole raft of connotations that stir emotions concerning privilege, power and injustice. Even simple words like 'love', 'hate', 'male', 'female' have altered their meanings. Also, a plethora of new words and phrases have entered our dictionaries – like 'intersectionality', 'heteronormativity' and 'cancel culture'. Welcome to the world of Woke.

People are on the way to speaking different languages and, as the story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11 tells us, that means that society fractures and

communities become divided. It leads to a society in chaos and frustration, inevitably miscommunicating and plagued by mistrust. And the conservative evangelical church exists today in the midst of all this.

Thinking

The facts-based outlook and the feelings-based outlook inevitably lead to two different ways of thinking. This is, as we shall see, what the 'Woke' movement is really about. It insists that the world must change the way it thinks about everything. And it can be very aggressive and condemnatory in pursuing this change.

Do Christians understand this new way of thinking? How are we to assess it? Do we realize what is being demanded of us? This is what this booklet tries to grapple with.

1: the theology of Woke

Here is a helpful definition of what we are talking about: 'The term *woke* refers to the state of being alert and attuned to the layers of oppression in society'.² While it began specifically with racism in mind, it has since broadened in its meaning to other areas of commonly considered social oppression including questions of gender and sexuality.

Christians should be against oppression of any human beings. The Lord cares for the fatherless, the refugee and the widow, Psalm 113.7-9. But what really is oppression? Is this a word which has changed its meaning too?

In a fallen world probably most people feel oppressed by their circumstances and frustrated in some way, Romans 8.18, 20. So how are we to understand the Woke agenda?

Therapy culture

We have to start with atheism. Generally speaking, our society doesn't believe in God. We haven't got time to enquire as to why this is³, but we must simply accept that 'No God' is its starting assumption. It is one of the axioms of modern life for the majority of 'intelligent' people.

When people no longer believe in God, they turn in upon themselves. They believe there is only this life so they have got to make it work for them. They want to be happy.

Those without God inevitably begin to focus, therefore, on how they feel. Life becomes driven by the desire for positive emotions. They may show interest in 'spirituality' or their own 'gods' or even be religious in some way. But those things will just be the product of their own felt needs. Their own likes and dislikes still call the shots. They have nothing in their lives that trumps 'feel good'. The purpose of life becomes to be happy and to help others feel good about themselves. This can be termed 'therapy culture.'

The godless culture's move towards 'feel good' being the most important thing in life, is taught in many passages of Scripture. And because it is such a

² *Awake, Not Woke*, by Noelle Mering, TAN Books, 2021, page 9

³ The Bible sees the root cause of atheism as foolishness, Psalm 14.1 and often links it not to a lack of evidence for God, Romans 1,19, 20, but to sinful blindness often linked to wealth and prosperity, Luke 12.19, 20.

powerfully positive feeling this often comes down to sex.

- Jeremiah describes how illicit passion consumes those who have turned away from the LORD saying, 'They are well-fed, lusty stallions, each neighing for another man's wife,' Jeremiah 5.8.
- The apostle Paul describes how, when people reject God, he gives 'them over to the sinful desires of their hearts,' Romans 1.24.
- For those who are enemies of Christ and his cross, 'their god is their stomach', Philippians 3.19 – that is they are ruled by their appetites.
- And the people who live during the last days are those who are 'lovers of themselves...lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God', 2 Timothy 3.2-4.

In a therapy culture people see their good as identical with their desires – what they think will make them happy.

Oppression

With this emphasis on feeling positive, the idea of oppression gets somewhat redefined.

First, whereas in previous generations oppression was generally defined in physical terms – thinking of things like slavery or torture or poverty – now if we *feel* constantly frustrated by anyone or anything we consider ourselves oppressed.

Second, in the past oppression was recognized where, without violence, people were deliberately kept from pursuing legitimate aspirations in life – perhaps because of the colour of their skin.

But here is what is new...

Third, a society that doesn't believe in God doesn't believe in sin. Without God, it is not for other people to tell me what is right and wrong. So, all desires, whether, in Christian terms, immoral or not, beneficial or not, become legitimate – and anything which frustrates the fulfilling of my desires – even sinful desires – or makes me *feel* uncomfortable about my desires, is now seen as oppressive.

Whereas Christians should be against all genuine oppression, because of our doctrine of sin we have to hold back when it comes to our third point with its new definition of oppression. Because the Woke agenda mixes together both

legitimate concerns and Biblically illegitimate concerns, this makes addressing the movement quite difficult. But for Woke all the eggs, good or bad, are put into one basket.

Christianity

We support the idea of human beings being generally able to fulfil themselves. But a Christian must ask, 'what happens when the 'self' is fallen?'

The whole of Christian faith is predicated on the fact of human sin.

- Sin is *culpable*. It is the breaking of God's law, 1 John 3.4 – our Creator's commands.
- Sin is *universal*. 'All have sinned', Romans 3.23. No-one is exempt except Jesus.
- Sin is *original*. Since the first man, Adam, rebelled against God, sin is endemic in us, Psalm 51.5.
- Sin is *total*. We are not as wicked as we possibly could be, but sin affects every aspect of our lives, Ephesians 2.3.
- Sin is *fatal*. 'The wages of sin is death...' Romans 6.23. We face not simply physical death but eternal separation from God.

It is because of the fact of human sin that Jesus came to be our Saviour. Therefore, to buy into the Woke agenda with its affirmation of even sinful human desires is to inevitably deny our faith.

Fulfilment

Christians are not killjoys. Jesus came to bring 'life to the full,' John 10.10. True Christianity is on the side of humanity's happiness. But in a fallen world, sin not only leads to condemnation, but often to misery and also entails foolishness. Ignoring God, thinking ourselves to be wise we can become fools, Romans 1.22.

The Bible tells us that human beings are made in God's image, Genesis 1.26, 27. Because that is the case, we find fulfilment in trusting him and following his ways, including the patterns of life he created for us at the beginning, Genesis 1.31.

The mistake of the first human pair, Adam and Eve, was to seek fulfilment in a way other than God's word directed. Satan promised, 'you will be like God',

Genesis 3.5. What could be more fulfilling? But he was lying. And they were fooled by his lies. It is sin that is the root of all oppression in the world and to compromise with it, or embrace it in any way, leads not to happiness but to misery. 'Authentic wholeness can never be sought through the deconstruction of the person down to her desires and grievances'.⁴

The Woke agenda emerges from atheism, which teaches that we are just a higher form of animal and the material, sensual world is all there is. But that is a lie. We are so much more than that. We are made to know God, John 17.3.

⁴ Noelle Mering, *ibid*, page 201

2: The history of Woke

Karl Marx was an atheist and a materialist.

For reasons that will become obvious, we will take him as our starting point as we try to see how the Woke movement has come into existence.

With 19th century ideas of evolution and progress in the back of his mind, Marx (1818-1883) bought into a philosophy of the upward climb of society to a more just and fairer future through revolution. He took economic oppression seriously. Seeing the wealth of the aristocracy and many Capitalist entrepreneurs starkly contrasted with the poverty of the labour forces employed in their factories and 'dark Satanic mills', his understanding was that through a series of conflicts and resolutions, societies could progress towards a better future. He felt his calling was to stir up the masses to overthrow the *status quo* to bring a better world.

Religion and family

Marx saw religion as the great enemy of what he was trying to accomplish. He believed that the underclasses were distracted from their poverty and oppression by faith.

Trust in God eases the pain in this life and encourages the downtrodden to hope in the next. It encourages people to accept their circumstances rather than be appalled by them and try to do something to alleviate their conditions. For a devout Christian, adversity could be seen as not something to resist, but rather a trial which God could use for their spiritual benefit and sanctification, Romans 5.3; James 1.2. This would not help Marx to agitate the workers to action. So not only did he take atheism as a given, he saw all forms of religion as the enemy.

Further Marx, and his compatriot Friedrich Engels, came to believe that to overturn Capitalism, oppression needed to be understood in a far wider way than simply wages and the factory. They saw that working people were also willing to put up with difficult conditions, simply out of love for their families and their desire to provide for them. In this way family life gave strength to Capitalism.

'Echoing earlier writings of Marx, Engels argued in *The Origin of the Family* that women ought to become liberated from the oppression of their husbands by

entering the factories and the workforce. Marx and Engels laid the foundation for “patriarchy” as pejorative. Housework should be nationalized, they claimed, and children were to be raised not by parents but communally. Besides advancing the power of the state, these changes would lead to more women being available for sex by removing their need for the support of a husband or the responsibility of child care.’⁵ (Remember sex is high on the agenda of a godless, ‘feel-good’ society).

The undermining of family life was therefore seen as essential to the overthrow of capitalism.

Revolution

Though WWI was crucial in bringing about the 1917 Communist Revolution in Russia, elsewhere the revolution had been resisted, much to the disappointment of many Marxists.

In order to understand what had gone wrong, German Marxists formed the Institute for Social Research (or ‘The Frankfurt School’). Influenced by Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, and the Italian Antonio Gramsci, they came to the conclusion that changing society was not simply about economics, but about cultural domination. The Frankfurt School developed its own strategy of ‘marching through the institutions’. They saw they needed to subvert the family, but not only the family. They must change the academy and the culture too (especially the media).

Fleeing Hitler’s Germany, in the 1930s they moved to the USA and Columbia University. From there they were able to take hold of the reins of training teachers and introduce them to ‘critical theory’. Critical theory aims to uncover and critique the underlying assumptions of societal life in a way that destabilizes the *status quo*. Swallowing critical theory, educators thereby would become activists, training their classes to adopt the revolutionary spirit by criticizing all that is. Critical theory turns everything, from sports to fashion to sitcoms, into politics – in the name of standing up for those who feel themselves oppressed in any way.

Of course, some of these groups may be experiencing real injustice and oppression, but others may not. However, this sadly, in a sense, is beside the

⁵ Noelle Mering, *ibid*, page 33-34

point for Woke hardliners. The actual long-term goal is not really justice, but the destabilization of Western civilization. This paves the way for revolution.

Anti-authority

All previous overarching accounts of the world have, for good or ill, attempted to provide us with stability, a set of categories by which cultures can operate and endure. The point of critical theory and the Woke agenda is to do the opposite.

Of course, in a fallen world, every institution will have its faults, from minor to extremely major, and can therefore be made to look bad. This is true whether it be the family, the schools, the church, the police, Parliament, the judiciary or anything else which has an element of authority for the purpose of societal stability. This is not to say that such institutions are above criticism. There will be real injustices, because all people are sinners, which should and must be addressed. But the matter to keep our eyes on is whether or not the criticisms are long term constructive or simply destructive.

In our day 'authority' has become a dirty word. As we look at the battles going on currently in society, we can see that over the last century this Woke agenda has made enormous headway under the guise of 'political correctness'.

Sex and culture

Though much of the focus of Woke activism has to do with genuine concerns around race and gender, perhaps the greatest threat to the Western world comes from the promotion of abnormal sexual relations.⁶ The promotion of pornography, same-sex relationships, transgender etc has not come out of nowhere. It seems this has been specifically adopted by the Woke movement.

What is the reason for this? Back in 1934, the Oxford scholar J. D. Unwin published *Sex and Culture*. His book was about the correlation between a society's level of sexual restraint and its stability and achievements. He found that where chastity and monogamy prevailed, society flourished. But according to Unwin, once a nation becomes prosperous it tends to embrace an increasingly liberal stance towards sex and relationships. This in turn leads to a loss of its cohesion (presumably through such things as family breakdown), its momentum and sense of purpose. Unwin's studies led him to believe that the full effect of

⁶ It should be noted, for example, that following Woke ideology, the BlackLivesMatter movement which is about race, specifically allies itself with LGBTQ+ which is about sexual orientation.

this decline is not realized until the third generation. Change takes root slowly in the first generation, becomes more normalized in the second, its full effect only emerging in the third generation. Interestingly, if we equate a generation with around 20 or 30 years, and locate the beginning of the West's sexual revolution in the 1960s, then if Unwin is correct, our society would just be entering the period of full societal breakdown.

But the Frankfurt School and its adherents would see all this as grist to the mill for revolution. This is the way to undermine the family. Making men lecherous through pornography, for example, engenders distrust in wives and rebellion in children.

3: The premises of Woke

Writing in *The Spectator* the journalist Mary Wakefield began an article titled 'Parents must resist Stonewall's gospel' as follows: 'I think by now it's becoming horribly apparent to parents of every political persuasion that we can't sit out the culture wars. You might call yourselves progressive...but still...the ideological tide is rising, and when it laps around your own children's feet, everything changes. It becomes impossible to ignore the fact that gender activism these days isn't about gay rights or even trans rights, it's not about being inclusive, it's about presenting utter nonsense as plain fact.'⁷

She goes on to list such Woke ideas as that there is no such thing as biological sex, no born males and females, and then to expose the lie that there are no real problems about youngsters taking puberty blocking drugs, testosterone or having surgery in order to transition from one sex/gender to another.⁸ She asks the obvious question, 'If there's no such thing as biological sex, why does any child need to transition at all?'

Where does this 'utter nonsense' that is now taught in many schools, come from? To understand we need to explore the premises or assumptions of the Woke way of thinking.

Desire before reason

As we have noted already, the godless society becomes populated by people who are all about 'feel good' – 'lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,' 2 Timothy 3.4. Woke thinking calls people to live out their own desires. With no God, the only purpose of existence is to recognize, and live out our 'authentic' selves based on our personal desires – and because sex is a most intense natural pleasure, to live out especially our sexual desires. This is axiomatic. It is a philosophy of so-called 'expressive individualism'.

Apart from perhaps the need to respect other people, any restriction or denial of pleasure is by definition seen as a type of oppression. Any mention of such things as the loss of libido through watching pornography or the debilitating effects of sexually transmitted diseases which come through multiple sexual partners, or the damage done to children through the break-up of families, is vehemently repudiated with accusations of bigotry, hatred and fear-mongering.

⁷ *The Spectator*, 16 July 2022, page 23

⁸ See *Irreversible Damage: Teenage Girls and the Transgender Craze*, by Abigail Shrier, Swift Press, 2021

Even laws of biology are to be ignored if they get in the way of personal desires. Above all things a person must be free to 'be themselves.'⁹ Desire must come before reason. Objectivity must be replaced by subjectivity.

It is interesting that in 2 Timothy 3, where the apostle Paul highlights people being 'lovers of themselves' that he describes the false teachers who encourage such a way of life as those who 'oppose the truth,' because they have 'depraved minds,' 2 Timothy 3.8. He later goes on to say, 'For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths,' 2 Timothy 4.3, 4. And if you want myths, Mary Wakefield would say, you need only go into our schools and listen to a representative of Stonewall or onto the internet and read the blogs of those who promote gender confusion – because desire must override everything, including common sense.

Therefore, in listening to Woke advocates it is essential to try to keep asking the question, 'What is the evidence for what you are saying?' For example, 'What is the evidence that there is no such thing as biological sex?' Subjectivity must be confronted by and balanced with objectivity.

Identities before individuals

Remember that the Woke agenda concerns perceived layers of oppression in society. To have an identity coinciding with one of those groups that is recognized as oppressed, bestows a status upon you. It legitimizes you in a way that you, yourself as a mere individual would not be.

For example, Woke people would argue that a white man who takes the identity of a trans woman should be allowed to use women's cloakrooms – but a white man without that identity they would argue should (of course) be barred. So such status, especially we would say 'victim status', means more than who you are just as an individual. In the Woke way of thinking, identifying with a group who have gained victim status and battling the oppression they (are said to) suffer is the highest virtue. It practically places a person beyond criticism.

This is where the concept of 'intersectionality' fits in. It relates to a person who is simultaneously a member of more than one oppressed or previously

⁹ Of course, there is no room here for the idea that we are all fallen people capable of being deceived by sin.

marginalized group. So, if we think in terms of race, gender and sexual orientation, a black woman who is a lesbian would stand at the intersection of all three victim categories. Each category increases her standing. In Woke terms, her voice must be heard. By contrast a white, heterosexual man has almost no right to speak – especially about any form of oppression. Because white males are categorized as powerful rather than oppressed, it is assumed that they will only ever speak in a way that reinforces their power over others and therefore should not be listened to. And, with its historical influence in the West and its Biblical sexual ethics, Christianity is usually put in the same category. It should not be listened to but opposed. Free speech goes. Only certain people and groups are allowed to speak.

This all follows once the idea of universal truth, which is a reality apart from any of us, is rejected. The idea that anyone, black or white, male or female, Christian or Muslim or whoever might have wisdom and be able to contribute to the common good, is lost. If you are the wrong kind of individual your input counts for nothing or should even be shut out. This is very different from a Christian view of humanity which sees all people as precious, made in the image of God and worthy of a voice.

Power before authority

The Biblical outlook teaches that God, the Creator, has authority over the whole world. Furthermore, his plan for the way society is to function includes a series of authority structures. There is the authority of civil government over society, Romans 13.1, 2. There is the authority of husbands and parents within a family, Ephesians 5.22,25, 6.1. There is authority within the workplace, Titus 2.9. It is God's will that this authority is to be exercised in a benign way in all these spheres for the good of those who are under authority. Civil government should build up a society. A husband's joy should be to see his wife flourish under his care. The delight of parents should be for their children to prosper physically, emotionally, mentally, socially, spiritually and to be confident in their love. A good boss will want to grow a happy workforce.

But even when such authority is exercised in a caring way (and as sinners we acknowledge that is not always the case), Woke philosophy would see all such authority as oppressive, 'patriarchal' and offensive. The aim of the revolution is to overthrow all such authorities – which are seen as bolstering capitalism and standing in the way of the revolution.

For the Woke, authority is to be opposed by power. It is an aggressive, accusatory, finger-pointing philosophy. One well-publicized Woke slogan is 'stay Woke, stay angry!' If people do not sign up to the current Woke agenda – what is politically correct at this point in time – they are to be shouted down or de-platformed. This is 'cancel culture.'

These are the basic rules of the game for those who follow the Woke agenda.

Christians need to be alert to these things. Pastors need to teach their people and equip teachers and parents and those in the work place for what they are likely to face.

4: The tactics of Woke

It would be wrong to think that everyone who buys into the Woke agenda is the same.

Though there are definitely hard-line Woke ideologues who pull the strings and often call the shots via social media etc, there are also many ordinary folk, perhaps somewhat naïve, who have got caught up in the movement. They have heard words like ‘injustice’, ‘oppression’, ‘inequality’ and, with a good heart and without much thought, signed up. There are others who see Woke as fashionable, an *avant garde* movement, and want to be part of the action. Still others see the Woke agenda as promising a better way for the future – this is particularly attractive to young people and, of course, who came blame them for wanting to make the world a better place? Every new generation has had similar hopes.

So, with this in mind, in talking these things through (if we are ever offered the chance to open our mouths) we need always to be courteous, but also discern who we are dealing with – hard-liners or those who are more open to reason. Paul tells us that ‘the Lord’s servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful,’ 2 Timothy 2.24.

But having said that we need to be aware of some of the tactics which are often used by the Woke movement.

They will stir trouble for their own ends

Jesus said, ‘Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God,’ Matthew 5.9. A Christian’s aim must be, wherever possible, to bring about harmony and reconciliation between people. But hard-line Woke advocates would see such an attitude as simply seeking to maintain the *status quo*. Whereas a Christian might approach a fractured relationship with an assumption that, because we are all sinners, there is some degree of both hurt and culpability on both sides and room for everyone to acknowledge they could have done better, that would not be good enough for Woke people. Their concern is to apportion blame to those they perceive as powerful, and often to keep that going.

Think, for example, of the most appalling wrong of slavery. The actions of the 18th century white slave traders against black Africans cannot be defended in

any way. But history tells us that it was often other Africans (of different tribes) who first caught and sold fellow Africans to the slavers in the first place. This terrible sin was not just a white man's problem. And sadly, around the world slavery still goes on today in various forms. The Scripture rings true which says that, 'All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,' Romans 3.23.

Again, it is interesting to think about the attack on the family. People with a Woke agenda, especially those in political positions, are well aware that the promotion of liberal views concerning sex will undermine family life. All the research shows that family breakdown is rarely beneficial for children. But that seemingly does not matter. They know that family breakdown will increase the need for social services to get involved and will fuel the calls for more government control over family life. This, as we saw earlier, is precisely what cultural Marxism wants.

Where trouble can be stirred there is often an opportunity for more state intervention and so another step towards a more totalitarian world.

They will mislead people who need help

The apostle Paul speaks of those who promote the 'lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God' philosophy as 'deceiving and being deceived,' 2 Timothy 3.13. In other words, they are liars and indeed become so self-assured in their stance that they end up believing their own lies. *The Spectator* article to which we referred earlier has already given us a flavour of some of the lies that are promoted concerning a totally liberal attitude towards sex.

Often the science is simply ignored. For example, Sharon James quotes an article that appeared in *The New Atlantis* magazine in 2016. It discussed over 200 studies and concluded: 'The hypothesis that gender identity is an innate, fixed property of human beings that is independent of biological sex – that a person might be "a man trapped in a woman's body" or "a woman trapped in a man's body" – is not supported by the scientific evidence.'¹⁰

People struggling with such problems need help, not to be told lies. But the Woke agenda has managed to suppress the truth and persuade / intimidate even professionals into saying these folk must not be challenged but always to be affirmed. If parents are unhappy that their teenaged daughter wants to

¹⁰ See *Gender Ideology: what do Christians need to know?* By Sharon James, Christian Focus, 2019, page 43

transition to become a man, then the parents are in the wrong. If necessary, the teenager should leave home and sever relations with her parents. Those in 'pain' over their gender or sexuality must always be affirmed.

The journalist Abigail Shrier exposes the terrible dangers of such an approach: 'Imagine we treated anorexics this way. Imagine a girl – 5'6" tall, 95 pounds – approaches her therapist and says: "I just know I'm fat. Please call me 'Fatty'". Imagine the APA (American Psychological Association) encouraged its doctors to "modify their understanding" of what constitutes "fat" to include this emaciated girl. Imagine the APA encouraged therapists to respond to such patients, "If you feel fat, then you are. I support your experience..."¹¹

It is possible to be loving towards people and yet challenge their perception of themselves. Indeed, sometimes true love finds that absolutely necessary.

They will tell you what you think

The Lord Jesus warned us against judging others, Matthew 7.1,2. In particular we cannot read other people's minds or know their motives. 'For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him?' writes the apostle Paul, 1 Corinthians 2.11. We should be slow to do it, but if we are going to make a judgment of another person, we can do so on the evidence of their actions, and even then, only over a sustained period of time.

Yet people coming from a Woke perspective seem to have no difficulty in rushing to judgment. They have no problems in explaining to you what your real motives are – supposedly – in challenging them. Perhaps out of courtesy a man seeks to help a woman opening doors as she struggles with luggage – but evidently, he is just being 'patronizing'. Even innocuous words can be interpreted as 'micro-aggressions'. And if you do not recognize them as such you are a fool. The Woke know everything and other people know nothing – not even about themselves.

They will threaten all opponents

Again, in the chapter where Paul explains something of a world in which people are 'lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God' he foresees that such attitudes easily lead to persecution. He warns Christians that in such times, 'everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted...' 2 Timothy 3.12.

¹¹ See *Irreversible Damage* by Abigail Shrier, Swift Press, 2021 page 99

The Woke movement is pathologically accusatory and bullying. Anyone who has the temerity to disagree or even to question them is very soon subjected to the full range of derogatory terms which tell us we only think the way we do way out of bigotry or because we are fascists or imbeciles.... The online abuse from the Woke camp has become infamous.¹² Already a number of university professors have lost their positions for not being Woke enough.¹³

It is in the midst of just such a social environment as ours that Paul warns Christians to stand firm, not to be taken in by the lies and to cling to the Bible. 'All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work,' 2 Timothy 3.16, 17.

¹² Though I have to sadly admit there are a lot of trolls and bullies out there from other camps too.

¹³ For example, Professor Kathleen Stock felt forced to resign from Sussex University in October 2021.

5: Why the churches must wake up

Often associated with the flag of an inclusive rainbow, we can already see that with its background in Marxism, the Woke movement will be against Biblical faith and the traditional family.

For this reason alone, the churches ought to beware and to give teaching concerning Woke from a Scriptural perspective to Christians in these days. They need to know what they are facing and likely to face. But I want to highlight two particular things.

The inside threat

Having gained such a hold in the contemporary world, shaping even government legislation, Woke has made the idea of getting angry much more mainstream and acceptable to people than it was. Remember the slogan: 'Stay Woke, stay angry!' Shaking your fist at others from the moral high-ground has become a 21st century iconic position. In a 'feel-good' world, self-righteously condemning others feels so good!

The first problem for the church is that this self-righteous attitude has begun to be adopted by some Christians.

Though God himself is slow to anger, Exodus 34.6; Psalm 145.8, the apostle Paul tells us that it is so easy for our anger to become sinful, and to be held on to in a way that is potentially damaging for us as we allow ourselves to become bitter, Ephesians 4.26. James encourages Christians to be 'slow to be angry,' James 1.19, like God. But the Woke movement propels us to make anger our first port of call and to quickly point the finger of blame.

When such an ethos takes hold in a church we are giving 'the devil a foothold,' Ephesians 4.27. The way we talk to or about each other can grieve the Holy Spirit, Ephesians 4.29, 30 and destroy a church spiritually. They may continue to meet together but God is absent.

Now that is not to say that it is right to cover over serious problems in a church. Our God is a God of justice – that is the very reason for the cross of Christ to redeem us sinners, 'so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus,' Romans 3.26. When there has been serious wrong done in a church, Christ does not want it swept under the carpet. There ought to be a

thorough and fair investigation and where necessary confession, repentance, compensation and reconciliation. But everyone should keep calm. James warns us that ‘man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God requires,’ James 1.20.

Accusations of abuse can make a church especially vulnerable. Abuse can be extremely serious and can devastate victims. But such situations must be handled with quiet integrity.

And it is worth adding two more things.

- *First*, if initially a problem can be solved privately, that is good. But if it cannot, it needs to be made ‘public’ to the church membership, 1 Timothy 5.20. Secrecy over serious matters in a church is a recipe for misunderstanding, rumour, gossip and disaster.
- *Second*, in Scripture, the gathered local church is the ultimate ‘court’ in which matters must be settled. It may be in some instances that we can learn from organizations who have particular expertise concerning abuse. But such outside organizations (who may well have their own agenda too) are not to pronounce judgment. Under Christ, a church must judge itself, Matthew 18.17. It is the gathering of Christ’s people who have ‘the power of the keys’, Matthew 18.18-20, and no-one else.

But in all such situations letting anger and bitterness off the leash in the church will not do. We are not Woke people, self-righteously keen to apportion blame to others. We are Christian people only too aware of our own sins.

The outside threat

The book of Revelation is about the ultimate victory of Christ and his church over every enemy. It was written by John the Apostle towards the very end of the first century in order to encourage the suffering church.

It is a pictorial / symbolic / apocalyptic book which covers the last phase of world history – from Christ’s first coming to his second coming – several times in order to look at different aspects and to give a more complete view.

With Revelation 20 John returns to the beginning of the Christian era for the last

time. And here we read something that should give us cause for thought as we contemplate Woke and its agenda.

And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain.

He seized the dragon, the ancient serpent, who is the devil or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.

He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations any more until the thousand years were ended.

After that he must be set free for a short time.

Revelation 20.1-3

As with much else in Revelation, the thousand years is meant to be symbolic, signifying a long time. Before Christ came the world was dominated by false gods, superstition, corruption and inhumanity. Think of Paul in Athens, a city full of idols, Acts 17. In the Roman Empire, if a baby was unwanted the normal thing was to leave her on a rubbish dump to die. The majority of people were slaves whose lives counted for nothing and whose only hope was in the pagan temples which perpetrated lies. The devil had blinded the minds of unbelievers, 2 Corinthians 4.4. And outside Israel, the whole world had been in this state for thousands of years.

But with the coming of Christ the spiritual darkness was broken. The One to whom God had promised, 'Ask of me and I will give you the nations,' Psalm 2.7 was born. His power to defeat Satan is first seen in his victory over the wilderness temptations and in his power to cast out devils. And, as Jesus approached the cross, he declared, 'Now is the prince of this world cast out...' John 12.31f. 'And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross,' Colossians 2.15.

We realize that a binding and restricting of Satan followed from Christ's first coming. From that point the gospel truth had come and the Spirit was given. Satan could deceive the nations no more. From then on, we see in Scripture not only a great diminishing of demon possession but the good news making headway across the earth. Yes, there was still persecution, but the gospel was victorious and the church a great missionary power. However, this gospel period, Revelation 20 tells us, though it lasts a long time will not last forever. Rather Satan will be set free for a short time before Christ returns, to spread his lies and deceive the nations again.

Something will happen. Some new lie will take over the earth which will turn the whole world against the church, Revelation 20.9.¹⁴

We know that much of the Woke agenda is lies and all lies come from the father of lies, the devil. We cannot be certain but it is interesting that the Woke movement looks very much like what is mentioned in Revelation 20. The church over the centuries has made many mistakes, but generally speaking it has been a great source of good in the world bringing things such as hospitals, education, the idea that love is a virtue and good family life to the benefit of mankind. And yet the Woke movement persuades people of the opposite. Good is evil and evil is good. In our day Christians have become the bad guys, and the faithful church the enemy. The gullible world is once again succumbing to the devil's deception in a way that has not been seen for hundreds of years in the Western world.

Perhaps we need to be awake.... Jesus said, 'Keep watch' Mark 13.37.

¹⁴ See also 2 Thessalonians 2.3-12