

St Nicholas Parish Church, Prestwick

Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2022

The Thought for the Week

This past week, during the first two and a half hours of the most pompous Academy Awards Oscar ceremony in its 94 years' history, millions of viewers (and may I say that I was not one of them!), we are told, were treated to a long list of sermons on a whole gamut of politically correct causes during the ceremony.

But then, out of the blue, the actor Will Smith walked forward and slapped the comedian Chris Rock in the face for making a joke about his wife, Jada Pinkett-Smith, becoming beautifully bald after she has opened up publicly about her struggle with alopecia. Now, forgive me if I mention that the actress has spoken widely about her condition, so it is not something of which she is ashamed or reluctant to mention.

When I saw the incident on the BBC News the following morning, I might have been forgiven thinking that I was watching a carefully choreographed parody, a set up.

It was only after Will Smith returned to his seat and yelled some dreadful expletives, that it became clear that all was not well.

About half an hour later, Will Smith was awarded the Best Actor Oscar, and physical abuse on stage by a black man on another black man did not seem to matter one iota.

Now, I can perhaps readily understand why Smith was outraged on his wife's behalf, but, his reaction, in the full glare of the Academy and the star studded audience and the millions of those who were watching on television, did not justify attacking Chris Rock who was so incredibly kind in not filing a complaint with the Los Angeles Police Department.

As one journalist has described it, "It was the behaviour of the gutter."

I am sure that Will Smith will have hurt fans who have watched him avidly on the screen for nearly 30 years, and, when all is said and done, he is the one who will most likely suffer most from the fallout.

Violence should never be the answer to even the most offensive comments.

We are living in a society where people are so easily offended. Now, I am not saying that Will Smith should not have been offended, but it does bring up the point that this younger generation are called the "snowflakes".

I made the decision a few weeks ago that I no longer wish to have my name on the "after dinner speakers" rota. For over forty years I have so enjoyed speaking at a whole host of sparkling occasions – Burns Suppers, Rotary Club Anniversaries, Inner Wheel Luncheons, Charity Lunches, Soroptimist Lunches, Golf Club Prizegivings - the length and breadth of Scotland, in London, and even in Alberta in Canada. Now, however, I am so conscious that the world around me is so drastically changed, that what I regard as being a totally innocuous

amusing anecdote at which we can all have a good laugh, can upset some poor soul in the audience and their sensibilities are deeply hurt. So, I have put my dinner suit at the back of the wardrobe! The “woke” brigade can rest easily that Fraser will not offend them after a dinner of rubber chicken and a glass of vino collapse! Some other unwary speaker can take the flack instead!

The Scottish ex-pat actor, Alan Cummings, now living in New York, said recently that we should not be using the word “brunch” as it smacks of white, middleclass, privilege. Give me strength!

Comedy gems like “Hallo, Hallo!”, “Fawlty Towers”, and “Dad’s Army”, are all under the spotlight and have been subject to intense scrutiny as some of the episodes are suspect because they are tainted with language that could possibly upset folk.

The game of chess is seen as “racist” as it the white which always moves first.

In my humble opinion, for what it’s worth, the “woke brigade” are mad, bad and dangerous to know!

What began as a very simple and very commendable and necessary protest against racism in every conceivable form has now taken over every aspect of our day to day life.

If being “woke” is being au fait and sensitive to any injustice in our society and dealing with, please count me in.

However, what has happened is the term has been appropriated and sloganized by hosts of those who are offended by totally innocuous terms.

Woke has come along and all hell has broken loose!

So, where do we as Christian men and women fit in with the “woke” culture?

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, “woke” is defined as being “alert to injustice in society, especially racism.”

If that is the pure definition of “woke”, then I see no problem with Christians being “woke” as such.

Our God is a God of justice and, as His hands and feet in this world it is our duty to be alert to the things that are “unjust.”

Sadly, at the heart of the Woke Movement seems to be a bitter mindset that delights in finding breaches of its moral code. The fuel for wokeness often seem to be anger – something seen not just in violent demonstrations but in the hunting out and the pursuit of offenders. Journalists, executives, celebrities and even ministers increasingly find themselves carefully checking what they write and say, lest those committed to a woke ideology slander them on social media and then at their door. People are tagged as either “woke” or “unwoke” and are not seen as whole, complex human beings with moral and immoral biases. This kind of generalisation about a person is the very posture “wokeness” decries!

For Christians, there are significant aspects missing in the woke movement. It needs to be treated with wariness, for at its heart lies an aching void. The concept of being “woke” is an attempt to create moral boundaries but without God.

It offers a bleak and hopeless world in which a stern and constantly shifting morality subjects all to a judgement from which there can be no redemption, no restoration.

Friends, far more preferable is the Christian message which, while it points out our deepest moral failings, offers us through Christ both pardon and new life.

Am I woke? Am I heck!

The Reverend Fraser R Aitken, Locum Minister.