

What Should the Saints Know about "Woke"?

By Michael M. Kerns

Introduction

You may think that you can escape the loud noise of the "woke" crowd, but you find it everywhere in businesses, schools, places of worship, governments, and even in your family with those who have false dysphoria about their biological gender. The concept of "woke" has evolved into a catch-all phrase that characterizes a worldview that divides Americans into groups, identities, or tribes, depending on your choice of language. The concept argues that the white race, and particularly men, as thoroughly guilty for the so-called systemic oppression in America among minorities. White people must confess their sins and the sins of their forefathers.

"Woke" Means "Aware"

Merriam Webster defines "woke" as "Aware of and actively attentive to important facts and issues (especially issues of racial and social justice)." "Woke was originally a term used largely by Black people to signify a consciousness around racial issues in America." [AAVE (African American Vernacular English)] Kenya Hunt, Deputy Editor of "Grazia UK," a women's fashion magazine, links the black urban word back to the 20th century American civil rights activist James Baldwin, who wrote, "To be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious is to be in a rage almost all the time." Kenya Hunt goes on to say, "But 'woke' in its original incarnation rests on activism and blackness." [theguardian.com.]

"Woke" now adds those who identify as LGGBBTTQQAAPP+ (Lesbian, Gay, Genderqueer, Bisexual, Demisexual, Transgender, Transsexual, Two spirit, Intersex, Queer, Questioning, Asexual, Allies, Pansexual, Polyamorous. [Netlingo.com] "Plus" includes allies of these groups.) as recipients of oppression and as public leaders of the "woke" movement in America. We could also use GSM (gender and sexual minorities) to identify this group. This "woke" or GSM worldview wants to fundamentally transform America by abandoning the U.S. Constitution, which guarantees our freedoms, and by denying the Biblical truths, which undergird our morality.

Black Lives Matter (BLM) Publicly Planted "Woke" in America

This "awareness" activism, that calls for confession of guilt by white people for past sins in America, gained a prominent foothold in the American culture through the Black Lives Matter organization founded in 2013, after the death of Trayvon Martin in 2012. BLM, a far leftist well-heeled political organization, expanded its hold on America through cooperative media after the deaths of Michael Brown in 2014, George Floyd in 2020, and Breonna Taylor in 2020. As a worldwide movement, it promotes protests and violence in their narrative to destroy systemic racism. "The call for Black lives to matter is a rallying cry for ALL Black lives striving for liberation." [Blacklivesmatter.com] The noted black observer Shelby Steele pinpoints the popularity of this movement. "White guilt is not angst over injustices suffered by others; it is the terror of being stigmatized with America's old bigotries—racism, sexism, homophobia and xenophobia." [WSJ Shelby Steele 3/5/17]

"Wokeness" Invades American Churches

Two ministers, on different cultural sides of America, hold to a Calvinistic view of Scripture, but the likeness ends there. They would disagree over philosophy of ministry, end-time views and the role of the church. Their differences about "woke" set the stage for examples of other churches that practice "woke," and their members may not even know it.

Social justice implies that minorities, especially black Americans, must be compensated for what white people, including church people, did to them. John MacArthur, prolific author and pastor-teacher for 52

years at Grace Community Church in California, wrote in an online statement about the “woke” concept of social justice. MacArthur argues against this concept of repenting for others.

The answer to every evil in every heart is not repentance for what someone else may have done, but repentance for our own sins, including hatred, anger, bitterness, or any other sinful attitude or behavior. There are people—increasing numbers of them—so obsessed with this issue that they seem able to find proof of racism in practically everything that is said or done by anyone who doesn’t share their worldview. (“Is the Controversy over ‘Social Justice’ Really Necessary?” Gty.org, August 27, 2018)

George Robertson, Senior Pastor of the 4000 member Second Presbyterian Church in Memphis, Tennessee, responded to MacArthur in a sixteen-page paper. That paper pointedly opposed MacArthur by arguing for public confession as a white man for his ancestors’ sins against those in the past.

Contrary to the Statement, I affirm the biblical truth that my ethnicity does connect me to my forefathers’ sins. I openly confess their transgressions, bigotries, cruelties and unjust gains. I openly acknowledge I am not a self-made man, but rather one who was born into a privileged societal status on account of the color of my skin. (www.2pc.org/media/the-jesus-gospel-part-2)

“Wokeness” Enters Evangelicalism through Its Leaders

This social awareness, including the recognition of social injustice and the implied need for confession by those in power, also finds its way across the evangelical religious culture of America. Public confession, and maybe even money to woke non-profits from local churches, apparently proves your awareness, and that, in turn, proves your rightness politically.

Albert Mohler Jr., President of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, prefaced a report to the Southern Baptist Convention in December 2018:

“We are living in an age of historical reckoning. The moral burden of history requires a far more direct and far more candid acknowledgment of the legacy of this school in the horrifying realities of American slavery, Jim Crow segregation, racism, and even the avowal of white racial supremacy.” [Sbts.edu] Mohler also stated: “We must repent of our own sins; we cannot repent for the dead. We must, however, offer full lament for a legacy we inherit, and a story that is now ours.” [Religion News Service, May 18, 2020]

Max Lucado, successful author, serves as the preaching pastor at the 5500 member Oak Hills Church (formerly Oak Hills Church of Christ) in San Antonio, Texas. At the Pray SA Rally in San Antonio, on August 11, 2020, he demonstrated his “wokeness” and apologized for the church when he preached, “We are longing for revival...but revival cannot come, unless the church first repents.” “Our heavenly Father has used this pandemic to bring to the forefront the most ancient sin of humanity and certainly of our nation,” pastor Lucado preached, “and that is the sin of racism.” [<https://sanantonioreport.org/pastor-max-lucado/>]

On 14 July 2004, Lucado preached against homosexuality and gay marriage. After he preached at the National Cathedral in 2021, some perishers knew of the 2004 sermon and complained. Lucado took the “woke” bait and apologized to the Episcopal congregation in a letter dated February 11, 2021.

In 2004 I preached a sermon on the topic of same-sex marriage. I now see that, in that sermon, I was disrespectful. I was hurtful. I wounded people in ways that were devastating. I should have done better. It grieves me that my words have hurt or been used to hurt the

LGBTQ community. I apologize to you and I ask forgiveness of Christ. Over centuries, the church has harmed LGBTQ people and their families, just as the church has harmed people on issues of race, gender, divorce, addiction, and so many other things. We must do better to serve and love one another. (episcopalnewsservice.org)

Ligon Duncan, Chancellor of Reformed Theological Seminary, expressed sorrow for “the staggering amount of injustice against African Americans.” He also repented of behalf of the seminary for its longtime commitment to “slavery, segregation, lynching, and injustice” before 12,000 participants in the Together for the Gospel (T4G) in April 2018 in Louisville, Kentucky. He has also said about his blindness to racism: “It has taken more than three decades for God to bring this blindness off of my heart.” [Gospelcoalition.org]

A congregation applauded their senior pastor when he publicly confessed his same-sex attraction identity or SSA. [Dr. Greg Johnson, lead pastor Memorial Presbyterian Church PCA St. Louis, “Theology” in the Raw podcast #876 circa May 2019] Does that mean that he considers himself gay? He does call himself a lifelong celibate virgin who loves Jesus. [Presbyterian Church in America General Assembly June, 2019] This “woke” pastor called the PCA (apparently an invisible power structure) to “apologize to same sex attracted people.” [PCA Convention July 2021] His local church also hosted the Revoice gathering July 2018. Revoice identifies with “woke,” as it calls for the church to be “Supporting, encouraging, and empowering gay, lesbian, same-sex-attracted, and other LGBT Christians so they can flourish while observing the historic, Christian doctrine of marriage and sexuality.” [Revoice.us]

“Wokeness” Divides American Churches

Practicing the “woke” view has its downside in the religious world. In 1972, the United Methodist Church, the second largest Protestant denomination in America with some 12 million members [Largest Christian Denominations in America: The Top 100 – Christianity FAQ] at its conference, re-affirmed its stance that “the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching and that “sexuality is God’s good gift to all persons.” [Umc.org.] In 2016, many delegates to the conference argued for the recognition of GSM people to include ordination and same sex marriage.

In June 2022, the Global Methodist Church formed from churches and clergy who rejected this non-biblical view on sexuality. [Religiousnews.com] Rev. Keith Boyette, Chairman of the Transitional Leadership Council of the Global Methodist Church, said that the schism began “without fanfare, but full of hope, faith, and perseverance.” [globalmethodist.org/a-new-beginning/ page 5]

“Wokeness” Bears Fruit Among Vulnerable Youth

American youth have identified in groups for decades. Grace, the secretary to the principal Ed, humorously points this out in the movie *Ferris Bueller’s Day Off* when she comments on Ferris, “Oh, he’s very popular Ed. The sportos, the motorheads, geeks...bloods, wastoids, dweebes...they all adore him.” (1986) (imbd.com) The identity group of the “T” among the youth today comes as no laughing matter. “Transgender is an umbrella term for anyone whose gender does not align with their sex assigned at birth. Cisgender is a term applied to people who are not transgender people whose gender identity matches their assigned sex.” [washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2021/04/22/transgender-child- sports-treatments/]

The “T” or transgender of GSM now leads in recruiting youth to the GSM movement and that would include youth in the church. No one would deny that some people do truly suffer from gender dysphoria. “Gender dysphoria” is a term that describes a sense of unease that a person may have because of a mismatch between their biological sex and their gender identity.” [nhs.uk/conditions/gender-dysphoria/]

However, all this attention, as pushed in traditional media, implies a large number of transgenders in America, but statistics would prove otherwise.

Despite its media attention, the transgender group ranks small in the GSM community. “For comparison, homosexuality may represent 1–2 percent of the US population (with men outnumbering women), bisexuality 2–4 percent (with women outnumbering men), intersex 1–4 percent, asexuality 1 percent, and transgenderism at 0.6 percent based on a broad definition of the term (though some researchers have it even lower than 0.1 percent). [religiousinstitute.org/denom_statements/transgenderism-transsexuality-gender-identity/]

The GSM community have fluidity about definition, and they have many identities for the denial of the traditional binary view of male and female. On any day you could choose to operate as any one of the GSM identities. Considering this fluidity, Jason Orme, assistant professor of Sociology at Drexel university and author of *Boys Town: Sex and Community in Chicago (he/him)*, speaks of ‘queer’ as an umbrella term for these minorities. [them.us/story/what-does-it-mean]

Any youth group in a local congregation will most likely have kids who claim transgender as their new identity instead of the harmless ones in the day of Ferris Bueller. The leader of any youth group must know the goal of this new identity and how to present the Gospel in love to those who claim transgender as their group.

“Wokeness” Bears Much Fruit In a New World View

Saints must recognize the origin and rapid invasion of the woke movement into every corner of America. The movement grows out of the American reform movement of progressivism. “Progressivism is a reaction to the increasing economic inequality that was a product of the Industrial Revolution.” [Thoughtco.com] We could agree with some of the ideas of progressivism. Wilberforce opposed slavery not as a progressive but as a Christian. George Mueller fed orphans, not as a progressive but as a Christian. Chuck Colson founded Prison Fellowship as a conduit for the Gospel but not as part of progressivism.

Wokers permit no solution to inequality other than dominating others with guilt. Wokers argue, “Because America is inherently a racist society, shot through with white supremacy, proponents of wokeness argue that we should embrace a sweeping program of ‘social justice.’” [“What Wokeness Is Not, and What it Is,” Owen Strachan, Patheos.com 15 October 2020] Nikole Hannah-Jones won a Pulitzer Prize for the leading essay in the 1619 Project that called slavery the “original sin.” She also contends that slavery “is a moral stain that the nation can never escape or overcome.” [“Claremont Review of Books,” Spring 2022, page 97]

The wokers have rapidly moved from political correctness in everything to social justice for the oppressed. They now view America as a collection of identity groups. Wokers of GSM acted wisely when they took on the identity of a minority because minorities get attention and money today. Richard M. Reinsch of the Heritage Foundation observed that these minorities “possess greater authority to speak—owing to the various oppressions they have experienced and the cosmic redress required for justice and liberation—than oppressor groups in almost every sphere.” [lawliberty.org/one-nation-under-woke]

The “woke” movement now has a new group to lead the way to its denial of Scripture. The transgender identity as a minority must take preeminence over all to dismiss finally the rule of the Almighty God who designed them. Like all godless philosophers, evolutionists, and godless rulers before them, wokers deny God’s design in anything, especially in the binary creation of male and female for His glory. Those who hold to the Judeo-Christian tradition see these definitions as fixed.

Wokers argue that “assigned” (birth) gender can change. They deny the simple ontology of the binary creation of humankind as male and female. No external cosmetics or fleshly mutilation changes a male

to a female or vice versa. God created humans in a binary way, male or female, and no other choices in between. Wokers see these definitions as fluid.

The Sexual Revolution wanted to liberate sex from its place in marriage where God put it. The Transgender Revolution wants to liberate sex from a fixed-birth identity where God put it.

The woke movement also dismisses individuals and puts people in groups. “You aren’t really a free agent in the world, but simply a member of your ‘group’ who is supposed to advance your group’s interest.” [Woke, Inc. Inside Corporate America’s Social Justice Scam. Vivek Ramaswamy. Center Street NY 2021, p 322]

Saints will find themselves in conflict over how to deal with this new uprising primarily among the youth of America. Wokers have moved from an awareness of social injustice as a mirror to a political thrust as a sword to divide America along racial lines.

God Calls Saints to be Awake

God calls His saints not to be “woke” but to be awake. Wokers claim awareness about social injustice on a national level and argue for national confession to correct it. The saints practice awareness on the personal level and argue for personal confession to God for forgiveness of personal sin. Wokers ask, “Will you apologize for the offenses of you or your fathers toward the oppressed?” A saint asks himself, “What am I doing which offends God?”

The Apostle Paul charged the Ephesians to wake up when he warned the saints about participating with others in the unfruitful deeds of darkness. He reminded the saints to walk in wisdom and to redeem the time because of evil.

Ephesians 5:13-16, Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore, it says, ‘Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.’ Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.

Each saint must identify what defines unfruitful works of darkness. Does putting up a placard in your front yard with progressive and false ideas mark out an unfruitful deed? Would putting up a placard for your favorite political candidate or for a pro-life stance mark out a fruitful deed? In anything that we do, can we answer the following question in the affirmative: “Does our participation in any endeavor bring glory to Christ?”

1 Chronicles 12:32, “Of Issachar, men who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do, 200 chiefs, and all their kinsmen under their command.”

Commentators disagree about the meaning of this phrase, “understanding of the times.” David fled to Ziklag to avoid King Saul, and warriors from the tribes joined David. In terms of the tribe of Issachar, the text identified the leaders or captains of the tribes as the ones who recognized the need to join David to save him from Saul. Saints do not have to be news junkies to recognize godless cultural trends and to avoid participating in these trends.

What we see will pass away someday, but now we walk carefully and speak kindly in truth, especially when those closest to us join the wokers. The Biblical worldview for the Spirit-filled saint must govern

his or her mind over the Satanic-controlled cultural trends that constantly shift but lead away from God. John reminds us that this world and its trends will pass away.

1 John 2:15-17, Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

Heavenly Citizenship Has a Higher Calling than American Citizenship

The Lord has established nations for His purpose, for man to pursue Him. Despite an awful war to settle slavery, ill treatment of those among us, unnatural growth of the federal government, and oftentimes inept leaders, America has continued by the grace of God for almost 250 years.

Acts 17:26-27, And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is not far from each one of us.

As children of the kingdom and His disciples, we live as people of the Book. Our place as citizens of heaven and ambassadors of Christ may limit our constitutional right of freedom of speech because we always represent Christ. Our worldview always begins and ends with His authority. We must be Christians first and anything else second. Too many Christians do not think that way.

“Wokeness” has no biblical basis, but how does rebuke of the wokers further the Gospel? When do we use cultural issues as a door to the Gospel as Paul did on Mars Hill?

Acts 17:22-23, So, Paul, standing during the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.”

What shall we say or do if a son, daughter, or acquaintance joins the wokers or even more upsetting proclaim membership in GSM? We cannot deny the truth, but we also cannot deny the grace that God has offered us. The apostle left us with a clear response.

1 Thessalonians 2:7-8, But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were well-pleased to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.

Like other nations, America will fade away. We ought to thank God for such freedom that we now enjoy. We may grieve over America’s demise, but no one knows the date for it. Our present citizenship means a sojourning and not permanency. Our citizenship lies above. Our hope does not rest in any way in any cultural mandate or in justice on this earth now but in His glorious return. *“But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ”* (Philippians 3:20).

The Concept of “Woke” Has Always Been with Us

“Woke” as a political idea comes from Satan, the father of lies, who opposes anything that the Father in heaven has created and who also birthed Lenin, Stalin, and Mao, among others.

John 8:44, Jesus said: *“You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”*

Those who lead the “woke” use every part of the culture, especially social media, to propose their views to destroy this nation. They act as the sons of disobedience.

Ephesians 2:1-2, *“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience....”*

Saints must live mindful of a world yet to come. We head to a country that we have yet to see. We long, as the pilgrims of old longed, to experience heaven one day, but we now live in a world like the era of the Tower of Babel or the Judges. We must be careful not to lead others into the way of this present world. We are free in Christ to speak, but freedom has its limits. As Os Guinness said, “Freedom thrives on self-restraint.”

God Calls the Saint to an Eternal Awareness

The culture wants to upend itself from its historic Judeo-Christian moorings and rage against it all, and many have not really seen the true cause and the motives of those who lead them. We live in this culture, but we do not bow down to the dark trends of this culture. We bow down to our Savior and stay awake in denying our flesh and following Him as we look forward for His return to establish true justice.

Titus 2:11-13, *For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.*