

SEEING THROUGH SMOKE

LIVING THE TRUTH IN AN AGE OF DECEPTION



JON GARVEY

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Jon Garvey

The Hump of the Camel, Devon, England

2020

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For information: Jon Garvey, contact@jongarvey.co.uk

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For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way. Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness. 2 Thessalonians 2:7–12.

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Preface

ON 26TH JUNE 2020, the *New Culture Forum* published a book by Marc Sidwell entitled, very much in keeping with the contents of this book, *The Long March: How the left won the culture war and what to do about it*.

My first reaction on reading it (it can be downloaded free from their website¹) was that it so much overlaps what I spent much of last year writing that it renders my book largely unnecessary. This was actually rather reassuring as, when I had completed my draft manuscript and was considering finding a publisher, I sought to find endorsements from people in significant Christian leadership positions in the UK, since church leaders were my target audience.

My first disappointment was in finding just how many Evangelical leaders I had known in college or had got to know since had already succumbed to the kind of ideas I warn about here. The second disappointment was in getting three refusals, on various grounds, from those I finally approached, whom I might have expected to be allies in bringing this information to uninformed and maybe confused church leaders. Bearing in mind the ease with which I was able to obtain endorsements for my two previous books, this seemed to me both to indicate what a battlefield this subject is, and perhaps (on a more personal, spiritual, level) that this was not a door the Lord wanted me to keep pushing at that time.

But Marc Sidwell's book also highlighted another issue. Between the time he sent off his manuscript in, I believe, February of this year, and its publication yesterday, the situation in Britain and the world had been completely transformed by the SARS-CoV-2 crisis and its potential aftermath, and the social and political unrest sweeping western

¹ http://www.newcultureforum.org.uk/assets/books/The_Long_March.pdf

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countries following the slaying of a black man, George Floyd, in Minneapolis.

Yet as Sidwell pointed out in an interview yesterday, those events do not outdate his book, but have actually served to make his claims about the reality of Neo-Marxism's "Long March through the Institutions" obvious to more people. I think the same is true of my book, though even as I wrote it I knew that my ignorance about the outcome of a General Election on Brexit, the 2020 US election, and a number of other issues were likely to date the book prematurely.

In the end, I think events just underscore its message. Last year I had difficulty getting the leadership team of my own church to understand what I was talking about, whereas in a conversation over tea with a casual secular acquaintance this week, she volunteered that there is clearly something "rotten in the state of Denmark," and my brief sketch of the "long march" immediately joined many of the dots for her.

The downside of the recent events is that they emphasise the subtitle of Sidwell's book: that the left has already won the culture war, and that the question is now one of survival for those with a commitment to freedom or biblical values, rather than effective resistance or reversal of the trend. It will certainly not be a question of "church business as usual." This is reflected in the surprising number of informed commentators who, on *YouTube* and elsewhere, are resigning themselves to a bleak future of moral servitude, or alternatively to actual civil war. And all this without most people in the churches, or amongst the public, knowing there was such a culture war going on at all.

Marc Sidwell writes as a churchgoing Christian, which influences his writing in, for example, citing the same work by Rod Dreher that I do in my later chapters. But he writes primarily for political conservatives, and his suggestions for action tend towards how individuals might take a leadership role in beginning the long and painful process of undoing the present cultural destruction – always provided that the

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unworkable utopian socialism being foisted on the world does not first create a social and economic crisis that brings a revolutionary reversal, such as we saw with the collapse of the Soviet System. That, he says, cannot be guaranteed within the foreseeable future, and things may get a lot worse first

My authorial aim was different from Sidwell's from the start: I wrote firstly to inform Christian leaders of the nature and massive scope of the deception enveloping us, and secondly to sketch out strategies that might help the churches survive and witness during the hard times.

I also wrote against the background of the dominical and apostolic warnings of the final rebellion and deception associated with Anti-christ in the end times, making the injunctions of Jesus to be on our guard and to watch even more urgent than in former times of persecution from without, and doctrinal error from within, the people of Christ.

I wrote for the churches because it was as the Church, and not simply as individual believers, that Christ established his kingdom on earth. Although at present, it appears that most church leaders see neither the nature nor the urgency of the problem, it is as a body that we are commissioned to testify to Christ in the world.

There have been times in history when individual Christians in exile, or even in prison, have kept the faith alive, and even influenced events by their suffering or writing. There have also, as Sidwell points out, been many occasions where believers who happen to be close to the reins of power have brought about transformations of society. He names modern individuals, but all Bible readers will be familiar with characters like Daniel, trained up for political leadership from youth, or Esther, thrust into being the woman for the hour unexpectedly.

But the churches as a whole cannot retreat to the desert, and nor will they wield the levers of power in an anti-Christian age. Sometimes in history, as in pre-war Nazi Germany, most of the churches have failed to rise to the challenges of the time. At other times, their faithful, suffering, witness has been a catalyst for change: it was the willing suf-

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fering and faithfulness of Christians that most inspired Alexandr Solzhenitsyn in his incarceration in the Gulag, and it was arguably the publication of his *Gulag Archipelago* that made the collapse of the Eastern bloc inevitable. It is important to remember that the Church was *designed* by its Lord for such times.

Solzhenitsyn's book was first circulated in *samizdat*, or self-published form, as duplicated sheets passed between dissidents and, eventually, successfully smuggled out of the Soviet Union for publication. In our increasingly censored cancellation culture, therefore, *Samizdat* seems an appropriate medium to offer my own book to whoever might find it informative or useful, since currently the commercial publication route seems closed. In any case, making it available from my blog *The Hump of the Camel* reaches a far larger audience than my book sales have, and considerably more quickly, too.

I offer it in the hope that you may be convinced of the existence of the problem if you doubted it; that you may understand it better if you were mystified; that you might learn a few things you didn't already know to consolidate your understanding if you were already convinced; that you will find some practical ideas to think through in relation to your own church situation; and finally that you may be assured, in a time of anxiety and possible suffering, that Jesus the Lamb deemed worthy to unseal the scroll of history has anticipated all this, and that it is the culmination of the Father's inscrutable purposes prior to his return.

Jon Garvey

June, 2020

Section 1:

The Father of Lies

Section 1 Introduction

IT IS AN UNDERSTATEMENT to say that these are confusing times. Here in the UK, in the USA and across the western world, long-established political systems appear to be in a turmoil marked by radical polarisation between right and left, nationalist and globalist. Yet for all that, to many ordinary people the familiar political parties all seem to be preaching a rather monochrome vision of society, and it is one that is completely alien to people's inherited traditions, though often marketed by the politicians in vague terms of "British" (or "American" or "Western") values.

This is a society in which humanitarian tolerance of homosexuality changed suddenly to legally binding support for gay marriage; in which "male" and "female" became oppressive terms rather than a description of the very nature of the world; in which tottering national infrastructures were somehow to be remedied by unrestricted immigration; and in which after decades of Islamist terrorism, resulting in western participation in at least two major wars and clandestine involvement in others, Islam appeared to have become a privileged ideology of peace, and Christianity regarded as a marginal extreme. On top of that, all the world's institutions, it seems, predict the imminent end of the world through man-made climate change, whilst the actual experience of devastation keeps slipping a few more years into the future amidst failed predictions, although the financial impact of the remedies hits poor people ever harder.¹

Christians in particular are directly affected by all this, because they believe in a world in which God rules both the natural and moral or-

¹ In the West a major result is the increasing bane of fuel poverty, occasioned largely by rocketing energy prices as fossil fuels are phased out and heavily subsidised renewable energy, paid for through energy bills, substituted. In the developing world, *lack* of development from the discouragement of the exploitation of its fossil-fuel resources leads to millions of premature deaths annually.

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ders by an eternal law, expressed perfectly in Jesus Christ, “the same yesterday, today, and for ever.”² A phenomenon like same-sex marriage directly impacts them, as Christians suffer prosecution or loss of their livelihood for opposing it, and street preachers are arrested if they question it (and sometimes even if they don’t).

But Christians also wonder how it could possibly be that a lifestyle which was universally regarded as aberrant just a generation ago should now be compulsorily taught to children in infant schools as desirable, and, apparently, is universally *endorsed* by society, whilst their own moral standards, until recently universal, are now “bigotry.” Their job application forms will ask their sexual orientation in order to “preserve diversity,” and their local *Argos* will be bedecked by “Pride” rainbows for a whole month in the year. Even more surprising is that, by criticising as “mediaeval” Christians in the developing world who resist these things because of biblical teaching, people seem to have altogether forgotten what they themselves believed firmly just yesterday.

One of the most marked signs of this moral change is the way that one by one, church denominations that were firm in their principled theological opposition to same-sex marriage at the time it became legal in Britain in 2013³ have come to embrace and celebrate it, even amongst their leaders. Individual believers wonder how 2,000 years of Christian teaching should suddenly be found to have been in error, and that the Church was the last to hear about it, from the anti-Christian world.

Although same-sex marriage, and more recently the issue of transgenderism, have been the matters of controversy most in the public consciousness for the Church, the thinking Christian will be quizzical about the whole range of changes in the national, and international, psyche. How could attitudes change so dramatically in such a short time, apparently without any newly arisen prophets having to preach

² Heb 13:8.

³ The only exceptions were the Quakers and the Unitarians, numbering at the time only around 14,000 and 7,000 respectively, and both in steady decline.

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them up? Do societies really change so spontaneously, or is somebody pulling the strings invisibly?

These were certainly questions that had troubled me for a long time. Until 2008 I was a working GP, seeing exponentially increasing rates of abortion and sexually transmitted disease, and wondering why political leaders, both in government and in my profession, persisted in proclaiming that the answer was more sex education and even freer contraception.⁴ It was hard to see, also, how the well-researched tendency towards poor outcomes for children from broken homes was likely to be helped by ever-easier divorce and tax-equality for cohabitation.

I was also concerned with the moral changes in society, and in the churches, through serving on the editorial board of Dr Clifford Hill's magazine *Prophecy Today*, and its successor *Sword*, for thirteen years. The main message of these publications was a call to repentance, both of church and nation—that is until 2001, when we decided, at a *Sword* editorial meeting in London, that the time had come to speak instead of remaining faithful in a land, and in a national church, we now considered to be under judgement. The very next day, the World Trade Centre twin towers were destroyed by *Al Qaeda* terrorists convinced on other grounds of the West's moral decadence.

However, when I left the magazine in 2010, my mind became focused on other things. I spent several years in fruitful dialogue with various scholars about science and faith, coming to rejoice more and more in the beauty and goodness of God's natural creation, a study that culminated in my book *God's Good Earth*. As soon as that was finished I became involved in another writing project, which led me to focus on the beauty and goodness of God's written word, the result of which, *The Generations of Heaven and Earth*, went off to the publisher early in 2019.

⁴ They are still saying that in 2019, as abortions topped 200,000 for the first time, largely from an increase in the over 25 age range, whilst teenage pregnancy rates have actually dropped.

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During those years I had done a little work in my blog, *The Hump of the Camel*, on the “inexplicable” shifts in society, and particularly on the nature of propaganda. I now had some time on my hands to try and make better sense of the question of how our society has become what it is. This was a rather more solitary journey of research, and a lot less pleasant than my former activity, as it revealed little of beauty and goodness in human affairs, but only corruption and, significantly, widespread deception.

Then quite suddenly it became a practical live issue for me, as the leadership of the Baptist church in which I serve as an elder sought to grapple with the question of how to deal both lovingly, and faithfully, with the new questions of sexuality and gender.

Our focus was immediately sharpened by the discovery that one of the two candidates standing for the presidency of the Baptist Union self-identified as a “gender-queer pansexual” (happily married, she said, to a male pastor), whose church practised same-sex marriage, and whose theology regarded the concept of male/female gender as a social construct of the “Patriarchy,” and therefore opposed to God’s will, and in need of abolition. This candidacy for national leadership was permitted despite a clear statement from the B.U., only three years earlier, endorsing the biblical view of marriage as “a union between one man and one woman,” which also urged churches to refrain from performing same-sex marriages out of “mutual respect.”⁵ It was obvious to me that viewing the sexuality and gender issues purely in terms of Christian compassion would be missing the ideological elephant in the room.

As I shared some of my research with my pastor, I happened to mention the term “Cultural Marxism,” which is a pretty useful label for a well-attested understanding of what is engineering a good deal of the change in society today. I gave him some sources for reading up on this.

⁵ Baptist Union, 2013.

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The very next day (how coincidental, or providential, these things are!) *The Independent* carried a piece on, if I remember rightly, the backlash of criticism against a Conservative MP for using this very term, “Cultural Marxism,” which it dismissed as an “anti-Semitic conspiracy theory.”

I will unpack this whole issue in a later chapter, but at the time it raised a dilemma: I had been reading academic material on this subject for months, or even years. Indeed some of my insights dated back to my own course in social psychology at Cambridge University in the early seventies. This, together with personal experience, tended to confirm that the New Left of the sixties has indeed engaged in a deliberate long-term campaign to infiltrate all the organs of cultural influence in western society, in order to bring about the socialist utopia which, they concluded, would never come by the old idea of armed proletarian revolution, but only by manipulating the hearts and minds of the people.

One of their own, Rudi Dutschke, had raided the mythology of the fashionable Maoism of the time to coin the phrase, “The Long March through the Institutions.” Mao’s revolutionaries had undertaken a literal “long march” in 1934–5, to escape the Chinese nationalist army and enable the eventual success of their take-over of China. The young leftist radicals who had manned the Paris barricades in 1968 would have to be equally patient as they slowly gained power and influence, but the results would be similarly far-reaching—the destruction of western culture, of its foundation in “bourgeois” family values, and of the original source of those values, the Christian Church.

This programme is not well known to the general public, but it is easily researched. Yet right now my pastor was faced with the choice of either accepting the word of one of his elders, or believing the assurance of one of the “quality dailies” that his trusted elder was, in fact, a conspiracy theorist, and an anti-Semitic one at that.

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This, indeed, is the problem faced by any of us who want, like the men of Issachar, to understand the times.⁶ If institutions as fundamental as the free press have become part of such a conspiracy as Cultural Marxism, then they *would* say that anyone discovering the fact was delusionally seeing reds under the bed. Civil society is based on trust—but can we trust the institutions of society? And if some are doubtful, then which ones should we doubt?

This book will attempt to explore these questions, beginning from the dilemma posed by the phenomenon of conspiracy theories, and suggest an authentic Christian response.

⁶ 1Chron 12:32.

1 On Conspiracy Theories

Plots afoot

WE LIVE AT A TIME when conspiracy theories are rife.

In Pakistan, polio vaccination campaigns funded by western philanthropists like Bill Gates¹ are widely suspected to be a plot to sterilize the population²—perhaps because Gates has spoken about overpopulation and expressed admiration for his father as head of *Planned Parenthood*,³ which began as a eugenics organisation. The Gates Foundation also funds contraception programmes, albeit stressing their voluntary nature in its publicity.⁴

But perhaps Pakistanis have just been aware of the progressive, and unexplained, decline in fertility in western males over several decades⁵ and have made a connection with our high childhood immunisation rates. They would not be the first people to confuse correlation with causation, nor the last.

In Palestine, suspicions of a Zionist plot to take over the world are fueled, even in state schools, by the long-discredited *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*,⁶ forged in Russia early in the twentieth century and, notoriously, re-cycled in Nazi Germany. This conspiracy theory has survived widely differing political causes. In Russia, it stemmed from a degree of Christian Orthodox anti-Semitism and, more significantly, the perception of economic domination by newly-arrived Jewish entrepreneurs; in Germany it was partly the perceived power of Jewish financiers during hard times, but also the high proportion of Jews

¹ Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, undated (1).

² Farmer, 2019.

³ Moyers, 2003.

⁴ Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, undated (2).

⁵ Kelland, 2017.

⁶ “The Protocols of the Elders of Zion.” *Wikipedia*.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Protocols_of_the_Elders_of_Zion.

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amongst the German communists ideologically opposed to the Nazis; and in Palestine, it stems from disputes over territory combined with historical Islamic hatred of the Jews.

Yet the *Protocols* are not unknown in the modern West either, amongst anti-Semitic Neo-Nazi groups in Europe and America, and even as far afield as New Zealand, where both white city councillors⁷ in former decades, and Muslim mullahs in the wake of the Christchurch mosque attack of 2019⁸ have blamed Zionist conspiracies for the state of the world.

It seems to be especially within the western nations that conspiracy theories proliferate, though, and there are probably significant sociological reasons for this, which I shall attempt to address later in this book. Conspiracies of world-domination are not always attributed to Zionists, but may involve instead the fabled Illuminati, or actual shadowy associations of the rich, powerful and influential such as the Bilderberg Group or the Club of Rome, or “official” supra-national organizations like the United Nations or the EU, not least because many of the senior people of these bodies are also often involved in the more secretive groups, and lack democratic accountability.

Even the mysterious Illuminati may take on various quasi-religious forms in conspiracy theories, such as the Rosicrucians, the Freemasons or the Roman Catholic Church, sadly not infrequently featured in popular Fundamentalist Christian paperbacks “exposing” them, and not just in works of fiction by Dan Brown. To others in the US, though, it is the Evangelicals who are believed by some to be secretly plotting to install a totalitarian theocratic government, even by way of the apparently innocuous Intelligent Design movement.

Within individual countries, suspicions of a “deep state” operating behind the democratic institutions of government (either separate from, or subordinate to, the more global conspiracies) are widely held. Nowadays these tend to arise from the perceived “democratic deficit”

⁷ Jewish Telegraphic Agency, 1995.

⁸ Svirsky, 2019.

On Conspiracy Theories

that has seen political establishments espousing globalist and socially progressive agendas, resulting in “populist” reactions to them. These reactive movements have led to the outsider Donald Trump being elected in the USA, to anti-establishment nationalist governments in European countries such as Hungary and Italy, and to the success of the Brexit Party in the recent European Parliament election, despite our own Parliament’s, and the media’s, apparent determination to stay within the EU whatever the referendum result.

It is this grounded suspicion about the institutions of government that continues to give wings to conspiracy theories about the 9/11 attacks, and even to a resurgence of interest in cold cases like the assassination of President Kennedy in 1963. This is scarcely surprising when, at the time of writing, it appears that everybody except the mainstream media detects foul-play in the death, in an American jail, of financier and convicted paedophile Jeffery Epstein, whilst awaiting a trial that would undoubtedly have exposed many others. His silencing will benefit many rich, powerful and immoral people implicated in his misdeeds, yet he was inexplicably almost (it appears) encouraged to hang himself through neglect by staff at the facility in which he was being held.

If we add to these those conspiracies connected to science and medicine, such as the alleged faking of the Apollo moon-landings, suppression of “the truth” about UFOs, the claimed covering-up of serious side-effects of MMR vaccine, and issues over the truth of climate change, the Darwinian monoculture of evolutionary science, or even the belief that the scientists have lied about the earth being round (which belief has seen a surprising resurgence), then it sometimes seems as though few areas of life are beyond dispute.

The spread of disillusion

The press, scientists and governments scorn those who swallow conspiracy theories, but since they themselves are often the main suspects in such theories, they persuade mainly those who reject the conspiracies already. It certainly doesn’t help, though, that particularly in the last century or so (for reasons I will seek to address later), there have

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been a good many *real* conspiracies, some of them global and of huge consequence, many involving just the sort of rich, powerful and secretive people suspected in the fictional conspiracies.

A major example would be Soviet Communism, which from the start was avowedly part of the Communist International (*Comintern*) dedicated to world revolution and to a global socialist state. Its agents *did* infiltrate western academic institutions (where apart from actual Soviet agents like Philby, Burgess, Maclean and Blunt, many in the humanities in particular bought into the whole Marxist package⁹), and it penetrated our security services. British socialism, which grew out of non-conformist liberalism rather than Marxism, was nevertheless deeply connected to Moscow through Labour Party politicians and trade unionists. Soviet agents also had a great influence on peace groups like the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, not because the Soviets eschewed nuclear weapons, but purely because dissent in the West helped give them the edge in the arms race, and so furthered the collapse of the western world order.

Only in retrospect, as former Soviet agents tell their stories or secret files become available, are the far reaching effects of such a real conspiracy seen. For example, it was the shooting of an anti-Vietnam War demonstrator, Benno Ohnesorg, by a policeman in West Berlin in June, 1967, that set the student movement in Germany and the entire West on a radically counter-cultural political course. This movement saw the police as agents of “Fascist” governments in need of overthrow¹⁰. Rupert Darwall writes:

Only in 2009 was it revealed that the West Berlin cop was a Stasi agent and a member of the East German communist party.¹¹

⁹ Scruton, 2016. 18-19.

¹⁰ Interestingly, and perhaps not coincidentally, another police killing, that of George Floyd, has now kicked off revolutionary protests against the police highly reminiscent of 1968.

¹¹ Darwall, 2019. 92.

On Conspiracy Theories

In the USA, Senator Joe McCarthy's anti-communist "witch-hunt," from 1950 on, is rightly remembered as being inspired by malice, self-aggrandizement and paranoia. Yet the threat to America was real, and according to many recent commentators was largely under-recognized at the time. The problem was that McCarthy's over-reaction actually hindered efforts to counter it effectively.

Worst of all, McCarthy besmirched the honorable cause of anti-communism. He discredited legitimate efforts to counter Soviet subversion of American institutions.¹²

In the wake of that threat, the CIA decided that they needed to use Soviet-style propaganda on their own people, to counter the actual Soviet propaganda. During *Operation Mockingbird* not only were journalists engaged in disinformation behind the iron curtain, but CIA-originated stories were planted in the western press to control the opinions of domestic readers.¹³ Once this was known, trust in the objectivity and independence of the press was bound to diminish.

And so a very real Communist conspiracy led to an anti-communist counter-conspiracy that involved, eventually, the institutions of all the "free" nations. The world became the stage for rival propaganda-machines. Ordinary people were kept equally in the dark about both, and of course ignorance breeds suspicion—in this case it was quite justified.

Then again, the fear of billionaire "philanthropists" engineering their own political agendas behind the scenes is not without serious precedent. The original eugenics movement, which saw enforced sterilization of poor and "morally degenerate" folk in the USA in the early twentieth century, was promoted and funded by the Rockefeller Foundation (along with the Carnegie Institution), as was the embryonic eugenics movement in Nazi Germany, through the Kaiser Wilhelm

¹² Bennett, William J. *America: The Last Best Hope, Vol 2*. Nashville, TN: Nelson, 2017. Quoted in Thomma, 2010.

¹³ "Project Mockingbird." *Wikipedia*.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Mockingbird.

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Institute of Anthropology, Human Heredity, and Eugenics.¹⁴ This institute did the work that underpinned Nazi racial policy culminating in the Holocaust (for which Standard Oil's partner company, I G Farben, developed and supplied the Ziklon gas used in the death camps). Rockefeller had the money and power to try and recast the world after his own vision, and to his own advantage, and to a great extent succeeded. That is no more than is claimed of the sinister Illuminati, after all.

The fact that through the Internet it is now widely known that many celebrated scientists, and especially biologists, also supported eugenics helps to associate big science with shady ideas in the public mind, if indeed Rockefeller's powerful influence, both financial and political, in the introduction of molecular biology and big pharma, hadn't already invited the connection.¹⁵

This is the problem: as soon as one is aware that there have indeed been global conspiracies, and that those who have operated them have been the same kind of unaccountable people suspected of similar things today, then it becomes extremely hard to discern what is true and what is false about the way the world operates. And that would appear to be of particular importance to the Christian, who is committed to telling truth about the world.

The Great Deception

Conspiracy theories are for the most part elaborate fictions (with their own methods of maintaining themselves, which needn't concern us

¹⁴ "Kaiser Wilhelm Institute of Anthropology, Human Heredity, and Eugenics." *Wikipedia*.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kaiser_Wilhelm_Institute_of_Anthropology,_Human_Heredity,_and_Eugenics.

¹⁵ Rockefeller saw both scientific progress and huge profit in moving the entire medical profession to "magic bullet" ideas of therapy, at a time when herbal and nutritional ideas predominated. He achieved both through financial and political influence. But only a century later are the severe limitations of this paradigm gaining ground, because the focusing of medical education—including mine—on molecular medicine had been so complete.

On Conspiracy Theories

here). And so to wrench the Scripture out of context, the general advice to Christians is:

“You are not to say, ‘It is a conspiracy!’ In regard to all that this people call a conspiracy, And you are not to fear what they fear or be in dread of it.” (Isa 8:12)¹⁶

But as the famous quote from *Catch-22* says, “*Just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they aren't after you.*” As we have seen, some big conspiracies are real, and the Bible actually speaks of one very big, dangerous, and final conspiracy which it behoves us to recognize:

2 Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, ² that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. ³ Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, ⁴ who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. ⁵ Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things? ⁶ And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he will be revealed. ⁷ For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way. ⁸ Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; ⁹ that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, ¹⁰ and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. ¹¹ For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influ-

¹⁶ The actual meaning of this verse is disputed, but most commentators believe the prophet is saying that not all alliances are treasonous, and that in this God's people are to be more discerning than the general public.

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ence so that they will believe what is false,¹² in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness. (2 Thessalonians: 1–12)

The theme of a final, grand, deception occurs in several places in the New Testament, finding its origin in the imagery of the final chapters of Daniel, describing the final tribulation of the saints and the blindness of the wicked:

¹⁰ Many will be purged, purified and refined, but the wicked will act wickedly; and none of the wicked will understand, but those who have insight will understand. (Daniel 12:10)

Revelation 20:7–9 describes this in absolute terms, as Satan, who has been bound so he would not deceive the nations during the gospel age, is released “*to deceive the nations.*” This matters to believers because the purpose of his deception is to gather those nations to their final war against the saints.

In 2 Timothy 3:12–13, though, Paul presents it as a slowly developing crisis: persecution is the lot of Christians, but as time goes on “*evil men and imposters will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.*” This apparent disagreement with Revelation 20 should not trouble us, for we read in 1 John that, although the antichrist is coming, yet his spirit is already at work, only until the end it is under severe restraint (as 2 Thessalonians 2:7 itself teaches). There is, it appears, a gradual progression leading to a sudden final crisis.

The ongoing nature of satanic deception after Eden is also alluded to in 1 Corinthians 6:9–11, one of the key passages on sexual immorality (as well as other sins threatening salvation) in the New Testament. The Corinthians were, like Eve, being deceived by those around them to treat God’s word lightly.

Jesus, too, in his apocalyptic Olivet discourse (Matthew 24:5), speaks of false messiahs “misleading” many. He uses the same Greek verb as the other texts, *planeo*, meaning to wander (from which we get the word “planet”): in the passive voice it means to be deceived, and in

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the active to deceive. Jesus goes on in v.24 to say that the false Christs and false prophets will do signs and wonders “*so as to mislead, if possible, the elect.*” The versions vary in whether the actual deception of the elect is possible, the NIV, for example, suggesting it is not by translating “*...if that were possible.*” It is worth pondering what kinds of signs and wonders might convince our generally cynical culture, fully aware of Photoshopped images and becoming informed of the technology of “deep fakes,” that a real supernatural power was at work

But the very possibility of the true Church being deluded, along with the rest of the world, of which the Lord warns us, tells us of the need to be on the alert. 2 Thessalonians (v11) says that the delusion is sent, or at least permitted, by God, as a judgement on an unbelieving world—so to be undeceived will be something of a marker of the true Church. Christians will need to know, in the first place, *that* there is a satanic delusion being perpetrated on their friends and neighbours, and potentially on themselves, and consequently they will need to know something about *what* the deception is in their time. Finally they will need to know how to avoid it, and all the more so if there is the possibility that it is part of the universal, severe, delusion that will presage the end of the age and the return of Christ. That will *not* be a good time to fall into error.

In the following chapters I aim to look at these questions in some detail, because (as the prevalence of conspiracy theories alone shows) there is a lot of deception and delusion *of some sort* going on. I would suggest that the very nature of our times—the global character of our culture, and the instant transmission of ideas whether good or bad (but more often bad¹⁷)—makes it more likely than in any previous era that any major deception in these days will be that prophesied in Scripture.

¹⁷ “Falsehood flies, and the Truth comes limping after it; so that when Men come to be undeceiv’d, it is too late; the Jest is over, and the Tale has had its Effect.” (Jonathan Swift, *The Examiner*, No. 15, 1710, p2). Or if you prefer an Evangelical quote, “If you want truth to go round the world you must hire an express train to pull it; but if you want a lie to go round the world, it will

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But even if today's delusions are not those of the end time, we need to learn how to resist the ongoing activity of our enemy, and we may actually learn some lessons about that from history. For the spirit of antichrist was active in former days too, and I suggest that our forebears were often much better at dealing with it than we are.

fly; it is as light as a feather, and a breath will carry it. It is well said in the old Proverb, 'A lie will go round the world while truth is pulling its boots on.' (C. H. Spurgeon, *Spurgeon's Gems*, 1859, pp.154–5).

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The growth of propaganda

IN THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER I suggested that our global society makes conditions, probably for the first time in history, ideal for such a universal deception as Scripture seems to predict shortly before the return of Christ. I also hinted that there are particular features of our world which have produced the kind of mental dislocation that renders people susceptible not only to the *suspicion* of conspiracies, but to the actual execution of deception on a massive scale.

Foremost amongst these, I would argue, is the refinement of propaganda as an effective tool of government, and also of commerce, of journalism, and of most aspects of life during the last century. This goes far beyond the time-honoured use of logic and rhetoric to persuade. Once a society is built on propaganda, truth becomes a rare and elusive commodity.

Disinformation and spin are, like the spirit of antichrist, age-old. They began, of course, in the Garden of Eden, whose archetypal deception can still give us the basic grounding for understanding all Satan's ways.

Within ancient history, images and descriptions of kings in ancient Egypt or Mesopotamia were all about portraying his power and even deity, rather than presenting an accurate picture. Even in the Biblical histories, the "utter destruction" of enemies "without survivors" is a culturally accepted form of hyperbole.¹ But only in the twentieth century did propaganda become a science, even a technology, which could govern the plots of dystopian novels like Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* or George Orwell's *1984*. Both authors regarded their work, rightly, as being grounded in contemporary reality. I liked

¹ Kitchen, 2006. 173-4.

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the recent comment from some anonymous internet poster regarding where libertarianism has taken us in the real western world:

We were so afraid of *1984* that we opted for *Brave New World*—but ended up with both.

The first major modern discussion of the subject of propaganda was in a 1928 book by Edward Bernays.² Rather chillingly, he viewed propaganda in a Machiavellian way as a necessary part of democratic society,³ paradoxically equating “democracy” with “rule by an invisible élite”:

The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country.⁴

Apparently on behalf of the interests of that “invisible government” he used Freudian psychoanalytic theory to formulate the principles of the new (1924) field of public relations, for advertising, for political leadership, for promoting women’s rights,⁵ for education, for social action, for art and for science. That leaves little untouched in our day.

“Advertising” is now individually targeted from the personal data harvested from our *Facebook* or *Twitter* account; “political leadership” is manufactured to succeed on the basis of poll data rather than principle; “women’s rights” have grown into an entire system of powerful minority pressure-groups based on a theory called “intersectionality”;

² Bernays, 1928.

³ To be fair, the nuance of “propaganda” before its 20th century systematization was simply “information,” just as the pejorative “dogma” once simply meant “that which is taught.” Bernays may have had the older sense largely in mind.

⁴ *Ibid*, 9.

⁵ It’s sobering to realise that Bernays, hired by the tobacco industry, was instrumental in persuading women that cigarette smoking was an empowering act, this one advertising campaign alone causing millions of deaths in service to PR (Davies, 2009. 165-6).

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“education” has become compulsory childhood indoctrination in the state’s value system; “social action” is in the hands of government-funded mega-charities and multi-billion pound NGOs, promoting their ideological interests with highly biased information within the political system itself; “art” is a marketing exercise, all the way from fashion and pop music to fine art; and even “science,” now largely funded by government and big business, has often become harnessed to propaganda interests, a phenomenon of which Dwight D. Eisenhower solemnly warned in his farewell address of 1960.⁶

Bernays’s final chapter, on the *Mechanics of Propaganda*, recognises the huge potential of new methods of mass-communication: the automobile, the popular press, and the radio. He could not, of course, have foreseen the Internet and social media.

Just one example from his book, relevant to the Christian conception of truth in the proclamation of the gospel, may show what a sea-change Bernays was marking—of whose malign implications, I suspect, he was not fully aware:

The lecture, once a powerful means of influencing public opinion, has changed its value. The lecture itself may be only a symbol, a ceremony; its importance, for propaganda purposes, lies in the fact that it was delivered. Professor So-and-So, expounding an epoch-making invention, may speak to five hundred persons, or only fifty. His lecture, if it is important, will be broadcast; reports of it will appear in the newspapers;

⁶ “Today, the solitary inventor, tinkering in his shop, has been overshadowed by task forces of scientists in laboratories and testing fields. In the same fashion, the free university, historically the fountainhead of free ideas and scientific discovery, has experienced a revolution in the conduct of research. Partly because of the huge costs involved, a government contract becomes virtually a substitute for intellectual curiosity. For every old blackboard there are now hundreds of new electronic computers.

“Yet, in holding scientific research and discovery in respect, as we should, we must also be alert to the equal and opposite danger that public policy could itself become the captive of a scientific-technological elite.” Eisenhower, 1960. 421.

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discussion will be stimulated. The real value of the lecture, from the propaganda point of view, is in its repercussion to the general public.⁷

It follows that, in a propaganda society, the importance (and perceived truth) of the lecture actually *consists* in its public propagation, even if it happens to be a pack of lies. The truthful, but unpublicized, lecture, will no longer matter. Truth will be measured only by the effectiveness of the public relations machinery behind it, and that will become people's expectation. "*The medium is the message*" was Marshall McLuhan's 1964 phrase for this,⁸ which he later punned appositely in a book entitled *The Medium is the Massage*.⁹

Consider Bernays's list of applications above—almost no aspect of society will consider truth for its own sake, even science. And that is what has largely come to pass in our culture a century on.

How propaganda destroys societies

Later, and more pessimistic, studies of propaganda came from Dutch psychologist A. M. Meerloo (1956) and Christian French sociologist Jacques Ellul (1965).

Meerloo's study¹⁰ of the techniques of individual mind control under Naziism and, particularly, Communist brain-washing—which he more correctly calls "menticide"—arose from his first-hand experience as a Dutch resistance worker and later an examiner of both Nazis and Communists.

It was the Soviet Communists who began to embrace propaganda principles in a wholehearted way, from the time that they were first enunciated. In fact it was probably from them (and certainly partly in response to them) that the archetypal propagandist, Joseph Goebbels, gained his inspiration for the Nazi propaganda machine of the 1930s.

⁷ *Ibid.* 154.

⁸ McLuhan, 1964.

⁹ McLuhan, 1967.

¹⁰ Meerloo, 1956.

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But even more significantly for us, Meerloo documents the deliberate use of similar techniques in supposedly free countries by politicians, commercial advertisers and special interest pressure-groups. Bearing in mind that he was writing in the early days of both mass-media television and social psychology, he was highly prescient about the increasing dangers to human freedom and dignity from these tools. Just as the New Media can be powerfully harnessed to create radicalized terrorists, so it can be used subtly to manipulate the rest of us to believe that we are *free* from manipulation.

The sheer power of “mass suggestion” is actually most graphically shown in Meerloo’s book by one instance in which the author himself unknowingly succumbed to it. Writing on the very subject of the power of the media to deceive, Meerloo says:

Radio and television have enhanced the hypnotizing power of sounds, images, and words. Most Americans remember very clearly that frightening day in 1938 when Orson Welles’s broadcast of the invasion from Mars sent hundreds of people scurrying for shelter, running from their homes like panicky animals trying to escape a forest fire. The Welles broadcast is one of the clearest examples of the enormous hypnosuggestive power of the various means of mass communication, and the tremendous impact that authoritatively broadcast nonsense can have on intelligent, normal people.¹¹

What is highly ironic is that the well-known story of the panic caused by Welles’s realistic radio drama is itself a propaganda myth, which was promulgated by the news media of the time and so became societal truth:

The true extent of the panic seems to have been that a small band of Grover's Mill [mentioned in the play] locals, believing the town's water tower on Grover's Mill Road had been turned

¹¹ Meerloo, 1956. 109.

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into a “giant Martian war machine”, fired guns filled with buckshot in an attack on the water tower.¹²

Apart from that there was little disturbance:

Police records for New Jersey did show an increase in calls on the night of the show. However ... “Some people called to find out where they could go to donate blood. Some callers were simply angry that such a realistic show was allowed on the air, while others called CBS to congratulate Mercury Theatre for the exciting Halloween programme.”¹³

A later, more complete study of mental manipulation, and of the overwhelming dangers it poses both to society and to the human spirit, is Ellul’s *Propaganda: The Formation of Men’s Attitudes*.¹⁴

Ellul’s great insight was that propaganda (essentially something that only became possible in the age of applied psychology and mass-media) once unleashed, becomes as insidious and all-pervasive in a society as, say, financial corruption. Once the Nazis and, more persistently, the Eastern-bloc Communists began to use propaganda both to control their own populations and to undermine others, the only effective response for the West was counter-propaganda, because mere information is crushed underfoot by any determined manipulation of the media.

Yet by Ellul’s time he was able to discern how, from governments, the use of propaganda had spread to political parties. He noted the (then recent) rigidity of the two-party US system, and suggested that in a democracy this shift was inevitable, because no new or minority party could hope to muster the resources for effective multi-media propaganda. Many have noted how, in these times, that polarisation into two standard positions has become almost laughably universal: ask an American’s voting habits and you’ll likely have the key to their posi-

¹² Chilton, 2016.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Ellul, 1973.

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tion on gun-control, health provision, sexuality, evolution, religion, climate change and more¹⁵.

Ellul's claim is also borne out in England, as usual catching the cold several decades after the US sneezed. It was Margaret Thatcher who first enlisted PR consultants Saatchi and Saatchi to mould and market the Conservative message, producing a landslide victory, and Tony Blair's "New Labour," famously orchestrated by "special advisers" (*aka* spin doctors), took it much further—to three terms in office. The only possible political result was propaganda escalation, and it is intriguing that the 2015 and 2019 elections saw our traditional "third option," the Liberal Democrats, and other minority parties like UKIP, effectively wiped out. Ellul's reasoning was prophetic.¹⁶

One of Ellul's key insights in relation to this is that the very concept of "public opinion" is a product of the shift to a propaganda-based society. To put it another way, public opinion is actually *no-one's* opinion, but is the functional outcome of propaganda. The propagandizers themselves do not believe in the public opinion; rather they are concerned only to produce the desired effect on behaviour, and tend (like Blair's spin-doctors) to become increasingly contemptuous of their ideological basis. Tony Blair knew what was behind the so-called "Dodgy Dossier" on Iraqi WMD, and pushed aside Robin Cook's "ethical foreign policy." Likewise LGBTQ activists know full well they are cherry-picking evidence, but in the case of the US AIDS epidemic they put the celebration of rampant promiscuity above the health of rank-and-file gay people, resulting in inadequate health advice and many deaths.¹⁷

¹⁵ It has been noted in 2020 in the response to COVID-19 lockdowns.

¹⁶ More recently the turmoil of Brexit has complicated the issues, the Brexit and Liberal Democrats, rather than the traditional parties, expressing the two poles in the European elections of 2019. Whilst the situation is still ongoing at the time of writing, this phenomenon seems to represent at least a temporary failure of "traditional" party propaganda. Yet even in this crucial debate, the spin-machines of "Project Fear" v. "Europhobes" have been dividing the country and muddying the waters.

¹⁷ Horowitz. 2018, 110–115.

How propaganda destroys ideologies

And so propaganda tends to destroy ideologies, even as it fulfils their aims. In Russia, communism began as the motive for propaganda, but inevitably became its malleable tool. Democracy suffers the same fate, once keeping public opinion behind the *word* democracy becomes the focus. It is then acceptable to torture jihadist prisoners, to change regimes by skulduggery, and to spy on one's own population, as long as it is kept secret—or at a pinch, attributed to the preservation of democracy, or the even more nebulous “western values.”

Meanwhile those propagandized are either manipulated into blanket acceptance of the programmed “public opinion” or, as we see so often nowadays, are made afraid to disagree because they believe they must be wrong in the face of the ubiquitous message, or simply because they're afraid of the social consequences. This is possibly why in the run-up to the 2015 UK election, many would not own up to the pollsters that they favoured the Conservatives, and why their decisive victory was a shock. But that was just that year's choice between the two parties: such a choice is not always offered in a propaganda state.

The whole society, then, becomes increasingly involved in a lie. But as Ellul noted, propaganda, once unleashed, becomes opposable only by counter-propaganda. Back in the sixties, Ellul showed how inter-bloc propaganda became inter-party propaganda. Half a century on, we can see that it has also become the norm in moulding public morality, public taste through blanket marketing of commodities and art, public education, and even science through its increasing politicisation.

Another aspect of a propaganda society is how, as it matures, the propaganda becomes self-perpetuating, however much true information is available. Ellul describes how, say, a communist who has bought into the package will read, watch and listen only to information that reinforces the myth, excluding all else as lies (and probably, therefore, never engaging with it). Likewise for the anti-communist, with his own information sources. And that is the reason why the “information explosion” that has happened with the Internet,

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though it might have been thought to reduce the power of propaganda, actually does the reverse.

Although good information is accessible at the touch of a mouse, the recipient of propaganda will in practice simply find an intensified availability of his own prejudices—this is familiar to all of us in the world of web forums, be they sceptical, Creationist, or whatever, where “communities” are often groups bathing in their own propaganda and shouting down (or simply erasing) that of others. *YouTube*’s algorithms will make suggestions according to what we already think.¹⁸ Even the advertising is targeted to our own profiles now.

And yet, despite the niche markets, there is still a “mainstream” message which influences the bulk of ordinary people with lives to pursue and little interest in “current affairs.” Simply by coming to believe the permanently recycled lies, these ordinary people will perpetuate them in conversation, when being “well-informed” they will correct their more ignorant neighbours with the misinformation they have been fed.

Since propaganda tends to major on major issues, be they racism, discrimination against women or planet earth burning up, the “well-informed” will also tend to become zealots for the cause of the lie. This is what caused Lenin to coin a term for influential western visitors who saw only what he wanted them to see in Russia—“useful idiots.”

In fact, the self-propagation of propaganda may be illustrated by a useful classification someone has made of people’s relationship to it:

1. Manipulators, who know the game and play it for their own wealth or power.
2. True believers, who either believe the lie, or see it as justified for the final good.
3. Those too naïve to question the authority of the message.

¹⁸ Though increasing evidence of the manipulation of the algorithms by social media to mould opinions to the “correct” views of these monopolies is emerging from whistleblowers and investigative journalism.

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4. Those who see through the lie, but opt to avoid problems by going along with it.
5. “Useful idiots,” who are culpably gullible, “claiming to be wise” but actually parroting the empty arguments fed to them uncritically.

Christian vulnerability to propaganda

Unfortunately (in this context) the unsuspecting people include a majority of Christians, who perhaps believe the best about everyone, who may consider politics a dirty, or at least unspiritual, word, or who may simply reflect the lazy norms of their social peers. To such people propaganda may be virtually invisible. If it were not it could not function optimally as propaganda. They may listen to the BBC news to avoid the party-bias of the newspapers, failing to appreciate the bias it has itself embraced:

... the BBC, along with its media and establishment allies, has become the vehicle for the propagation of a series of noble lies in pursuit of a political agenda.¹⁹

To question the mainstream of propaganda is (according to Bernays’s analysis) to threaten the stability of society, and Christians are taught to promote the peace of society and respect its authorities. On the other hand, to succumb to propaganda is to deny truth, which is even more fundamental to God’s kingdom. And to *engage* in propaganda, as everyone in a propaganda state must to some extent do, inevitably destroys the very thing it means to be Christian—to speak the truth in love—just as it can destroy science as a truth-telling enterprise.

At this point perhaps it would be as well to speak more on another potential situation for the eclipsing of truth by public relations—the Church itself. Ellul points to three episodes in Church history when

¹⁹ Aitken, 2018. 13. Fortunately this gullibility is not universally true: in a children’s talk at my church only this week, on “trust,” when the speaker asked for a show of hands for, “Who trusts the news?” *no* hands went up. Perhaps in an unhealthy situation this is a healthy symptom of what Robin Aitken writes: “Sooner or later people will realize they have been duped.”

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this occurred, albeit in ages when propaganda was not fully developed. In the fourth century came the institutionalisation of Christianity under Constantine, merging state interests with the gospel. The ninth century saw political party-spirit, more than theological difference, lead to the Great Schism between eastern and western churches, leaders of each excommunicating the other for their heresy. And in the sixteenth century the Reformation triggered a propaganda battle leading to bloody physical wars across Europe. In all three cases there were real issues and real Christians with true convictions involved, but what came out of them was the degrading of Christianity itself to just another vehicle for partisan propaganda.

Today the Church falls over itself to avoid sectarian squabbling. But it also tries very hard to be “relevant” to what it perceives as the needs of public opinion, that product of propaganda. And that often means, as in the case of secular institutions, subtly adapting the message, and/or the medium, to maximise “success”—in other words, having recourse to propaganda.

Is there not a danger that the fashionable “seeker sensitivity” differs little from “marketing by focus groups” in both politics and commerce? Sociologists Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton coined the term “moralistic therapeutic deism” to describe the predominant belief amongst young Americans nowadays.²⁰ Whilst it may be less than a fully accurate descriptor, it is the indication of a very sub-Christian religious approach. It may be partly either be the result of, or the cause of, “seeker-orientated” churches.

Ellul’s answer to such things is that being true to the Truth is the very core of Christianity, without which it is better off dead. The apparent self-destruction of acting counter-culturally by attempting to communicate that truth amid a chorus of ready-made lies is, actually, no more than a reminder that the strength of Christ is shown in weakness. The Kingdom of God was always the project of Christ through the Holy Spirit, and the madness of history—as the Book of Revelation

²⁰ Smith, 2005.

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graphically teaches—is simply the unfolding of the scroll that God himself has written and sealed. Our job is to seek to do truth. His is to ensure that it finally prevails, to his glory.

3 Propaganda in Words

IN THE NEXT TWO CHAPTERS I will try to illustrate some general propaganda strategies from recent years, which may stimulate us to think more carefully about the messages we receive daily, whether the source be the *Guardian* or a popular preacher telling anecdotes of miraculous events. I will make no attempt to treat the methods of propaganda exhaustively. That is better achieved by books like Meerloo's and Ellul's, for those interested. In this chapter I will look at verbal propaganda.

Lies

Clearly the most obvious form of propaganda is lying. Joseph Goebbels famously said:

If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it.

... Except that it seems likely that Goebbels neither said, nor believed this, though it is cited over half a million times on the Internet and in over twenty books.¹ In fact he accused the English of stupidity for their habit of "telling a big lie and sticking to it." However, once again we find that the ubiquity of the falsehood proves the point: on this matter, at least, the real Goebbels was wrong and whoever made up the quote (in English, it seems) was right. When do most people ever check their sources?

A particularly egregious example of lying as propaganda, because successful for so long, is a whole series of unsubstantiated myths about religion and science which were initiated in the nineteenth century, particularly in anti-religious, pro-science, books by Andrew Dickson White and John William Draper. These myths range from the alleged destruction of the ancient library at Alexandria by ignorant

¹ "False Nazi Quotations." <https://bytwerk.com/gpa/falsenaziquotations.htm>.

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Christian mobs to the story of Galileo’s martyrdom for science by a tradition-bound Catholic Church—both false, but widely believed even now, because of their frequent repetition.

Perhaps the most instructive instance of these is the familiar claim that Columbus’s discovery of America finally disproved the blinkered Christian doctrine that the world is flat. I learned this over sixty years ago from the same series of science sticker-books that first taught me about dinosaurs and astronomy, and I marvelled at the arresting image of a galleon sailing over the edge of the world. And yet even then historians of science knew it was nonsense—all educated people have known the world was round since long before the Christian era, and there are only two notable (and early) exceptions to its affirmation by Christian writers.²

And yet not only is the false narrative still taught in schools and popular science books, but it appears in high-budget documentaries. In several years of my participation at the science-faith site *BioLogos*, it was regularly trotted out as an example of conflict between science and religion, even by working scientists who are Christians yet had never thought to doubt the falsehood.

The important questions to ask about such widely-accepted lies are who stands to benefit, and how they maintain control of the public narrative. In this case, White and Draper’s work arose from a long campaign by Thomas Huxley and his secular associates to wrest the control of science from Christian researchers, who had been its mainstay.³ This party eventually gained control of science education, resulting both in the rigidly secular ethos of contemporary science, and the ability to sell the myth of Christianity’s anti-intellectual “obscurantism” with the requisite authority. It is a useful exercise to ask who

² These are the Ante-Nicene Church Father Lucius Lactantius, a converted pagan philosopher of Constantine’s court, who seems to have rejected the spherical earth with all his other pagan philosophy, on principle; and the eccentric 6th century monk Cosmas Indicopleustes, whose error is significantly mitigated by his being the first Christian to recognise temple imagery in the Creation account.

³ Stanley, 2016.

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still gains from failing to rectify the error, despite many authoritative correctives,⁴ and why they possess the popular mind more than the legitimate historians do.

Nevertheless, one would normally expect lies to require totalitarian control of the media for their success as propaganda. As the “Pseudo-Goebbels” quotation goes on to say:

The lie can be maintained only for such time as the State can shield the people from the political, economic and or military consequences of the lie. It thus becomes vitally important for the State to use all of its powers to repress dissent.⁵

Such state repression remains true in our own largely unsuspected propaganda world. Edward Snowden discovered that the ultra-secret STELLARWIND file on illegal US intelligence mass-surveillance, which had been supposedly been “redacted” for public consumption, was in fact a completely different document. The public version was a complete fiction designed to hide ongoing collection of our data by supposedly democratic governments. Releasing that information to journalists in 2013 rendered him liable to a law that punishes such disclosure with lifelong imprisonment, even when the purpose is the public good, and even when the information reveals the illegal and unconstitutional activity of a powerful unelected élite.⁶

At the time of Stalin’s artificially induced (and partly deliberate) famine of 1932-3, in which over five million people died, complete control of the media enabled news to be given of bumper harvests, which were no doubt widely accepted because—well, they were repeated in every news outlet.⁷ But because food remained scarce for all, and life was impossible in the affected regions, the seeds of disbelief were sown not only regarding *that* news, but regarding everything the party

⁴ E.g. Hannam, 2010; Hart, 2009; Russell, 2012.

⁵ “False Nazi Quotations.” <https://bytwerk.com/gpa/falsenaziquotations.htm>

Note 1.

⁶ Snowden, 2019. 175–7.

⁷ Solzhenitsyn, 1974. 54-7.

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said. Raw terror became increasingly necessary to maintain control. And yet since the state news-media were the sole alternative to word of mouth (with its risk of denunciation and arrest), even the most cynical had no effective way of judging reality.

Jacques Ellul analyses the power of news media, whilst applying it to our own western society:

We must emphasize this circle which we shall meet again and again; the structure of present-day society places the individual where he is most easily reached by propaganda. The media of mass communication, which are part of the technical evolution of this society, deepen this situation while making it possible to reach the individual man, integrated in the mass; and what these media do is exactly what propaganda must do in order to attain its objectives.⁸

Propaganda, he says—as opposed to rational argument—works by being ubiquitous and persistent, giving the mind no space for sober consideration. In that way, judgement gives way to conditioned reflex. Propaganda does not aim at changing our mind, but at bypassing it to produce the desired *action* in line with the intention of the message. The mind follows after the event.

As both Meerloo and Ellul point out, nobody is fully immune from this: at least part of the agenda must eventually sneak through your defences. That is even more the case when you *have* no real mental defences because, in a “free” society, you assume you’re receiving information, rather than propaganda. Ellul argues that it is actually the most educated and best-informed who succumb most easily to propaganda, because they are most exposed to the message.

So the truth is that persistent falsehood *can* succeed in a supposedly free society like ours, simply because powerful voices are free to tell lies whose refutation is not immediate or prominent. A large part of the justification for “gay rights” in the early days of Gay Liberation

⁸ Ellul, 1973. 9.

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was the figure of 10 percent for the prevalence of exclusive homosexuality in society. How could such a sizeable minority be denied its democratic rights? The 10 percent figure was used as the basis for estimating homosexuals' contribution to society, and even for calculating how many gay soldiers died heroically in the Second World War in TV documentaries. It was constantly used in press reports and even in medical articles. It was levelled at the church leadership team on which I served by a man who was discovered to be abusing adolescent boys: why pick on him, he argued, when there were without doubt twenty others (maybe including ourselves) hidden in the fellowship?

But the figure had long been demonstrated to be false, and to be based on biased and partly fraudulent science by the infamous Alfred Kinsey between 1948 and 1953. More thorough research, and a number of more rigorous surveys, showed a prevalence of between 2 and 4 percent, those figures often including all who had had even one youthful homosexual encounter. One must ask what forces within society led organs of publication to keep using the discredited figure? Who stood to gain, and who controlled the media?

The ten percent figure is still used even today in *Mermaids UK* transgender training sessions in primary schools.⁹ In a recent case this occurred in a church school, with the support of the Anglican Diocese of Chelmsford. It has led to the resignation of Rev John Parker, firstly from his school governorship, and then as vicar of Fordham and Eight Ash Green, in Essex, after his bishop told him his views are not welcome in the Church of England. Parker has an Oxford degree in biology, and was being pressured to acquiesce in a scientific falsehood in a matter of child safeguarding.

One phenomenon worth recording here is that professional expertise does not protect most of us from being fooled by propaganda. Whatever your field, it is likely that from time to time you will come across a news item or other claim which you know, from your training and

⁹ Parker, 2019.

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experience, to be completely wrong. Nearly everyone can see through false propaganda claims in their own area of knowledge.

But sad to relate, it appears that we all assume that the media or the government must be truthful in those things we cannot ourselves validate. Even scientists or biblical scholars, who detect falsehood in their own fields, will assume that scholars in *other* fields will be as rigorous and truthful as they are themselves. Society depends on such trust—where is scholarship if the scholars cheat, or civil life if the news is false? And so lying propaganda undermines every important aspect of life.

Truth

Let us return to Goebbels, who as a master-propagandist actually preferred to tell the truth when possible—if perhaps not the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. He said (and we must factor in the character of the man and his cause as we interpret the nuance of this):

Good propaganda does not need to lie, indeed it may not lie. It has no reason to fear the truth. It is a mistake to believe that people cannot take the truth. They can. It is only a matter of presenting the truth to people in a way that they will be able to understand. A propaganda that lies proves that it has a bad cause. It cannot be successful in the long run.¹⁰

Truth, unlike pure falsehood, can always be defended against refutation. But it can mislead for all that. One way to mislead by using truth is simply to leave out significant facts. Only recently, an article appeared in the mainstream press in which climate doom was portended by the announcement that the coast of Alaska was now completely ice-free. We were led to assume the imminent disappearance of arctic ice *in toto*, but the piece failed to mention that the summer loss of sea-ice from Alaska has been a normal occurrence since long before the current scares about climate change.

¹⁰ Joseph Goebbels, Address in Nuremberg, September 1934.

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In the same climatic vein, in the week of writing much press coverage has been given over to French President Macron's concern about "unprecedented" fires in the Amazon forests, though Prof Louis Giglio of the Global Fire Emissions Database, in response to a colleague's query, stated, "*In many if not most regions within 'the Amazon' the 2019 fire counts are entirely unexceptional.*"¹¹ Did you ever hear that part? The fires were real, but the news was not, and served some political purpose (such as covering over the lack of common ground at the G7 conference that Macron was hosting).

Similarly, news articles pushing the LGBTQ agenda by talk of homophobic or transphobic bullying at school are intended to create shame or outrage, but invariably fail to mention that the statistics show only 2 percent of school bullying to be related to sexuality or gender. Where, therefore, should concern and resources against school bullying be most effectively targeted? At the 2%, or the 98%?

Truth is also obscured simply by persistently failing to mention certain points of view entirely. Perhaps the most relevant example for Christians is the virtual air-brushing of Christians and their faith out of the media. A recent case was the way, after the Islamist bombing of churches in Sri Lanka, which could scarcely be totally ignored, several Democrat politicians in the US, including Hilary Clinton and ex-President Obama, referred to the victims using the awkward term "Easter worshippers," rather than "Christians" or even "churchgoers."

It is also notable how few Christians appear in TV drama, except in the form of stereotypes that are either chinless and bigoted, or are fighting their thoroughly worldly demons in a way with which few actual Christians would identify. Whose agenda is served by the marginalisation of Christians worldwide in this way?

The most baleful result of this kind of thing is the invisibility of major issues. Sporadic attacks against individual Muslims in northern Eng-

¹¹ Highlighted Comment.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H7lgKjvAqt4&lc=UgxdSdhofnw96BOVms94AaABAg>.

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lish towns are always reported, whilst systematic and deadly persecutions of Christians worldwide seldom are. Eventually nobody notices their absence. The issue effectively ceases to exist. In our society, only what is regularly reported in the news is real. Issues which the press drops become quickly forgotten, enabling the past to be re-written if necessary: the Crusades may be frequently cited as examples of Christian aggression, but the *reasons* for them, several centuries of aggressive Muslim imperialism, can be quietly ignored.¹²

In the political field, when the media shares the agenda of state propaganda, the suppression of truth by simply ignoring it is rife. British readers will remember the interminable time it took for the £10 million Chilcot Inquiry to deliver the truth about the disastrous war in Iraq. During the inquiry, much was made of the need for guilty heads to roll, given the many thousands killed in Iraq and amongst western troops, the destruction of the country's institutions that encourage the formation of ISIL and years of further bloodshed across the Middle East, the imprisonment without trial and torture of prisoners, and so on. The report duly named names and attributed blame... and then, suddenly, the whole matter disappeared from the press. If you Google "Chilcot enquiry consequences," you will find little after 2016.

More recently in October 2019 extradition proceedings on Julian Assange, the *Wikileaks* whistle-blower on western government corruption and illegality, went totally unreported in the press both here, where he is in solitary confinement without charge, and in the US, to which he is being extradited. Few of us remember, or even know, that the United Nations has already deemed his detention and extradition illegal. All of these truths are in the public domain, but not the public consciousness, simply because the media consciously directs our attention elsewhere.

Furthermore, to speak habitually of issues from only one side has the effect of making the alternatives unsayable. Note, for example, how mainstream news coverage of the Muslim families objecting to

¹² Stark, 2010. 12-33.

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LGBTQ materials in their children's primary schools in 2019 has overwhelmingly focused on the problems the demonstrations were causing to teachers and the educational system, whilst strongly hinting that many of the protesters came from elsewhere. The parents themselves have seldom been interviewed. It is easy to forget the importance not only of parents' legitimate concern for their children's best interests, but of the fundamental legal framework that states:

In exercising or performing all their respective powers and duties under the Education Acts, the Secretary of State, local education authorities and the funding authorities shall have regard to the general principle that *pupils are to be educated in accordance with the wishes of their parents*, so far as that is compatible with the provision of efficient instruction and training and the avoidance of unreasonable public expenditure [my italics].¹³

If all the mainstream news presents the parents as the problem, then it becomes increasingly difficult for anybody else to say, "Actually, I agree with them."

Language

The manipulation of language is another technique of which everybody ought to have been thoroughly forewarned by Orwell's "Newspeak" in 1984. As Meerloo reminds us:

"Speech manifestations represent conditioned reflex functions of the human brain." In a simpler way we may say: he who dictates and formulates the words and phrases we use, he who is master of the press and radio, is master of the mind.¹⁴

A veritable lexicon of neologisms has been invented for us by the progressive movement, and other older terms have been generalised beyond any actual meaning. Amongst the most established of the latter is the word "fascist," which early in the history of Communism became

¹³ UK Public General Acts 1996.

¹⁴ Meerloo, 1956.27.

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a general pejorative for anyone with whom the Bolshevik party disagreed, whether they had any real connection to Mussolini's movement and its ideology or not.

I well remember a Communist at my medical school telling me gloomily over lunch that he was the only socialist amongst 600 fascists. But long before that, American folk singer Woody Guthrie's guitar bore the legend, "This machine kills fascists," without any evident sense of concern about its homicidal tendencies. Just as philosopher Alvin Plantinga pointed out about the word "fundamentalist" in religious circles, if it has any meaning at all "fascist" now means "anyone more conservative than me."¹⁵

Its use is designed not to describe, but to close down dialogue—with the additional advantage of closing the minds of all who use it, including those innocents wishing to avoid the charge by saying, "I'm no fascist, but..." Already they have inadvertently admitted the category to be valid rather than a mere buzzword, and so have sided themselves with the "anti-fascists" who might, in reality, be considerably more unpleasant or violent than those they label.

It is evident that some other terms have become broad equivalents of the catch-all accusation "fascist." "Far right" is one such term, which since it is often applied to those who have already been de-platformed by the media seldom needs to be aligned with any *actual* opinions. But its status as a buzz-word is shown by the way it is applied indiscriminately in the press both to avowed Neo-Nazi groups, and to a Christian advocacy group like *Christian Concern*.

Once more, it is a word designed to shut down discussion, making ordinary people afraid that they might somehow fall into that accursed category (of which they know little, since "Far Right" spokespersons are routinely silenced in mainstream media, though even the views of IRA bombers were given air-time during the Irish "troubles."). The term simultaneously alienates people from those whose views they

¹⁵ Plantinga, 2000. 245.

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might, in fact, find reasonable and share, once they have been so labelled.¹⁶

“Hate group” is another such loaded term, since it has acquired a range that may be, and often is, used to cover not only gangs of knife-wielding anti-Muslims, but those desiring independence from the EU, or churches teaching a biblical view of sin. A little thought shows that the real meaning of the term is a group one ought oneself to hate, on the say-so of the media, without really asking why.

Even the word “racist” has now become almost too general to be useful, since the charge is levelled at those flying the St George’s flag (or in America, the stars and stripes), or at anyone, of any political stripe, discussing immigration or even questioning the opinions of a “person of colour.” Its power lies in its historical associations, however inapplicable in the particular situation. In 2020 it has become virtually synonymous with a light skin in the mystic notion of the Critical Race Theorists’ “Systemic Racism.”

Everyone is aware of the cluster of new “phobias” that have arisen in connection with homosexuality, transgenderism, “queer”-identity, Islam and probably more. Once more, they have been coined quite deliberately to marginalize any criticism of the relevant activist ideologies, by association with a group of medical conditions, the true phobias, perceived by many lay-people to be signs of moral weakness. At the same time, their root meaning of “fear” neutralises the need to engage with the actual reasons people have for their opinions, since they can be dismissed as irrational anxiety.

One additional effect of this welter of accusatory terms is that it has actually completely, yet insensibly, cancelled the concept of right and wrong of both biblical and secular morality. The universal hatred of racism and racists, for example, disguises the fact that it is hatred itself, not its object, that is the evil on which we will be judged by God.

¹⁶ Such blanket terms also run the real risk of making those labelled “fascists” feel that real fascists are their allies.

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It also perpetuates a historically recent, and biologically false, concept of “race,” forcing us to see each other as God does not see us.

In similar vein are the “denialisms” associated particularly with more scientific matters like climate change, evolution or vaccination. The intended comparison here is with holocaust-denial, the purpose being that some of the moral abhorrence of that position should stick to those termed “denialists.” Once again it is a word used to shut down discussion, avoiding the need to work through the real arguments which such people might bring to the table, were they not all too often excluded from it.

In all these cases, even accepting the validity of the linguistic terms capitulates to the propaganda goals. Many of us are even willing to use terms like “post-Christian” to appear well informed, though it relegates the glorious hope of the coming kingdom of heaven to the dustbin of history. The temptation to use what appears to be correct and up to date vocabulary is with us all, but in this case the language itself aims at deception and indoctrination. If a word, or a usage, is new (though our language has a long and rich history), it is worth asking who stands to lose by it, as well as who benefits.

4 Propaganda beyond Words

WORDS ARE A NECESSARY part of the content of propaganda, for in them is the message with which we are intended to comply. But they are by no means the only, or even the most important part in fulfilling its goals.

Personality

Edward Bernays writes of the importance of harnessing personality in propaganda:

Another instrument of propaganda is the personality. Has the device of the exploited personality been pushed too far? President Coolidge photographed on his vacation in full Indian regalia in company with full-blooded chiefs, was the climax of a greatly over-reported vacation. Obviously a public personality can be made absurd by misuse of the very mechanism which helped create it.

Yet the vivid dramatization of personality will always remain one of the functions of the public relations counsel. The public instinctively demands The Mechanics of Propaganda a personality to typify a conspicuous corporation or enterprise.¹

Such excesses remain ridiculous, but are *still* practised by politicians – such as the Democrat leaders appropriating African scarves to “take the knee” for Black Lives Matter recently. But Bernays wrote before the full evil of the personality cults of Stalin, Hitler, or the small army of totalitarian dictators since. Cults of personality are, of course, not new. I mentioned previously the iconography of kings in the ancient world, and somewhat closer to our own time the preservation of the royal image was particularly mastered by the Tudor monarchs Henry VIII and Elizabeth I. Even early photographs of our own Queen Eliza-

¹ Bernays, 1928. 156.

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both II were designed to project a particular impression of her throughout the Empire that was rapidly becoming the British Commonwealth.

Today, perhaps the shining example of such personality branding in the political sphere is Vladimir Putin, whose photographs, showing him pursuing manly activities stripped to the waist, appear to do him no harm with the Russian public, despite the transparency, to worldly-wise westerners, of their function.

But personality branding can also be used negatively by opponents, as in the case of Donald Trump, whose most innocuous words or actions are immediately branded, by his enemies (constituting virtually the entire media machine) as racist and incompetent. This phenomenon has been labelled as “Trump Derangement Syndrome,” or “Orange Man Bad,” and is just an extreme example of how personality branding, good or bad, governs the way we are now encouraged to evaluate our leaders. It is usually worse for female public figures, whose professional effectiveness is often judged by the media by relentless concentration on their dress-sense.

The situation is no better in popular culture, where the image of celebrity has all but replaced the recognition of excellence or its antithesis. It began with the “Hollywood Star,” selling a fantasy lifestyle of wealth and beauty to the masses during difficult economic times a century ago, but now has reached the point where the opinions of celebrities on weighty matters are given undue weight simply because they are famous. It is not clear how acting or singing, or even presenting TV documentaries, qualifies one to speak authoritatively on science or politics.

Nevertheless, such personalities are exploited by the politicians themselves, as bodies like the United Nations appoint movie actors to be special ambassadors on this or that subject, knowing that a star photographed with children in a famine-zone provokes more support than competent reporting on the famine itself.

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Personalities (or their public image, at least) may even be manufactured from whole cloth, for propaganda purposes. This was the *penchant* of pop Svengalis moulding nonentities into teen idols for their own profit back in the 1950s, but it has more serious equivalents today.² Sad to say, almost any media personality today will be projecting some PR man's image, for a bottom line. It is always wise to ask who paid the publicist's fee, and why.

Once again, it is important in a Christian context to recognise the emergence of the "Personality Preacher," arguably having his origin in Charles Finney in nineteenth century America, but perfected by the televangelists and Charismatic revivalists of today. But it is not an unknown danger in less extreme circles, either, for there is always a danger that style will speak louder than substance on a public platform.

Emotional manipulation

I have mentioned above Ellul's claim that all propaganda is intended to bypass reason, and to produce a Pavlovian kind of conditioned reflex (like the famous example of Pavlov's dogs, conditioned to salivate whenever a bell sounded). Pavlov's theories have been of more lasting influence on propaganda theory than those of Freud which preceded them,³ as Meerloo also observes.

In the Pavlovian strategy, terrorizing force can finally be replaced by a new organization of the means of communication. Ready-made opinions can be distributed day by day through press, radio, and so on, again and again, till they reach the nerve cell and implant a fixed pattern of thought in the brain. Consequently, guided public opinion is the result, according to Pavlovian theoreticians, of good propaganda technique, and the polls a verification of the temporary successful action of the Pavlovian machinations on the mind. Yet, the polls may

² Morningstar, 2019.

³ Bernays's mother was Sigmund Freud's sister, and his father's sister Freud's wife.

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only count what people pretend to think and believe, because it is dangerous for them to do otherwise.⁴

Both of these psychological theories (behaviourist and psycho-analytic), in effect target the *emotions*, for after all conditioning reflexes is about moulding appetites, not perfecting arguments. That is the reason for employing personality as a tool: by appealing to our reactions to beauty, sex-appeal, fame, childhood, cute animals or even *machismo* we are persuaded we *want* to believe the associated message. Hence the use of anecdote, and the studied avoidance of data, in movements like *Black Lives Matter*.

In propaganda targeted at the Church, feelings of compassion, and of associated guilt for its implied lack, prove very effective. This is particularly noticeable in the current matters of sexuality and gender, in which there is always a strong message of Christianity's past persecution of minorities (seldom documented very accurately), or its current hypocrisy in covering its own dirty linen.

Naturally there is a case to be made in such matters—remember that propaganda works best when based on kernels of truth. But Christians should be careful to notice how an ideology such as the LGBTQ lobby, which is already somewhat confused in its *rationale*, is deliberately packaged quite differently in different contexts. In the political arena, the emphasis is on civil liberty and choice of lifestyle, exemplified in the blatant excesses of Pride Parades, and also in those troubling news articles about children displaying “gender creativity” or performing as drag queens in gay clubs.

But none of that appears in discussions of the matter in the Church of England General Synod, or in the theological material urging churches to abandon biblical Christian teaching. There, the emphasis is all on *lack* of choice about sexuality and gender, and therefore about the cruelty of imposing moral constraints on behaviour as if there were options.

⁴ Meerloo, 1956.28.

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This fundamental contradiction is a tension within the progressive movement itself, helping to explain the conflicts between some feminists (arguing for radical autonomy of female expression) and transsexuals (arguing, to the feminists whose sports or toilets they wish to co-opt, the givenness of their gender identity). It is not apparent that these tensions can be coherently integrated, making the rational basis of the ideology suspect. But my point here is that *as propaganda*, the agenda is targeted at the emotional vulnerabilities of the audience: governments are susceptible to libertarian arguments, and churches to arguments from victimhood and the charge of lack of charity.

In terms of technique, one time-honoured way of manipulating emotions is by the manner in which information is presented. In my book *God's Good Earth* I included a section on "nature porn" in TV documentaries. One example was a celebrated scene in the BBC's *Planet Earth II*, in which marine iguanas ran a gauntlet of deadly snakes to reach the safety of rocks. The film's editor, Matthew Meech, admitted that sequences like this were cut to produce "human" stories, taking inspiration from dramas like the Bourne Movies.⁵

This may seem an innocent example of fostering public interest in nature, and the film-makers' own justification is that it increases concern for, and support for, the natural world. But in fact it leads to the serious error of viewing God's creation as cunning and malevolent, necessitating a constant battle of wits between (in this case) homicidal snakes and terrified lizards. But nature is not a human drama, and to present it as such is propaganda, made effective by the very quality of the cinematography, cutting, and mood-music. That is why journalist and late convert to Christianity, Malcolm Muggeridge, once said:

It's very nearly impossible to tell the truth in television.⁶

The medium of television or film sweeps aside our critical faculties. This is of some importance in fiction, in which (for example) the image a woad-painted William Wallace sticks in many minds despite

⁵ Garvey, 2019. 159–60.

⁶ Muggeridge, 1977. "Questions following the 3rd lecture."

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Braveheart's travesty of historical truth. Or, in a film in production in 2019, *Mary Anning & the Dinosaur Hunters*, the devoutly Christian fossil-hunter Mary Anning is portrayed as a lesbian, presumably to hijack her scientific and feminist status for the LGBTQ agenda. But such misrepresentation is even more problematic in documentaries, in which we justly expect the facts behind the imagery to be true.

Jordan Peterson, in a YouTube video, shows an old Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda video.⁷ He points out how it achieves its effect firstly by juxtaposing the images of “German order” with scenes suggesting the self-inflicted poverty and chaotic culture of the Jews in the Warsaw ghetto. The narrator tells of their being spared the ravages of war faced by ordinary people, being rich city dwellers (although also, in some unspecified way, ignorant and unsavoury). The impression is emphasized both by the authoritative voice of the narrator, and by the use of minor-key mood music darkly suggesting the threat posed by the Jews.

In fact, all that the footage itself shows is fairly ordinary (and impoverished) people doing nothing threatening at all: the film-footage adds a veneer of verisimilitude to what is otherwise nothing but unsubstantiated assertion and manipulative mood music.

We expect nothing better from Hitler's regime. What is more worrying is when we compare this propaganda with a recent BBC News documentary on German populism.⁸ We start, once more, with doom-laden music, which returns intermittently to maintain the sense of foreboding. The female presenter, looking suitably grim, plods around the place to voiced-over comments about suspicions of racism, and vague hints of the similarities to Hitler of what turn out to be rather small groups of populists, whose main activity, other than discussing worries over the Islamisation of their country and disowning racism point-blank, appears to be enjoying a beer in their club bar.

⁷ “Jordan Peterson shows you an old German Propaganda Film.”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lc8IGcCkKK0>.

⁸ “The Rise of the Right: Populism in Germany.” *BBC News*.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-pP3EcdC1VU&t=5s>.

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Views of rather hateful graffiti and broken windows are juxtaposed with the interviews and the plodding journalist, and it is easy not to notice that this vandalism has been inflicted on the property of the populists by left-wing Antifa or Islamist groups, rather than being evidence of their own violence towards others. In short, if there is a genuine threat to civic peace from these groups the documentary has given us no better evidence than the Nazis did for the degeneracy of the Jews. The BBC has, in fact, used exactly the same emotional innuendo techniques as Goebbels. And we should ponder their motives.

One might suppose that after ninety years of having our hearts wrung or stimulated by music in films, adverts, TV programmes and documentaries we would instantly recognise, and resist, the practice. But it appears we have grown to like having our opinions formed for us through our emotions. Unfortunately I remember occasions when church congregations fawned over a visiting speaker who performed his heterodox sermon like a TV star, in preference to their regular pastor's solid, but un-choreographed, teaching.

Coercion

Ex-prison psychiatrist Theodore Dalrymple makes an astute observation on the effectiveness of propaganda even when it fails to persuade:

Political correctness is communist propaganda writ small. In my study of communist societies, I came to the conclusion that the purpose of communist propaganda was not to persuade or convince, nor to inform, but to humiliate; and therefore, the less it corresponded to reality the better. When people are forced to remain silent when they are being told the most obvious lies, or even worse when they are forced to repeat the lies themselves, they lose once and for all their sense of probity. To assent to obvious lies is to co-operate with evil, and in some small way to become evil oneself. One's standing to resist anything is thus eroded, and even destroyed. A society of emasculated liars is easy to control. I think if you exam-

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ine political correctness, it has the same effect and is intended to.⁹

In totalitarian societies the rule of terror is obvious, and the demoralizing effect of being forced to act as if obviously false propaganda is true is easy to imagine. But in our own culture the same effect exists, increasingly, at the basic level being our hesitation to speak aloud on subjects other than in what is deemed a “politically correct” way. I have noted above how polarisation in public discourse, with the obvious “official” preference for one of the poles, can bias opinion polls: people hesitate even in an anonymous survey to admit to certain opinions or voting intentions. This is oppressive in itself.

It has been exacerbated by the need for dependence on social media to maintain any public position now: not only can the wrong (perceived) view result in large volumes of negative Retweets or online death threats, but recently the main platforms, owned by a very few massive private corporations, have proved quite capable of censoring access not only to social media like Instagram, Twitter, Facebook or YouTube, but to channels of funding under the same ownership. In some cases this, combined with the mainstream media’s refusal even to mention certain individuals, amounts to a virtual “de-personing” little better than the ancient practices of exile or outlawry. This is as likely to be the result of libels by some “approved” source as of any views actually expressed by the victim.

In a multitude of cases the false representations of people’s opinions have led to sanctions including loss of employment. The 2019 case of conservative philosopher Roger Scruton, sacked by James Brokenshire from an unpaid government position because of deliberate misrepresentation of his words in a *New Statesman* interview, is a clear example of this.¹⁰ The journal later apologised, and the wronged victim was quietly reinstated three months later, but the journalist kept his job as assistant editor. Less venerable individuals than Scruton

⁹ Theodore Dalrymple interviewed by Jamie Glazov in Glazov, 2005.

¹⁰ Steerpike, 2019.

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have been destroyed by such machinations. Scruton himself was dead within a year.

What is bad for individuals is also bad for ideas: truths that are no longer spoken will disappear from minds, and potentially from the culture. These truths, in the very near future, might well include key tenets of Christian doctrine, for what may not be spoken in public discourse will tend to disappear from the public space of church services too.

Another effect of coercion is one I learned during my social psychology studies at university: the cognitive dissonance produced by acting against one's beliefs tends to cause the beliefs themselves to change, in order to justify the actions and be able to live with oneself. This is the phenomenon that led death-camp guards to justify the unjustifiable in World War 2. Naturally it is of great value to the propagandist, who knows that many people will resolve their alienation by eventual, unconscious, compliance with the prevalent indoctrination. This was the ultimate fate of Winston Smith in *1984*, but the means used need not be as extreme as the prolonged torture and deprivation we once called "brainwashing": even in the novel Smith was an unusually stubborn case.

Most people are more compliant, perhaps because less questioning. This may help explain how an entirely novel system of sexual morality has apparently become normative over just a couple of decades. Somehow people have amnesia for well-founded views they held not many years since. Even entire Christian denominations now support single-sex marriage, after issuing reasoned and well-researched documents arguing against it at the time the government legalised it just five years ago. This is moral acrobatics on a grand scale, requiring psychological and sociological, rather than logical, explanation. And also requiring prophetic censure.

One last common category of coercion in propaganda is foreclosure of the right of reply, not only by intimidating *ad hominem* attacks on individuals, but by repeating mantras like "The debate is over on this

subject,” or “You are on the wrong side of history.” The simple answer to these claims is that such assertions are refuted by the very *existence* of the opponent. In Christian history, Arianism had been adopted officially by the Catholic Church before the “denialist” Athanasius appeared, virtually alone, from the wrong side of history—and prevailed.

Confusion

If all else fails, propaganda can be effective even by simply confusing its victims into impotence. One recent example of this was the Novichok poisoning of the Skripals in Salisbury in 2018. On the face of it, the Russian government was wrong-footed on this, since a trail of evidence and inane denials led straight to the door of its security services. Yet the denials and excuses kept coming, and an army of obvious Russian trolls with fake English names also barraged the comments pages of the news sites, accusing the British government of orchestrating the crime itself, from nearby Porton Down.

The whole Russian propaganda exercise was entirely unconvincing. But given what I have already said about western governments’ long involvement in propaganda and dirty tricks, there will have been many people who concluded, “Governments! You can’t trust any of them.” And since such cynical doubt leads to withdrawal from involvement, Russia will have succeeded in some weakening of Britain’s national resolve despite its incompetence.

At the same time, Russian dissidents were shown that they too could be killed with impunity, and that even the discovery of government involvement would achieve nothing.

Another source of confusion, perhaps useful to manipulators and certainly one result of their work, is what has been called “liquid modernity.” The term was first coined by Marxist theorist of Postmodernism, Zygmunt Bauman,¹¹ but I use it here specifically for the quite recent phenomenon of moral norms that change apparently every

¹¹ Bauman, 2000.

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week. A celebrity can get caught out for speaking in terms of the wrong phase of feminism, or a blogger can use a phrase that was in vogue a month or two ago only to find himself castigated for hate speech by the activists who are at the centre of things.

This can backfire badly, as activists themselves get bogged down in arguments over whether it is wrong this week to clap speakers (it may trigger anxiety in others), or a problem to say “No problem,” (apparently implying there may be a problem). But for many people, fear of offending norms may well put important subjects out of bounds for discussion, and weaken the incentive to try. And therefore, after a while there is nobody left to defend either truth or common sense from insane changes—unless courageous people resist.

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5 Framing the Great Deception

AT THIS POINT LET ME bring a reminder of the principal theme of this book.

- Scripture warns of a programme of supernatural deception, culminating in a climactic delusion surrounding the antichrist of the end times.
- There has probably never been a period of more widespread deception, and the ability to generate and promulgate it everywhere, than today.
- Therefore Christians need to be alert to the possibility that the two are related, and consider carefully how to maintain the truth of Christ's kingdom in the face of both attack and seduction.

Even if our own times are *not* those of the very end of the age, yet Scripture's warnings are made for the whole church age, and the remedies for deception remain the same for all time. It is therefore quite in order, as far as I am concerned, for readers to maintain a healthy caution about how close to the end we actually are, so long as they also recognise deception's perennial patterns, and guard against them, as indeed others in the long history of the Church have done. But history also gives us examples of entire Christian nations being lost to the doctrines of demons through the failure of believers to respond to their threat appropriately.

Considering the devil's involvement

I have introduced this subject through the lenses of conspiracy theories and real conspiracies, and through examining the modern proliferation of propaganda techniques, which are the handmaiden of the latter. But it should not therefore be concluded that there is necessarily a single global, satanic, conspiracy waiting to be exposed.

We may indeed expect to recognise actual human conspiracies in such a situation of the end times. After all, the prayer of the disciples in

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Acts 4 identifies one such conspiracy as the *modus operandi* of the evil one in the crucifixion of Christ:

²⁷ For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸ to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.

Incidentally, in this passage we also see that even the malign strategy of Satan is ultimately subsumed in the predestinating will of the Father, just as it is in the passage in 2 Thessalonians 2 with which I began the book, in which it is, in the final analysis, God who sends the delusion as a judgement on unbelief:

¹¹ For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, ¹² in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness.

The same is true of the Old Testament source for Revelation 20's account of the deception of the nations, Ezekiel 38. There Yahweh describes the assembly of the great horde in terms of his own "putting hooks in their jaws."

38 And the word of the Lord came to me saying, ² "Son of man, set your face toward Gog of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him ³ and say, 'Thus says the Lord God, "Behold, I am against you, O Gog, prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal. ⁴ I will turn you about and put hooks into your jaws, and I will bring you out, and all your army, horses and horsemen, all of them splendidly attired, a great company *with* buckler and shield, all of them wielding swords; ⁵ Persia, Ethiopia and Put with them, all of them *with* shield and helmet; ⁶ Gomer with all its troops; Beth-togarmah *from* the remote parts of the north with all its troops—many peoples with you.

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⁷“Be prepared, and prepare yourself, you and all your companies that are assembled about you, and be a guard for them.
⁸After many days you will be summoned; in the latter years you will come into the land that is restored from the sword, *whose inhabitants* have been gathered from many nations to the mountains of Israel which had been a continual waste; but its people were brought out from the nations, and they are living securely, all of them. ⁹You will go up, you will come like a storm; you will be like a cloud covering the land, you and all your troops, and many peoples with you.”

This should reassure us, as it reassured the disciples in Acts chapter 4, of God’s control of the final outcome, but it does not change the reality of the devil’s deception, nor of its real danger to the saints.

It is hard to see the final gathering of the nations to battle in Revelation 20, resulting from Satan’s deception, as the immediate result of anything except some kind of conspiratorial negotiations between world leaders. In our times, realism dictates that these would include public figures appointed by democratic elections, serving on the Security Council of the United Nations, attending the G7 summits, having opponents in other political parties, and so on.

And yet the armies described in Scripture need not themselves be part of the conspiracy, but foot-soldiers deceived, or maybe simply conscripted, into attacking God’s people. Modern propaganda could achieve this, but only if it were maximally pervasive, and persuasive.

I showed in Chapter 2 how different types of people may further a propaganda conspiracy, from the “evil geniuses” orchestrating it in full knowledge of their methods and goals, to the more-or-less unwitting True Believers, the fellow-travellers, the naïve innocents, those who go along with the lie for a quiet life or self-interest, and the Useful Idiots.

But it is particularly the case, when we *know* the “great deception” will be masterminded by a supremely evil genius, Satan, that his master plan might well involve overlapping, or even entirely separate hu-

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man conspiracies. There is no reason why such groups of conspirators should necessarily collaborate, or even know of each other's existence, though they might.

For example, it is not inconceivable that an ideology like Marxism, historically committed to a new world order, and a cabal of rich industrialists bent on corporate control of the world, might each be quite separately manipulated by Satan to pursue similar immediate goals. Each might even discount the other's existence as a conspiracy theory. Alternatively each might seek to use the other as a co-belligerent. A third alternative is that their aims might overlap so much that they become one: currently, for example, China is a powerful and expansionist totalitarian Communist Empire, in which many corporate giants such as Google, and less well-known investors, as well as indigenous businesses, see their main future profits. A situation like that might be ripe for an unlikely, as well as an unholy, ideological alliance between big business and revolutionary politics.

Such co-conspirators might or might not have a conscious sense that Christ's Church is their primary enemy. But even if they do not, they may see the Church as a serious hindrance, challenging (if faithful to the Truth) both totalitarian politics and globalist monopolism, in my example.

In other words, we are looking for evidence of a *strategy*, more than we are seeking to unravel a *conspiracy*. As my example shows, even in human terms apparently conflicting ideologies may turn out to be bedfellows. But Satan has no ideology: it is all one to him if humanity is destroyed by socialism or capitalism, by pollution or by destructive de-industrialisation, by Islam or by Christian heterodoxy. Nevertheless, the existence of interlocking conspiracies might be some of the evidence we need for understanding Satan's strategy.

Satan's first deception, in the Garden of Eden, bears no textual hallmarks of a conspiracy or of the insistent psychological pressure of propaganda as I have described it. In the highly condensed and literary account of the fall in Genesis 3, Satan only speaks twice. The first

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time, he deliberately misrepresents the command God gave Adam, which although it may subtly influence Eve, does not in the least fool her, for she corrects him, though introducing an error of her own.

His deception, as such, comes in his second brief exchange, in which he contradicts God's word with, arguably, two half-truths: that she would not die, and that she would become like God. The sentence of death which he denies, in the event of Eve's eating the fruit, results in spiritual death, or delayed death, or both, rather than instant immolation. And the promised knowledge of good and evil indeed makes her, in one sense only, like God,¹ yet in every other way it makes her entirely unlike him, and alienated from him, from Adam, from the natural world, and even from herself. But whether he includes elements of truth or not, as far as Eve is concerned when she gives her account to the Lord, "*The serpent deceived me,*" and the Bible never contradicts her on that conclusion.

So we probably learn little about the actual *means* Satan might use to deceive the end-times nations from the Eden account. But we can certainly learn a lot about his *motivations*, which arise from jealousy and murderous hatred.

In my book *The Generations of Heaven and Earth* I take inspiration from Irenaeus and other Church Fathers to revive a plausible early speculation about the reasons for Satan's seduction of Adam and Eve.² In some sense, as the witness of later Scripture makes clear, Satan was manifested in the serpent: it was not merely an inferior animal, though that may have been how it appeared to Eve. If, as I argue in that book, Adam and Eve were appointed to extend the human rule of creation beyond the Genesis 1 mandate over the creatures of earth, to become co-regents of the whole created order (see Psalm 8 in the light of Hebrews 2:1–15), the divine goal finally achieved for the race by its representative Christ, then Satan, a glorious angel in the divine council, had reason to be envious since his own status would suffer. Hebrews chapter 1:

¹ Genesis 4:22.

² Garvey, 2020. Ch 17.

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¹³ But to which of the angels has He ever said,

“Sit at My right hand,
Until I make Your enemies
A footstool for Your feet”?

¹⁴ Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?

It takes a more Christ-like leader amongst the divine council than Satan to be glad to render service to a naked and ignorant upstart ape. But such an affront to angelic dignity might be remedied if one were subtle enough. It is unrealistic to think of the devil’s ambition as being to usurp Almighty God’s role—only fallen humans are ignorant enough even to contemplate such an absurdity. Rather, the devil’s animus is against humanity, the usurper, whom he trapped in condemnation and bondage to sin through his deception in the garden, and whom he still wishes to destroy. This is indeed a rebellion against God’s will for the Creation, for which the Enemy is justly condemned by the victory of Christ over human sin. The clearing of sin’s condemnation opens the way for the just punishment of Satan along with the glorification of humanity in accordance with God’s eternal plan.³

We are told that Satan knows his days are numbered,⁴ and that he is also therefore fully aware of the final victory of Christ. And so vindictive rage, jealousy and murder appear to be all that is left to him, apart from his capacity to lie and deceive. Like some nihilistic mass-shooter on a US college campus, he will take out as many unwitting enemies as he can before the police bullets get him.

Therefore whatever the final deception turns out to be in detail, we are likely to find it couched in the beguiling terms of some scheme that will do humanity enormous good, but which will actually consign as many as possible of them to perdition. If the pattern of Eden is any-

³ Eph 1:1–12; Col 1:16–27.

⁴ Rev 12:12.

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thing to go by, such a plan would achieve most by making God *as he has spoken* appear to have been misconstrued.

In particular, since “war against the saints” is on his agenda, then the alleged misrepresentation of God by his people, the Church (and maybe the people of Israel too) must be made to seem a culpable abuse of humanity. The Church, the message will be, has led people away from the best path, and even away from God, to the detriment of the human race. This strategy has the benefit of also bewitching as many of those *within* the church as possible—“*so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect*” (Matthew 24:24)—and decimating the rest of the believers through persecuting tribulation. We see this clearly in the “progressive” movement in Evangelicalism now.

Where is Antichrist?

In New Testament passages the figure of *antichrist* is never far from warnings about a final period of deception. 2 Thessalonians 2 describes him as

³...the man of lawlessness ..., the son of destruction, ⁴who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God...

⁹...that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, ¹⁰and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.

The term “antichrist” itself appears only in the letters of John, in which the author seems to accept a coming “final villain,” whilst characterising the ongoing character of deception as “the spirit of antichrist.” In chapter 2:

¹⁸Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour.... ²¹I have not writ-

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ten to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it, and because no lie is of the truth.²² Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son.

And in chapter 4:

4 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.² By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God;³ and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the *spirit* of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.

John's emphasis is on false prophecy and teaching, and the focus for his own times, at least, is on the denial that Christ has come in the flesh. But all these passages seem to speak of one individual who will be "*anti*", that is "over against," or "answering to," or "instead of" Christ Jesus. The Greek preposition covers a number of possibilities, from someone denying Christ and seeking to replace him, to someone claiming to be him. But the emphasis on prophecy, false signs and claims to deity appears to indicate a primarily religious figure, and quite possibly one arising from within the Church itself.

Even that, though, covers a multitude of possibilities, and yet is quite a tough hill for the antichrist to climb, if he is to persuade the whole world.

In Reformation times, the Roman Catholic Pope was widely regarded by Protestants as the antichrist,⁵ a belief that persists amongst some to this day, although the historical situation has changed so much. Given their theological assumptions, the Reformers had a good case: Catho-

⁵ For example: "Shall we recognise the Apostolic see where we see nothing but horrible apostasy? Shall he be the vicar of Christ who, by his furious efforts in persecuting the Gospel, plainly declares himself to be Antichrist?" Calvin, 1962. 384.

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lic doctrine and practice had become corrupted with falsehood, and yet the Pope elevated them, and his own authority over the Church, beyond that of Scripture. This corrupt administration also had a history of extravagant claims of miracles (the association of Catholic miracles with antichrist possibly explains the cessationism that became the norm in Reformed circles).

As the Reformers calculated it, the Church of Christ had been in “Babylonish captivity” to Rome for a pre-millennial thousand years, and as time went by, the closeness of the year 1666 seemed to some to augur the return of Christ, in vague reminiscence of the mark of the beast, 666.⁶

On the other hand, the biblical prophecies might equally justly be applied to the onset of Islam, a religion that arose in militant opposition both to Christianity and Judaism, yet adopted many of their beliefs and parts of their Scriptures. This occurred centuries before the Reformation. Though Mohammad never put himself in the place of God (or of Allah), nor performed miracles, yet in denying the Sonship and atoning death of Christ he was, from a Christian perspective, a false prophet. In our own day, militant Islam has become a worldwide phenomenon, and one in which it is eminently possible to “blaspheme the prophet” and be killed for it, as if he were divine. Most of the world’s increasing persecution of Christians is at the hand of Muslims, Islamic countries constituting nine of the eleven most severe areas of persecution,⁷ and in a number of Muslim countries Christianity has been virtually extinguished.

Yet although either of these organisations might still become the cradle of the final antichrist (just as might Pentecostalism, Reformed Evangelicalism, the Brexit Party or even Greenpeace), the relevant Scriptures still seem to point to a single individual, rather than to a whole religion or even an institution like the papacy. He is likely to appear insidiously, quite suddenly, and from a direction few expect, or they would not be caught off-guard after two thousand years of well-

⁶ Rev 13:18.

⁷ Christian Today, 2019.

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documented expectation from the New Testament to Richard Donner's *The Omen*, the highest grossing film of 1976.

This emphasis on an individual seems to entail that the great deception, when it comes, will occupy just a single generation, in which this mysterious man (or woman?) pursues his meteoric career. I have to say that currently I see no obvious candidates for that role, but this is hardly surprising, or the book would have a considerably more urgent tone. To win over the hearts and minds of a world as divided as ours, to a cause antithetical to a Church now so numerous worldwide, will be an extraordinary feat.

Recently, one or two American friends have anxiously pointed out to me to the enthusiasm amongst American Evangelicals for Donald Trump, whose moral credentials for such support seem to them at least dubious, and some of whose sayings seem to them to verge on blasphemy. They see him as a likely antichrist. I think they go along with the narrative of his being determined to subordinate democracy to his own ego, possibly assisted by Russian influence, and of course as Commander in Chief of US forces the President has more power to mobilise armies than any other political leader in the world.

And yet the problem for me with such concerns, as it would be with Barack Obama or any other US leader (and most non-American leaders), is the polarisation of society which Jacques Ellul regarded as inevitable in a propaganda society, and which is all too evident today in America. When Obama was President, the Republican Party regarded him as the devil incarnate, and with Trump the Democrats *and* a good number of Republicans do the same, together with most of the press and a majority of people in the west who consider themselves liberally educated.

An individual's image may quickly change, of course, especially if they pull off some miraculous-seeming coup, so we must not dismiss seriously-grounded suspicions out of hand. But I will worry more if President Trump perfects cold fusion in his spare time and solves the world's energy problems at a stroke. It seems to me that the person to

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look out for, and to fear, as the antichrist is the person of whom *everyone* approves, whose cause *everyone* sees as good. In all likelihood that will be the person whose marketing campaign has been the most subtle and successful. A universal saint like some new Mother Theresa, or a national or international hero in the mould of Nelson Mandela, or a beloved philanthropist like Princess Diana or Andrew Carnegie (casting no aspersions on any of those deceased individuals) is the kind of person who, it seems to me, would be the only kind to rally the kind of support around the world necessary to deceive the nations. Do not look for *The Omen* to be realized, but ... *Forrest Gump*, perhaps?

Antichrist's hallmark is not so much that that he claims to be God, but that somehow nearly everyone *accepts* that he is. In a sceptical and diverse age like ours, that's a big ask. But we are in the age of PR, and that might just be an adequate substitute for a genuinely persuasive cause. His opponents will, by definition, be the ones out of step, the killjoys nay-saying the best the world can unite to produce, and apparently irrationally opposed to the obvious good that antichrist will be achieving for all.

They will also, of course, be those who are enduring to the end and being saved.

Section 2:

A Smörgåsbord of Deception

Section 2 Introduction

IN THIS SECTION, I want to spend a few chapters examining various modern deceptions, and possible deceptions, in more detail.

Clearly this cannot be an exhaustive account, but I will try to discuss those that have a bearing on my theme, which is the deception that is a threat to Christ's Church. Not all possible deceptions represent such a threat.

Let me take, as a counter-example, the possibility that the earth is really flat rather than spherical, as the surprisingly popular conspiracy theory claims. In my judgement, and that of nearly the whole world, such a thing is vanishingly unlikely. Very few people in churches give such a theory a moment's thought.

But even if it turned out, *per impossibile*, to be the truth, then whilst its demonstration would cause embarrassment to individual Christians as much as the rest of the world, and destroy confidence in virtually all human knowledge and experience of the last two millennia, it would not affect Christian teaching at all. Galileo was right to say that the Bible teaches us how to go to heaven, rather than how the heavens go.¹

I have written in *The Generations of Heaven and Earth* on the phenomenological and theological nature of biblical "cosmology,"² and agree with Galileo and his sources. At most, finding that the earth is flat would boost the dented reputations within Christianity of ancient Christian flat-earthers Lactantius and Cosmas Indicopleustes!

¹ Actually he quoted it from Cardinal Caesar Baronius, in his important letter of 1615 to Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina. It is usually misquoted as above. It actually follows his discussion of a similar argument from Augustine, and he writes: "I would say here something that was heard from an ecclesiastic of the most eminent degree: 'that the intention of the Holy Ghost is to teach us how one goes to heaven, not how heaven goes.'" Galilei, 1615.

² Garvey, 2020. Chapter 16—"A Tale of Two Temples."

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So I have in fact used *my* judgement to select plausible deceptions with serious potential risks to the Church, some of which may be obvious and some less obvious, and some more or less plausible to readers than others. And herein lies a problem. My judgement that *X* is a candidate for satanic deception may be seen by some readers as preposterous. I have already mentioned how the term “Cultural Marxism,” which I mentioned to my pastor, was branded the very next day as a “conspiracy theory” in the press. How can one judge?

In a society like the late Soviet Union, it may have been the case that everyone knew fifty percent of what they read in *Pravda* (ironically meaning “truth”!) to be false. But in a totalitarian state there was no independent way for them to know *which* fifty percent they should discount. I have no doubt that canny Russian dissidents who rightly rejected news reports on one issue were hoodwinked into believing other falsehoods, or indeed were dismissive of propaganda that turned out, in the event, to be perfectly true. Even dissidents may disagree.

And so many readers will consider at least some of my examples to be wrong, and although this disagreement may be the product of their own biases, it may equally well be that their judgement is better than mine on that particular issue. I do not think, however, that this is of ultimate importance, because at the very least the cases I present will encourage critical examination of the evidence, which is central to the kind of discernment that is sorely needed today, not least in the churches. Our culture does not really encourage us to think, and sadly Christians often avoid it too.

All I ask is that readers give serious consideration to what I present. If they disagree, they should muster proper reasons of their own for their disagreement. And at the end of the day, even if *all* my examples should, in their eyes, fail, then their appraisal of my work will put them in a better position to judge what other kinds of deception the “spirit of antichrist” is employing in our times and those which might succeed in future.

Introduction

Jesus calls us to be like sheep among wolves, “as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.”³ He teaches us to take his approach to the world, not the specific conclusions we must reach.

The final section of the book will deal more positively with what kind of strategies churches, and individual believers, may take to maintain their witness to the Truth of Christ in the face of Satan’s deceptions.

³ Matt 10:16.

6 Modernist Deceptions

Modernism in history

THIS CHAPTER IS ABOUT deceptions arising, broadly speaking, from the rationalist Enlightenment. This is not a rigid classification, since the Enlightenment project itself went through various phases over several centuries, and for my purposes here it may be seen as emerging *from* the humanism of the Renaissance, which sowed many of its seeds. In time it merged *into* the Postmodern period, which has taken some of those seeds to their extremes, rather like a garden plant that has gone to seed and become useless either for flowers or food. And so it is most useful to regard Modernism as a phase on a historical continuum rather than a discrete package.

The heart of what I wish to deal with here is what I have explored elsewhere as the prevailing narrative of western civilization over the last seven hundred years—the Prometheus myth. The core of the Enlightenment involves the rejection of any external authority, and especially God and his word in the Bible, in favour of human autonomy and reason. This is well illustrated by the story of Prometheus’s theft of fire from Zeus, a myth that was cited over and over again in the course of the Enlightenment.¹

Many of the challenges faced by the Church over the last few centuries have arisen from this imperative of human autonomy, from the Socinian heresy of the sixteenth century to the New Atheism which flourished after the destruction of the World Trade Center as a backlash against religion in general.

The New Atheists are a fast-fading force now, perhaps largely because the last decade or two has seen the rapid ascendancy of ideas arising from Postmodernism. Reason has become relativized and subordinated to emotion and identity politics, so that Enlightenment Modernism

¹ Garvey, 2019. 107-115.

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may be said to have had its day. Even the physical sciences are now in many universities beleaguered by claims that not only their institutions, but even their methods and aims, are sexist or racist. Truth itself is seen as unacceptably discriminatory.² And so within academia, the physical sciences are increasingly viewed as conservative bastions of the Patriarchy. Autonomous reason has finally eaten itself.

Ironically, but perhaps inevitably, the Enlightenment, though in many ways anti-religious, led to positive benefits for the faith including the critical approach to Scripture that produced the Reformation,³ and therein perhaps lies one of its dangers. For at the core of Christianity is the existence of absolute truth, and it shares this concept with Modernism, even though the basis of its truth claims differs from that of rationalists. In that respect the Church is a co-belligerent with those Modernists who resist the relativism of the age, not least among them the physical scientists, many of whom have become less antagonistic to Christian truth claims than was the case even half a century ago.

In Chapter 3 I mentioned the unhelpful concept of a war between science and religion, which was fomented for particular sectional reasons in the nineteenth century and is still peddled today. And yet in every case of alleged conflict, even regarding old chestnuts like evolution *versus* creation, the main source of conflict (and of its offspring in the churches of heresy or apostasy on the one hand, and reactionary fundamentalism on the other) is not over evidence, but over an unacknowledged difference in metaphysical assumptions, underpinning profound worldview differences.⁴ Science itself is metaphysically neutral, but much Modernism has been blind to this, because Modernism rejected the concept of metaphysics altogether and so failed to recognise its own philosophical presuppositions.

² Not long ago we were said to be in a “Post-Christian Society.” Now observers are talking about a “Post-Truth Society.”

³ John Calvin was a thoroughgoing Humanist, and Luther’s early schooling, at least, was humanistically based.

⁴ For a full discussion see Plantinga, 2011.

Modernist Deceptions

Modernism, then, is no longer the Spirit of the Age, but it is not yet dead. And some of its ideas are still beguiling to Christians, both because Christians rightly see reason as preferable to irrationality, but also because they were brought up under its tutelage, and may sometimes fail to distinguish its worldview from the truly Christian one.

Scientism and the supernatural

And so, as I have found in dialoguing with Christians in the sciences over the last decade, an unconsciously naturalistic, anti-supernaturalist worldview may deceive believers into what I call “soft scientism,” that is, the assumption that although in theory God rules his world and miracles may occur, in practice the expectation is that “natural” or purely human forces are at work in events. This is very far from the worldview that permeates Scripture, and that of the Church down most of history, in which God was always active in particular, as well as general, providence. To the historical majority of Christians, “everything that happens is from God,” and that is true regardless of whether events are contingent, or entirely regular.

The early English Protestant scientists, such as Francis Bacon, had a strong doctrine of special providence,⁵ but failed to formulate adequately its relationship to so-called “laws of nature.” As a result (amongst other causes), the whole concept of divine action began to fade as the Enlightenment progressed. First special providence became subsumed, in Deism, under the general providence of divine laws, and then the laws themselves became, rather incoherently, independent of God, who was held to be unable to go beyond them even if he existed. These shifts in dominant worldview have affected all of us.

Accordingly much of the “science-faith” discussion now proceeds under the assumptions, practically speaking, of naturalism. And this remains so even when special providence is granted: it is generally grafted rather awkwardly on to a “semi-deistic” form of naturalism, rather than being grounded in a robust biblical theology of nature. The

⁵ In Bacon’s apologetic for his new science, the “utopian novelette” *New Atlantis*, his protagonists arrive at the land where science reigns through a providential storm.

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question is reduced on both sides to whether God sometimes “intervenes.” There is, accordingly, very little appreciation of what Scripture means when it says that Jesus now rules all creation.⁶ It seems as if instead, like some constitutional monarch in practice subordinate to Parliament, Jesus’s name is vaguely linked to laws of nature that operate independently as they always have. Nothing substantial happened at the ascension within the cosmic realm, notwithstanding the radical interpretation of Psalm 8 made in Hebrews 2:9 that a man now rules the cosmic order.

Naturalistic assumptions have, for nearly two centuries, also predominated in the academy, and notably within biblical studies, where critical methodologies have been accorded a reliability far beyond their actual worth, whilst God’s direct activity in both biblical and current history have been excluded *a priori* by methodological naturalism, the methodology that takes into account only natural, that is to say material efficient, causation.

There is a case to be made for methodological naturalism within natural science, though it has proved well-nigh impossible to define what is actually *meant* by “natural.”⁷ Almost inevitably the word takes on an entirely unbiblical connotation of the natural world’s “operating apart from God,” or at best doing its own thing whilst God merely sustains it in existence. This is a far cry from the comprehensive notions of divine action seen in mediaeval theologians like Thomas Aquinas, but at least scientific progress can be made by concentrating on “secondary causes.”

But when addressing historical instances in the Bible of miraculous or providential circumstances, in the context of the God who has acted decisively in history through the incarnate Christ, naturalism proves to

⁶ Ephesians 1:20–23; Philippians 2:9–11.

⁷ “Methodological naturalism, when used to enforce an exclusive view of scientific investigation, is based on three problematic streams of philosophy: mechanical philosophy, positivistic epistemology, and divine incomprehensibility. Each of these philosophies has inherent flaws that prevent them from being usable across the entirety of causal relationships that science attempts to investigate.” Bartlett, 2017. 13.

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be an entirely inadequate methodology. Yet it is so well-established in the theological “guilds” that in general Evangelical scholars pay lip service to it even when they do not accept its theological assumptions.

The practical implications of this intellectual deception are many. The older moral challenges to Christian belief, such as abortion and euthanasia, first arose in the context of rationalist and naturalist ethics. Both had their origins in the eugenics movement of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,⁸ which saw the control of populations for the “greater good of humanity” as an undeniable outworking of reason untrammelled by dogma.

Both issues became lines in the sand for many Evangelicals and Catholics, but a substantial and increasing proportion of believers accepted the moral reasoning in support of these practices.

As Modernism has given way to Postmodernism, the ideas of autonomy behind abortion and euthanasia have been carried on, but have become increasingly divorced from both reason and universal good, so that the emphasis in them, as in everything, is now almost exclusively on the right to personal choice. The danger of deception for the Christian is that the concept of “autonomy” remains unchallenged, because it is falsely equated with the Christian concept of freedom.⁹

These “classical” ethical issues also, incidentally, gave us some of our first tastes of the methods of propaganda employed to establish radical societal change. Politically, the case for changes in the abortion laws both here and in the USA involved from the start gross exaggeration of the number of illegal abortions and the deaths resulting from them. As Dr Bernard Nathanson, once the founder of America’s *National Abortion Rights Action League*, but later a pro-lifer, wrote:

⁸ “Eugenics in the United States.” *Wikipedia*.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eugenics_in_the_United_States.

⁹ Space prevents a full discussion of this issue, but Christian liberty is perhaps summed up in Thomas Cranmer’s words in the *Book of Common Prayer*: “whose service is perfect freedom.” Jesus’s own radical freedom, it will be recalled, was expressed in his perfect obedience to the Father.

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We fed a line of deceit, dishonesty, of fabrication of statistics and figures. We coddled and caressed and stroked the press.¹⁰

The same occurred in preparing for the 1967 UK Abortion Act. We also saw, for the first time, the deliberate infiltration of influential bodies to push the policy forward. MP David Alton wrote:

After 1967, pre-abortion doctors went out of their way to gain office in, and control of, the medical establishment.¹¹

Once medical opinion swung around to support it, verbal gymnastics were performed to reformulate embryology, which had always taught that life began at conception.¹²

Churchmen inclined to justify abortion made novel interpretations of Scripture, and conveniently forgot the universal position of the early Church, for which avoiding abortion and infanticide was a proud mark of distinction from their culture (as it was with the Jews) even when Christians were a despised minority.¹³

In the press, hard cases of inability to obtain abortion were commonly reported, whereas the media were, and remain, silent on the problems it caused, the predominantly social grounds, the regrets and the exponentially escalating numbers.

Similarly, euthanasia was, and continues to be, “sold” in the press on individual cases, even though a succession of legal judgements going as high as the European Court of Justice has shown there is no legal right to choose to die. In the courts and in Parliament, too, these former rulings seem to make no difference to the issue of euthanasia be-

¹⁰ Quoted in Alton, 1988. 29-30.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹² For example, the embryo became a “pre-embryo” or “zygotic material,” such neologisms having little or no solid scientific basis.

¹³ Early references include *Didache* 2; *Epistle of Barnabas* 19; *Epistle to Diognetus* 5; *Plea of Athenagoras for the Christians* 35; Tertullian, *Apologeticus* 1.9; Hippolytus, *Apostolic Constitutions* VII.3; Origen, *Against Celsus* VIII.55.

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ing raised again and again, presumably in the expectation that at some stage the constant pressure for change will prevail, irreversibly.

A more subtle example of the unconscious adoption of Enlightenment thinking by Christians is the current pre-occupation with climate change, which I will critique later. Where the *fact* of anthropogenic global warming is accepted by Christians, the remedies suggested are almost entirely political and social, just as they are amongst unbelievers. Rarely, if ever, are there calls for days of repentance and prayer, as there frequently were in earlier times of trouble. Prayers are not offered that plead with God to reverse the warming tendency, which might quite legitimately be made alongside human efforts at mitigation. This is not simply because we are accustomed to take credit and blame for everything in a godless age, but because there is no real understanding, as there is in Scripture, that God is ultimately in charge of the weather, because Enlightenment naturalism is so entrenched in our worldview.

Indeed, earlier generations would have seen such climate change as a personal divine *judgement* upon mankind for its misdemeanours, rather than merely as a physical consequence of our actions over which God has no control. Now, though, it is *we* who must save the planet, even though in our professed theology there is no saviour apart from the Lord.¹⁴

The materialist mindset

The influence of Enlightenment thinking would appear to be part of the explanation for the division of Christian beliefs about the supernatural along “intellectual” lines, with the better educated (meaning those more exposed to Enlightenment ideals) being suspicious of visible signs of the Holy Spirit’s work, or of the inner experience of God apart from “reason” understood in the Enlightenment’s highly restricted sense.¹⁵ Such things are often seen as being restricted to the igno-

¹⁴ Isaiah 43:11.

¹⁵ In this the seventeenth century Blaise Pascal, himself noted as a scientist, bucked the Enlightenment trend when he wrote, “Le coeur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît point. On le sent en mille choses... C'est le coeur qui sent

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rant and superstitious, whether amongst the “lower orders” in the west, or in developing nations where such things are considered entirely normal. Or, we must add, amongst the supposedly gullible believers of more “primitive” (*i.e.* pre-Enlightenment) times: such devaluing of the wisdom of the past is quintessentially an Enlightenment attitude.

And yet paradoxically the Enlightenment’s values have also affected those who, sometimes lacking Modernist education, have always been *suspicious* of Modernism. It was the rationalism of the Enlightenment that led people to take the creation narrative of Genesis, for example, as a purely material account of the creation of *things*, whereas the ancient mindset in which it arose was far more subtle, as had been appreciated by older Christian thinkers like Augustine.

The educated people concluded, with regret, that Genesis could no longer be trusted on origins, and they saw science’s entirely naturalistic account as a more correct alternative.

When opposition to this rejection of Scripture came it tended, as it still does, to be couched in terms of “the plain man’s reading of Scripture.” It contradicted the findings of science in order to insist that Genesis *is* a scientific account, instead of questioning the whole metaphysical foundation of Darwin, and others, that made their *understanding* of the creation account inadequate. In their opposition of mainstream science to the Bible, the “literalists” failed to notice that they had swallowed the Enlightenment conceit that a true account must be a *material* account to convey solid truth.

The materialist and rationalist Enlightenment mindset can affect much of our church life more or less unconsciously. One notable instance of this is the tendency to replace our service of God as primarily a spir-

Dieu, et non la raison. Voilà ce que c'est que la foi parfaite, Dieu sensible au cœur.” (“The heart has its reasons, of which reason knows nothing. One experiences it in a thousand things... It is the heart that experiences God, and not reason. This, then, is faith: God felt by the heart, not by reason.”) Stewart, 1948. 190. Translation mine.

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itual expression of worship with the development of techniques to reach goals efficiently.

I suppose this may have begun with Charles Finney's instrumentalist approach to revival, in which using the best "new measures" would reliably and predictably produce the right results.¹⁶ It is a danger, too, in such fields as church growth, where a passionate concern to speak, and live, the truth of Christ can easily be replaced by harvesting the results of research to select the methods that "work" to increase numbers.

The whole question of "relevance" must be assessed in the light of this. It has always been the case that a church's activities have been rightly based on what proves most beneficial to the people, either from traditional or local experience. But when our focus shifts from "testifying to what we have heard and seen" to "presenting what will appeal to our target population," we are, I suggest, favouring a pragmatic Enlightenment model over a spiritual biblical one.

Indeed, we appear then to be approaching quite closely the world of Edward Bernays, in which it is the public impact of the lecture that matters, and not its content.

One final example of the temptations of an Enlightenment approach lies in the "therapeutic" gospel now being so widely taught in churches, to which a number of observers have drawn attention (including Smith and Denton, whom I cited in Chapter 2). Jesus and the apostles preached the Kingdom of God on earth, of which we might become a part through repentance and faith in Christ. "Poor sinners" were indeed pitied by a loving Father, but this was in order to restore them from sinful deception to the work for which he had created mankind

¹⁶ "By a mere gaze, without a word spoken, Finney says he reduced a whole room-full of factory girls to hysteria. As the Lutheran says God in the word works a saving impression, Finney says God in the preacher works a saving impression. The evangelist has become a Sacrament." B. B. Warfield, quoted in Horton. 2018.

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before the fall, that is the rule over his world described in Psalm 8 in such awed terms.

The “therapeutic gospel,” in contrast, is about the Christ whose concern is to meet whatever deficiencies and needs we may be experiencing at the time. It is, sadly, not restricted to the Televangelists with their promises of smart cars and big houses, of complete healing here and now and, what is more, of dramatic spiritual gifts to collect to increase our spiritual status as some new heavenly élite.

In less extreme surroundings, the therapeutic emphasis is seen in the nature of our prayers (overwhelmingly for our own needs, rather than for the kingdom), and in simple things like the preponderance of “I” rather than “you,” or even “we,” in our songs. We find it so hard to see the significance of any God-talk that doesn’t centre on us.

Even in a 2013 sung version of the Apostle’s Creed, which surely is all about focusing on the Trinitarian God of our corporate faith, “We believe” is replaced with “I believe.” The truths that Jesus is our Lord, that he was born of the virgin, suffered under Pilate, was crucified, dead, buried, descended, rose again and is exalted at the right hand of God become simply that “he gave his life for me,” and the entire significance of the Holy Spirit that “he lives in me.”

Therapeutic Christianity is, I suggest, a natural end-product of an Enlightenment which embraced the notion that “Man is the measure of all things.”¹⁷ However, in some ways it appears a transitional feature between Modern and Postmodern thinking, in that the obsessional focus on my own individual needs, and particularly those which mark me out as in some way disadvantaged in the world, and so *owed* redress by God, is utterly Postmodern. We will look at that in later chapters.

¹⁷ Protagoras (c481–c420 BCE), quoted by Plato in *Theaetetus* §152a.

The Long March through the Institutions

THE RESIDUAL DANGER of deception from Modernism is that, although everybody has known about the Enlightenment for centuries, it is now taken for granted. Not least, because it has gone out of fashion it is no longer regarded as a threat to the Church. As I described in the last chapter, it may even be clung to as a voice of reason in irrational times, thus unconsciously perpetuating its errors as well as its virtues.

Cultural Marxism (probably the most apt term for a phenomenon with several other labels) is, on the other hand, much less well known, is not widely understood, and its very existence is branded as a conspiracy theory by the mainstream media anyway.¹

A compact Christian introduction to Cultural Marxism, in the context of the controversies over sexuality and gender in the Church, is Melvin Tinker's excellent little book entitled, in conscious reference to C. S. Lewis's dystopian novel, *That Hideous Strength*.² A potted video summary by Dr Gavin Ashenden, speaking at a GAFCON conference, also helps orientate our minds to the basic idea.³

My own introduction to it came from the much more detailed and well-documented treatment by philosopher Roger Scruton, who experienced its origins first-hand in the student riots of 1968 in Paris.⁴ In

¹ Joe Mulhall, an "anti-racism campaigner" quoted in *The Independent* in March 2019, sought to anathematise it by expressing surprise that a politician would even have heard of it, since it "is usually championed by those on the extreme right." Kentish, 2019. This is a classic example of closing down a discussion by lumping it into a forbidden "buzz-word" category, or in this case two, "far-right" and "antisemitic." Note also the headline itself does not simply report the politician's remarks, but others' *criticism* of them: opinion replaces news.

² Tinker, 2018.

³ Ashenden, 2018.

⁴ Scruton, 2016.

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retrospect, though, I had also come face to face with it in my studies of Social Psychology in Cambridge in 1972–3. These were under the auspices of the almost exclusively leftist Social and Political Sciences faculty, and were undertaken in the wake of Cambridge’s own version of the Paris riots. One of my supervisors had, in fact, been a ring-leader of the Garden House Riot of 1970, though he had since converted to Pentecostal Christianity, and hence was an unusual source of candid insight. The potted summary that follows traces a necessarily incomplete and oversimplified course of the phenomenon, gleaned from all these sources.

Marxism had its roots in the Enlightenment way of thinking. It claimed (falsely) to be scientific and rational, and for that reason to be ultimate truth.⁵ It was, from its inception, an international conspiracy for overthrowing the world order. Its aim was to foster mass resentment, culminating in violent class struggle and global revolution. Its primary and absolute enemies were the bourgeoisie,⁶ and the primary source of *their* values was held to be the Christian Church, which therefore became the ruling class’s repressor-in-chief of the workers and Marxism’s sworn enemy.

Wherever it gained power, then, it is not surprising that Marxism suppressed, and continues to suppress, not only privileged state priests, but ordinary believers. Alexander Solzhenitsyn describes this new species of political enemy in *Gulag Archipelago*:

Clumsy, semiliterate, unable to deliver speeches from the rostrum or compose an underground proclamation (which their faith made unnecessary anyway), they went off to camp to face tortures and death—only so as not to renounce their faith! ... They were the only ones, perhaps, to whom the camp philosophy and even the camp language did not stick. And were

⁵ “To say that this is ‘scientific’ rather than utopian is, in retrospect, little more than a joke,” Scruton, 2016. 5. He is commenting on Marx’s own description of the socialist state in *The German Ideology*.

⁶ “The only choice is: either bourgeois or socialist ideology; there is no middle course.” Vladimir Lenin, quoted in Scruton, 2016. 201.

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these not political? Well, you'd certainly not call them riff-raff.⁷

Marxism was thus, at its deepest level, a *spiritual* deception. Humanly speaking, it was overtly against religion amongst other targets of its hatred. But seen in terms of our theme of satanic delusion, the destruction of Christianity was its primary purpose. It thrived amongst the intelligentsia of the West, who did not see, or possibly did not care about, its oppressive nature.

One Italian Communist, Antonio Gramsci, was imprisoned by Mussolini's Fascists in 1926 until he died of TB a decade later (as Scruton points out, the much stressed diametrical opposition between Communism and Fascism actually covers over their nearly identical totalitarian ideologies⁸). Gramsci came to realise that armed proletarian revolution was never going to happen amongst relatively contented workers in the prosperous European states. But he argued that the hated bourgeoisie ruled not only through force, but because the whole of society's institutions, from government to education, made up what he called their "hegemony."

Communism would come, he concluded,

... not as a revolutionary movement from below, but as a steady replacement of the ruling hegemony—a long march through the institutions, as it was later described. Thus the superstructure will be gradually transformed, to the point where the new social order, the emergence of which was blocked by the old hegemony, is able to come forth under its own impulsion. This process, called "passive revolution," can be accomplished only by the conjunction of two forces: that exerted from above by the communist intellectuals, who steadily re-

⁷ Solzhenitsyn, 1975. 309–10.

⁸ "With an almost unanimous lack of perception the academic world has described and analyzed international political relations in the context of an unrelenting conflict between capitalism and communism, and rigid adherence to this Marxist formula has distorted modern history." Sutton, 2016. 126-7.

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place the hegemony of the bourgeoisie, and that exerted from below by the “masses,” who bear within themselves the seeds of the new social order that has grown from their labour.⁹

In other words, if communists gradually take over the reins of power and communication in a society, they will eventually control the hearts and minds of the people themselves, who will then become willing agents of the revolution.

Gramsci’s ideas were rediscovered by the student revolutionaries of Paris in 1968. Their protests, originally against the Vietnam War, had been encouraged by French leftist intellectuals, including the Existentialists like Jean-Paul Sartre and those who would become influential Postmodernist voices now, such as Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault.

The Paris events led to a whole international generation of “New Left” students becoming convinced of the necessity for, and the practicality of, Gramsci’s programme. As I stated in the Introduction to Section 1 of this book, it was Rudi Dutschke, a German student radical, who coined the “long march” catch phrase.

Also influential for this “sociological” approach to overthrowing the existing world order was a group of leftist thinkers called the Frankfurt School. This began in inter-war Germany, its members fled to America with the rise of Hitler, and they divided themselves between the two nations after the war. I will mention two individuals from this movement particularly to show the influence on political and sociological education in my own experience.

The first, Theodor Adorno, had written a particularly influential book, *The Authoritarian Personality*, in 1950. This purported to measure nine personality traits associated with rigid authoritarianism, using a scale he termed the “F-scale” (“F” standing for “Fascist”!). For example #5, “Superstition and stereotypy,” brackets belief in the supernatu-

⁹ Scruton, 2016. 204.

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ral to thinking in rigid categories, and so exhibiting prejudices such as racism. As Melvin Tinker points out of the whole list:

This is a tactical definition which immediately puts Christians in their place as die-hard fascists!¹⁰

By my time as a student in the Cambridge social psychology department, Adorno's concept had become a kind of axiom underlying, as it seemed to me, the whole of sociology. "Authoritarianism" was bad, opposed to every worthwhile value, and was the unique province of the Fascists, by which was meant those with any whiff of bourgeois, or Christian, values. This, of course, sat very well with long-haired students in an age of revolution, for whom any University authority trying to intervene in the shouting-down of unpopular speakers or the endless sit-ins could be labelled as a would-be Hitler, with the backing of the sociological theory taught in the same university.

It is interesting to see how the suspicion of any kind of "authoritarianism" which Adorno introduced now gives the very word "authority" a stigma throughout society from the schools, where teachers are criticised if they exercise it, to theology, where many shy away from conceiving that God might actually exert his divine authority judicially. Nobody, after all, wants to worship a Fascist.

Adapted in Postmodernist hands, *The Authoritarian Personality* underpins the whole understanding of human relationships as being based solely on power, and in particular the "Patriarchy" which is the bogeyman of modern "third wave" feminism and the whole so-called "woke" movement. And so to make sense of the confusing social politics of victimhood today, one needs to look back at Adorno—and the way in which his empirically weak ideas have marched through the institutions.

A second member of the Frankfurt School worthy of mention here is Herbert Marcuse, on whom we had a whole lecture series, and whose name was chanted by student protesters in the Paris riots. Amongst

¹⁰ Tinker, 2018. 56.

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others he tried to integrate Freudian psychoanalysis with Marxism. As Rupert Darwall summarises it:

Capitalism embodied Thanatos, the life- and nature-destroying primary drive, and suppressed Eros, the instinct for life.¹¹

This was a very dubious application of psychoanalytic theory, which itself is more or less discredited today. But what it meant, at least as I was taught it, was that achieving the utopia had a lot to do with sex—any kind of sex, and as much of it as possible. No doubt it was that aspect of Marcuse’s work that inspired the chanting of his name in Paris.

But Marcuse also helps to explain, if we accept the existence of “the long march through the institutions,” just why so much of the dramatic change in society has revolved around a progressive removal of all sexual taboos and restraints. For marriage—and particularly the indissoluble bond of Christian marriage that has formed the foundation of every institution in Western culture—is conceived by the left as the very heart of what prevents the realisation of the socialist utopia. I will describe how this idea has developed in a later chapter, but suffice it to say that the prolonged attack on marriage is neither accidental nor limited – it is even one of the core tenets of *Black Lives Matter*.

In 1998, at the request of Jack Straw, then Home Secretary, my boss at *Prophecy Today*, Dr Clifford Hill, was involved in producing a report for Parliament detailing the dire social consequences of the nation’s increasing family breakdown. But Straw was unable to persuade his government to produce the White Paper he saw as the next step. Hill writes:

This reflected the growing influence of the LGBT lobby in the Civil Service, as well as in the Labour Government of Tony Blair. In 1999 the Chancellor Gordon Brown even removed the “married person’s allowance” in income tax, thus further

¹¹ Darwall, 2019. 44.

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sending out anti-marriage vibes to the nation and further weakening family life.¹²

So the leftist students of 1968, and their heirs, had a strong sense of destiny in overturning society through infiltrating its institutions with such ideas. These intellectuals included many of the academics from the social and political sciences who taught me social psychology, and I guess many of their students who went on to follow careers in education at both school and university level, in the social sciences, in the social services, in clinical psychology, in politics, and even in the arts and entertainment.

There were student activists in many other departments as well: I knew a few in medical school, and have followed their sometimes influential careers within the profession. Medics, even more than natural scientists, are a rather conservative bunch. But equally, it is those who were politically active who ended up on the GMC or BMA, who were elected to leadership positions in the Royal Colleges, and who became government advisers and medical educators. A similar situation would apply to the pure sciences, for there are scientists who love to do science, and others who love to *organise* scientists politically. And most of those are left-leaning.

Activists in history departments got to reform our views of the past or stand for Parliament and make our laws. Activists in literature departments became our writers, journalists and English teachers. And so on.

A case study

The career of one well-known activist whom I encountered personally, albeit at a distance, illustrates how the long march through the institutions, far from being a mad conspiracy theory, is entirely plausible.

In August, 1970, shortly before I left for Cambridge, I joined several hundred thousand other young people at the Isle of Wight Festival. In the wake of Woodstock the year before, there was certainly no short-

¹² Hill, 2018. 205.

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age of illegal substances and sexual activity around (which as a Christian, I hasten to say, I avoided), but the overall atmosphere was good-natured and summery, and the music excellent.

That is, it was good-natured until the arrival of a large gang of French leftists and anarchists under the leadership of one Daniel Cohn-Bendit, known to us punters as “Danny the Red,” and Jean-Jacques Lebel, now a celebrated art-critic. Cohn-Bendit, the son of a lawyer and a German citizen, had been a sociology student in Paris, where he became an outspoken activist for an ideology mixing Marxism, anarchy, and sexual indulgence. He was expelled from France as a seditious alien around the time of the Paris riots, and so his name became well-known, though he had not been particularly prominent in them.

Quite why his people wanted to destroy a peaceful music festival I’m not sure, but their slogan was “Free Music for the People,” and you may still read their complaint, on leftist websites, that the festival “ripped off” the poor (that is to say, white middle-class teenagers from across Europe) by charging £3 for three solid days of one of the greatest line-up of contemporary acts ever assembled. The ticket covered *five* days, actually, but the first two days were free, even though the Maoists hadn’t yet arrived to demand it.

Once they did arrive, the gang was heard and seen roving around rabble-rousing, breaking down fences and attacking security personnel. I remember a night-time “meeting” close to where we were camped, which was quite intimidating in the lurid light of a large bonfire they had lit. Their violence continued intermittently, including the interruption of some acts by activists wishing to preach revolution, and they eventually succeeded in having the festival declared free, incidentally bankrupting the organisers.

The M.C. of the festival, Ricki Farr, recalls how it happened. On the Sunday a local priest, whose congregation had opened their doors to youngsters troubled by drug or money issues, was given the platform to appeal for financial help. Farr recalls his disgust as a hundred or so

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of Cohn-Bendit's activists actually spat on the man, and in a famous tirade Farr called for all the gates to be opened.¹³

That goal achieved, Cohn-Bendit's people were still not satisfied, and they started targeting the little guys with catering franchises shouting "Free Food for the People."

He next appears running an "anti-authoritarian kindergarten"¹⁴ in Germany, and on several occasions later claimed to have been involved in sexual activities with the children. He now says that his statements were not based on fact, and were intended to be "obnoxious provocation."¹⁵ Perhaps this is true, but it remains a fact that, until public outcry drove it underground, paedophilia was as much a part of the progressive agenda as feminism or gay rights.

For a number of years the *Paedophile Information Exchange*, of which Jimmy Savile was a member, was openly represented on government policy bodies, and was part of the Civil Liberties coalition. The Gay Liberation Front too, had a paedophilia branch, though that seems now to be forgotten.

Additionally, in 1977 the Postmodernist philosopher Michel Foucault addressed a petition to the French parliament calling for the abolition of the age of consent and the decriminalization of paedophilia. The petition was signed by a veritable *Who's Who* of progressive and Marxist Paris luminaries, including the poet Louis Aragon, prominent philosophers Jean-Paul Sartre, Jacques Derrida, and Louis Althusser, the archetypal feminist Simone de Beauvoir, gay activists Guy Hocquenghem and Jean Danet, and others including doctors and psychologists such as the child psychoanalyst Françoise Dolto.

¹³ "Rikki Farr's Rant at the Isle of Wight, 1970."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gUtk7eaIPn8>.

¹⁴ "The essays of Adorno ornamenting every anti-authoritarian classroom": Rudolph Bahro, cited in Darwall, 2019. 95.

¹⁵ "Daniel Cohn-Bendit." *Wikipedia*.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daniel_Cohn-Bendit#Defense_of_paedophilia.

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As for Cohn-Bendit's own subsequent political party, in 2013 George Conger wrote:

No political group in Germany promoted the interests of men with pedophile tendencies as staunchly as the environmental party. For a period of time in the mid-1980s, it practically served as the parliamentary arm of the pedophile movement. A look at its archives reveals numerous traces of the pedophiles' flirtation with the Green Party. They appear in motions, party resolutions, memos and even reports by the party treasurer. That is because at times the party not only supported its now forgotten fellow campaigners politically, but also more tangibly, in the form of financial support.¹⁶

But I have got ahead of myself. From the kindergarten Cohn-Bendit went on to lead a cell of agitators called the Revolutionary Struggle,¹⁷ which appears not to have actually engaged in violent acts, though there were links to the emerging left terrorism groups like the Red Army Faction and the Baader-Meinhof gang, who were also inspired by Marcuse and the Frankfurt School. They trained in PLO terrorist camps, and the cross fertilization of Islamist fundamentalists and Communist terrorists may help to explain why Islam is now an apparently unlikely ally of leftist thinkers.

But by the end of the seventies, the terrorist route had shown itself to be counterproductive: its activists were largely in prison or dead, and the public were disgusted by the gratuitous violence they had inflicted. Additionally it had begun to be clearer to the world how in the Soviet Union, the Chinese Cultural Revolution, and Pol Pot's Cambodia, revolutionary communism was no better, to put it mildly, than Fascism.¹⁸

¹⁶ Conger, 2013.

¹⁷ Darwall, 2019. 95.

¹⁸ It is well known that the number of deaths from Communism in the twentieth century greatly exceeds those inflicted by Fascist states.

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By now, Cohn-Bendit was making only a meagre living from a radical bookshop, and he decided to cash in on the growing anti-nuclear movement by taking it over.¹⁹ In 1980 he co-founded the German Green Party,²⁰ later becoming successfully involved in the EU political élite as an MEP (and especially successful after Germany formed a “Red-Green” coalition government in 1998). He is now co-chairman of the European Green Coalition which has had so much say in Europe’s hugely expensive, and possibly unworkable, renewable energy policies. His slogan, reportedly, is “Let’s redesign Europe,” by which he appears to mean the institution of a single European federal government.

It is hard, after reviewing a career like that, not to ask if he means to redesign Europe in the same manner he aimed to redesign the Isle of Wight Festival in 1970. Certainly should he have such ambitions, he has spent a career gaining access to the levers of power.

The great divide

Does one need an ideological “third column” to bring about the massive changes we have seen within our society? Possibly not, but recognising the existence of such a “long march” makes it easier to join the dots between issues that appear otherwise to be disparate.

We may ask why, as soon as civil partnerships were legalised, single-sex marriage became the vital issue; and then transsexuality; and then brand new genders; and then the celebration of child drag-queens appearing in gay clubs²¹ (or adult drag-queens telling stories to children in libraries). How many oppressed minority groups can there still be, since persecuted Christians don’t count? But if the aim, all along, was to execute the theoretical agenda of someone like Herbert Marcuse in order to destroy the family and bring about the socialist utopia, then the ratchet will continue to tighten until marriage and the family have finally been abolished.

¹⁹ Darwall, 2019. 99.

²⁰ Plans for the German Greens were first laid by Rudi Dutschke, but he died in 1979. See Darwall, 2019. 49.

²¹ Murray, 2019. 217.

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We may ask, again, what possible connection there could be to make both LGBTQ rights and environmentalism equally popular with the same progressive groups. But if creating panic over climate change were a stage towards overturning the capitalist society and imposing a new social order across the world, then both would fit neatly together and one would *expect* sexual libertarians and eco-warriors to be co-belligerents.

There is one thing we would certainly expect to see, if we accept Gramsci's idea that society's institutions, in his time, were all united by a value system which he termed a "hegemony" and dismissed as bourgeois. If there has indeed been a concerted attempt to replace that value system wholesale with an alternative "hegemony" based on a radically different worldview, we would expect no other outcome than a dramatic polarization of society such as has emerged in western society in the last few years. On one side would be those who either embrace, or have been seduced by, the ideology that has infiltrated our institutions. On the other would be those who, for various reasons (including belief in the Bible from which the older values came) completely reject the dreams of Cultural Marxism.

Since the long march through the institutions was always conceived as a silent revolution, rather than as a dialogue leading to evolutionary progress, compromise between the two is logically impossible—they are two entirely disparate visions of society. It looks as though Lenin was right:

“The only choice is: either bourgeois or socialist ideology; there is no middle course.”

Marcuse, too, rejected the idea of compromise by his self-contradictory concept of “repressive tolerance”:

He argued that tolerance was good only if non-dominant (Progressive) ideas were allowed to flourish and those non-dominant ideas could only flourish if dominant (Traditional) ideas were shut down. A new kind of tolerance was needed: tolerance of the Progressive, meaning cultural and political

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subversion and revolutionary violence; combined with intolerance of existing traditional institutions, and any hint of opposition to Progressivism.²²

For the churches, then, accepting the existence of Cultural Marxism behind societal changes leads to the realization that the game can no longer be about dialogue and the accommodation of people's disparate opinions: the aim of the revolution was always to destroy the old ways entirely. So the alternatives are either to be absorbed by the socialist vision, or to fully embrace a counter-cultural role, one that is far more deeply and fundamentally counter-cultural than their challenge to the old "bourgeois" culture ever was. Working that out in love is the challenge, but it is a quite different challenge from what is usually assumed, by pastors and congregations alike.

Encompassing both ideologies is not an option.

²² Campbell-Jack, 2018.

8 The Postmodern Dimension

The grand narrative of Postmodernism

POSTMODERNISM IS A TERM that still bewilders most ordinary people not actually engaged in discussing it, and a good number of those who are. In order to understand why it actually matters to the subject at hand—that of deception—it helps to place it in the context of the Marxist “long march through the institutions” explored in the previous chapter.

Douglas Murray helps to explain this perspective:

In the latter part of the twentieth century we entered the post-modern era. An era which defined itself, and was defined, by its suspicion towards all grand narratives. However, as all schoolchildren learn, nature abhors a vacuum, and into the postmodern vacuum new ideas began to creep, with the intention of providing explanations and meanings of their own.¹

I would actually frame the chronology of the matter slightly differently: as we shall see, Postmodernism arose in the same context as did Cultural Marxism, centred on Paris, and involved some of the same players. It serves the agenda of Cultural Marxism well, because like Marxism it too is utopian, seeking to overthrow the current world order with only vaguely conceived ideas of how the replacement might actually work.

As Murray suggests, the heart of Postmodernism is the denial of all “grand narratives.” This actually followed logically from the Enlightenment denial of external authority and tradition, once the realisation came that unaided human reason could not, in itself, provide objective truth. Hence if *your* take on the way things are differs from *mine*, and there is no external arbiter between us (such as the word of God), then

¹ Murray, 2019. 1.

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absolute truth simply does not exist, but only subjective experiences of reality. Individual feelings become truth, and we somehow have to live with as many different versions of the world as there are people living in it.

As an extreme example, black students are now being told, here and elsewhere in the West, that truth itself is a western white construct:

The idea that there is a single truth—“the Truth”—is a construct of the Euro-West that is deeply rooted in the Enlightenment... The idea that the truth is an entity for which we must search, in matters that endanger our abilities to exist in open spaces, is an attempt to silence oppressed peoples.²

Imagine the effect of that on society—but even more on non-whites as they try to do anything successful in the world with that belief. If it sounds like a vision of hell, then N. T. Wright summed it up in a typically pithy one-liner:

Postmodernity is about announcing the doctrine of the Fall to arrogant modernity.³

It will be obvious that internal contradiction is therefore *intrinsic* to the Postmodern world view. Apart from any other inconsistency, its assertion of hyper-subjectivism is *itself* a grand narrative of the world, so why should it be any truer than those other narratives Postmodernism rejects?

But additionally internal contradiction is inherent to all utopian ideologies, and it was true of Marxism long before Postmodernism was conceived. In effect the deep-sounding “Marxist dialectic” was a fancy way of embracing internal incoherence. As Roger Scruton writes concerning Marx’s prophecy of the eventual withering away of the state:

² Students of Pomona and Claremont Colleges, quoted in Murray, 2019. 136. Murray adds that the truly disturbing thing is not that they express such views, but that they were *taught* them by their tutors.

³ Wright, 2009.

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... it requires but the slightest critical address, to recognise that Marx's "full communism" embodies a contradiction: it is a state in which all the benefits of legal order are still present, even though there is no law; in which all the products of social cooperation are still in existence, even though nobody enjoys the property rights with hitherto have provided the sole motive for producing them.⁴

Scruton points out many more specific instances of the often wilful embracing of contradiction in Marxism, but one we have encountered already is the "repressive tolerance" of Herbert Marcuse, in which tolerance for progressive ideas was to be achieved by absolute intolerance of every other view. In both Communism and Postmodernism, the noble struggle itself becomes the justification for the lack of clarity, or the frank incoherence, of the goals:

To young intellectuals disillusioned with the ensuing reality [after the First World War], Utopia had become a precious asset. It was the one thing to be trusted, precisely because it contained nothing real.⁵

Communism in practice retained that utopianism. Russian historian Beryl Williams writes of Lenin:

His was a profoundly ideological revolution. He believed that society could be perfected by the conscious decisions of a revolutionary elite who would educate the population to understand their true interests, and would build a society which needed neither money nor policing, and in which mankind's true potential would be realized in harmony.... It was the end which justified all the means necessary during the transition stage of the dictatorship of the proletariat, when the old society would be destroyed and the ground prepared for the new

⁴ Scruton, 2016. 6.

⁵ Scruton, 2016. 19.

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socialist future. Without this dimension neither the Bolshevik revolution nor Lenin can be fully understood.⁶

And so it should not surprise us that what appears at first sight to be a consistent and comprehensible programme in Marxism should come to embrace aspects of Postmodernism logically incompatible with it, provided they may be seen to serve the cause at the time. It must be added that once truth becomes a relativized commodity, it becomes increasingly difficult to see the incoherence in one's own views anyway.

Take the fundamental Marxist idea of class struggle. The suffering of the proletariat was, ostensibly, the single great and perennial injustice that justified violent revolution. It was the overriding truth of history. In Gramsci's Cultural Marxism, the lack of revolutionary fervour in the exploited could be bypassed, and their emancipation achieved by the quiet revolution of the intellectuals. But they still deserved liberation.

But in Postmodern thinking, other groups began to displace the workers as those marginalised by bourgeois culture. In the "second wave" of feminism from the 1960s to the 1980s, women of whatever class became the downtrodden. This soon led (in concert with the sexual revolution sparked by those like Marcuse) to the progressive addition of other sexual victim groups into one single growing lobby: the lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transsexuals and finally queers (see below—this is a self-appellation, not a pejorative).

Other alleged out-groups also followed. Paedophiles have been mentioned already as the one group from whom the progressive movement, for the moment, has backed off because of public pressure. Yet academic sociologists and others are still producing apologetics for it, and there are indications that it will return to the public agenda before long. It has already been pointed out by some that, as legal sanctions make the teaching of transgenderism to school-children compulsory, and as children alone become responsible for choosing their gender

⁶ Williams, 2000. 162–3.

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and commencing medical transition administered by adults, it makes little sense not to permit them to consent to sexual relations with adults as well.

The Civil Rights movement in America and the struggle against Apartheid in Africa added blacks to the roster of the oppressed, and in those original settings race was a genuine issue of injustice. But Post-modernism has made a universal law out of specific social injustices: the progressive world is now divided rigidly into “whites,” who exercise unjust supremacy under all circumstances, and “people of colour,” whose experience is only of suffering at their hands. No absurdity is seen in comparing a black ex-President who buys a \$15 million dollar estate in Martha’s Vineyard with an out of work white trucker in poverty-stricken Moreno Valley, California, and talking about the latter’s “white privilege.” Yet it is absurd nonetheless.

You will notice that progressive thought has entirely forgotten that it was the liberation of such proletarians that was supposed to be the purpose of Marxism. As “Populists” the working classes are now seen as the greatest hindrance to the arrival of the new world, and are therefore despised by progressives.

Muslims have also become a victim group, with their own ethnically-defined prejudice, “Islamophobia.”⁷ However other minority religions, including Christianity even where severely persecuted, fail to qualify as victim groups, especially when the persecution is by Muslims.

Lesser categories of victims proliferate alongside these, such as the “fat-shamed,” the state-educated, or those “triggered” by handclaps or “racist numbers.”⁸ It is a far cry from “*Workers of the world unite.*”

⁷ An all party UK parliamentary group, heavily influenced by Muslim pressure groups, has produced a definition of Islamophobia, already adopted by two of our main political parties, thus: “Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness.” This definition, to use a favourite Postmodernist word, is “problematic.”

⁸ Straker, 2016.

Foucault, intersectionality and queer theory

We have come across Michel Foucault before in connection with his espousal of paedophilia. Although denying the label “Marxist” he was one of the many influential Paris scholars standing behind the student riots of 1968.

His writing is convoluted and difficult, and indeed deliberately incomprehensible⁹ in places, yet Foucault has become perhaps the greatest single influence on contemporary thinking in the humanities. My own impression from reading one of his better-known works¹⁰ was of a very dense, yet prolix, style littered with references to obscure writers and metaphors that seemed to make things more, rather than less, obscure.

My net conclusion was that the total amount of meat on the particular thesis of his book was rather scanty, and that the obscurity was hiding less-than-convincing arguments. Can it really be true (as Foucault asserts) that the core sciences of humanity in the modern era are psychoanalysis and, of all disciplines, ethnology? And can it really be the case that one of the pivotal philosophical figures inaugurating the modern age is the Marquis de Sade?

But Postmodern writing is often intended to conquer by obscurity. Foucault himself convicted his fellow Postmodernist Jacques Derrida of “*obscurantisme terroriste*”:

He writes so obscurely you can't tell what he's saying. That's the obscurantism part. And then when you criticize him, he can always say, 'You didn't understand me; you're an idiot.' That's the terrorism part.¹¹

⁹ As deconstructionist philosopher John Searle translates Foucault's admission to him: “In France, you gotta have ten percent incomprehensible, otherwise people won't think it's deep—they won't think you're a profound thinker.” Searle, 2013.

¹⁰ Foucault, 1989.

¹¹ Searle, 2013.

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There appears to be a degree of psychological projection in this criticism: Foucault is almost equally obscure. The supremely ironic thing is that Foucault himself, in later works, develops “Deconstructionism,” the idea that a text actually has no intrinsic meaning, but only what the reader manufactures for himself. Here then is another self-contradiction: “the meaning of this book is that this book has no meaning.”

Nevertheless, Foucault does develop some actual ideas, and one of the most influential is that all human relationships are entirely power relationships. This gives meaning to the division noted in the previous section of this chapter between “victim groups” and “oppressors.” If men and women, for example, interact (and it is somewhat inevitable that they will!) the Postmodernist task is to decide which side is exerting the power, and which is exploited. The only possible result (because presupposed from the start) is to define male-female relationships in terms of conflict, to which the most obvious solution is a reversal of the power structure. This is the kind of thinking we see at work in so-called “third wave feminism,” in the assertions that colleges and even nations are plagued by a “rape culture,” and in the constantly shifting criteria for what constitutes sexual harassment in the workplace.

But power also determines all the other relationships mentioned in the previous section. Sexuality, gender, race, religion... all must be understood in terms of the oppression of the powerless by the powerful, for nothing else exists.

In the study of English literature now, I am told, the aim is not to learn about life and humanity from the literary geniuses who created the body of literature, but to unmask their sexism, or racism. That explains the calls sometimes heard in the press to replace Shakespeare in English courses with more worthy contemporary writers, usually meaning those from some “culturally diverse” minority, who perhaps believe that truth is a white prejudice.

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The underlying motivation, just as it is in in Marxism, is the harnessing, or rather the engendering and careful fostering, of a sense of grievance in order to undermine society and hope that something better will replace it. Such resentment inevitably becomes endemic. As black social theorist Thomas Sowell astutely observes:

"When people get used to preferential treatment, equal treatment seems like discrimination."¹²

Also as in Marxism, the power structures deemed important in Post-modernist thinking are formulated along crude “class” lines. Under Lenin, Stalin, Mao or Pol Pot, a class enemy was worthy of death simply because of his membership of a group, regardless of his actual behaviour:

No matter what the individual qualities [of the defendant], *only one* method of evaluating him is to be applied: evaluation from the point of view of *class expediency*.¹³

That actually became the foundation of the Communist judicial system:

Under revolutionary justice you are tried, in the end, not for what you do but for what you are: emigre or kulak, Jew or anti-socialist, enemy of the people or running dog of capitalism—in each case the crime is not an action, but a state of being.¹⁴

It is the same under the current progressive moral system, in which your right to speak in public, to be employed on a campus, or to post on *Facebook* depends on where you fit in the complex (yet still crassly oversimplified and utterly confused) hierarchy of privilege categories which is called “intersectionality.” As has been shown, these categories are largely arbitrary, based on one-dimensional interpretations of

¹² Sowell, 2014.

¹³ Nikolai Krylenko, Soviet Prosecutor General from 1931. Quoted in Solzhenitsyn, 1974. 308.

¹⁴ Scruton, 1989.

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history and society in which all men are rapists and all women tell the truth, all whites were slave-owners and all non-whites are still enslaved by them, and so on.

Yet the ideas are seductive for those susceptible to societal guilt as well as for the disgruntled. The senior churchman who talks about “checking your white privilege” before evangelising other nations, on the grounds that Britain once had a racist empire, has prioritized a fashionable (and factually erroneous) human philosophy over the Scriptural injunction to “preach the message, to insist upon proclaiming it (whether the time is right or not).”¹⁵

To establish even absolute equality of opportunity for all is a tall order. To ensure equal *outcomes* for all is sheer impossibility (even if one could show it to be desirable).¹⁶ To try to achieve either by dividing people into a matrix of crude intersectional categories graded according to some arbitrary algorithm is already producing social chaos, and will inevitably do so more and more¹⁷. And the reason is that in real life, power is only one aspect of many ways in which people interact, and even power exhibits a myriad of subtle variables—including the possibility of imposing one’s will by wielding one’s oppression.

It is important to realise that such thinking is no longer the sole domain of radical academics. It now predominates in government and even in big business, and only partly because it can be turned to votes or a profit. If the PR person you hire is “woke,” then so will be your investments and advertising campaigns. In 2019 in the USA Gillette (owned by Procter and Gamble) ran an advertising campaign with one ad advising men to “shave their toxic masculinity,” and a second in which a father teaches his transsexual son to shave. It is speculated that this, “one of the most hated ads in Internet history,” may have contributed to Gillette’s \$5.24 billion loss that quarter.¹⁸ But that will

¹⁵ 2 Timothy 4:2 (GNB).

¹⁶ Theologically, it is hard to distinguish “privilege” from “common grace.”

¹⁷ Since writing this, critical race theory has sunk the US into near Civil War.

¹⁸ Watson, 2019.

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not necessarily stop it: the utter failure of Soviet collectivisation did not deter the committed Communists from pursuing it to destruction.

One of Foucault's later contributions, which takes intersectionality even further and makes some sense of the latest proliferation of novel genders, is "queer theory."¹⁹ The basic premise of this builds on his insistence that all relationships are, at root, power relationships. He goes on to say that wherever one finds a "binary," the meeting of opposites, there one will also necessarily find an oppressive power-relationship. Hence the prevailing theme nowadays of the "Patriarchy" of white males which is held to be to blame for every evil in society, and to have been so since European civilization began.

Therefore, the only way to produce equity in society is to abolish all binaries. These would include black and white (in practice by blinding oneself to the nuanced realities of genetics in a thoroughly racist way, and discriminating against certain skin colours), homosexual and heterosexual, governor and governed, sane and insane—but the most fundamental is the male-female divide.²⁰ The abolition is achieved by "queering" the distinctions between the two categories, however much they are determined by natural reality. In other words, the two biological sexes, represented in every human institution throughout history, must be eradicated. This is Queer Theory.

It is also a queer theory. To dissolve the biological distinction that has prevailed in earth's biology for the last two billion years may seem an impossible task, but Postmodernists seldom let reality govern their ambitions, since they deny objective reality. And so it is pretty clear that the current claims that there are 112 human genders (according to Tumblr.com), and rising, derive from Postmodernist Queer Theory rather than from any objective truth, for a decade or two ago even those who proclaimed gender fluidity were talking about males be-

¹⁹ Cox, 2017.

²⁰ Actually, the most fundamental binary is the God-human one, a fact which has not escaped the notice of those who eschew "queer theology," influential in theological academia, and by trickle down in some churches.

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coming females, and *vice versa*,²¹ and not making new genders up on the hoof.

By the time we reach where we are today, many of the ideological conceits of Postmodernism and Cultural Marxism have become so mainstream that they have become separated from their original theoretical sources. So their provenance is not always obvious. They may be taught in isolation in colleges, and without any historical understanding whatsoever in the press or in primary schools (and increasingly in churches), and by employers as pseudo-academic courses in “unconscious bias training²²,” and so on.

Individuals who have problems that they attribute, rightly or wrongly, to their race, or gender, or sexuality may make sense of their troubles according to the victim categories I have been describing, without knowing anything about Postmodernism, just as we may talk about our “subconscious fears” with no actual knowledge of Freud. Their experience is real, but their understanding of it may not be. False ideas, after all, could not be deceptive at all unless they proposed answers to genuinely perceived problems.²³

The fact remains that in many cases, whether for personal or political reasons, these ideas began life as deliberately transgressive and destructive. To the committed revolutionary, whatever weakens society is a good idea, even if it’s a bad idea. And to the square peg, even a specific revolutionary cause is unnecessary if your protest makes a square mark on the round hole.

²¹ Note that the uncommon biological cases of “intersex,” though sometimes added as an “I” to the LGBTQ brand, have no connection with queer theory. Most intersex individuals have a rationale for the gender role they adopt, and indeed many resent being dragged into the progressive culture wars.

²² Sound research shows no correlation between measures of “unconscious bias” and racist actions. The whole field is pseudo-science, but the courses proliferate, and are made compulsory indoctrination for workers and students.

²³ One must, however, bear in mind how suggestible Adam and Eve were to being told God was holding them back.

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This was certainly the case with Foucault, who as a homosexual and a sado-masochist lived his whole life in a deliberately provocative way. The celebrated linguist Noam Chomsky, himself a Marxist, said he had “*never met anyone who was so totally amoral*” as Foucault. In a TV debate with Chomsky, Foucault specifically rejected “*such ideas as responsibility, sensitivity, justice, and law.*”²⁴ Such attitudes (taken together with his admiration of de Sade, whose confinement to mental institutions for the last thirty-two years of his life he believed, contradicting himself, to be an injustice) bespeak a very disturbed human being. Yet his ideas have become central to the Postmodernist culture that is dominant today. There is a good chance that Foucault governs your church denomination’s approach to sexuality and gender.

Postmodernism and current issues

I hope enough has been said above, here and in the previous chapter, to show that there are indeed powerful ideologies at work in the moral issues over which the churches have been struggling in recent years. To take it for granted that historically disadvantaged minorities just happen to have been brought to public attention by compassionate people, and that the Church’s job is to repent of past ignorance and affirm these minorities, is politically, as well as theologically, naïve.

Indeed, such minorities do exist, and may in some cases have been ignored or even rejected uncharitably by Christians as well as others. The alleged facts of the history are nevertheless themselves worthy of investigation, as the real past is invariably a lot more complicated than what we are told now, especially when those doing the telling have an ideological agenda: historiography was one of the prime targets of Cultural Marxism. As Orwell wrote:

“Who controls the past,” ran the Party slogan, “controls the future: who controls the present controls the past.”²⁵

²⁴ “‘Totally amoral’: Michel Foucault.” *Useful Stooges*, 14/10/2016. <https://usefulstooges.com/2016/10/14/totally-amoral-michel-foucault/>.

²⁵ Orwell, 1954. 31.

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In our minds we need to separate the activists, and the publicists, from the genuinely suffering individuals, both in how we understand the issues, and in how we offer truth-telling help to the sufferers. For the “black community” does not, in reality, represent any one individual, still less the newly-coined (for 2020) “BAME community²⁶” encompassing both Syrian refugees and Chinese billionaires. The “LGBTQ community” is a political activism construct, and not the authentic collective voice of anybody:

It barely exists even within each letter of its constituent parts.
And each has little in common with the others.²⁷

The minorities, like the poor, we will always have with us, and Christians will always be bound to love them as individuals. But the “LGBTQ community” designedly stands or falls as a unit: if one category is found to be spurious, the whole ideological programme collapses. Since they are actually at odds with each other, at some stage that collapse will certainly happen.

But if we accept at face-value either the Postmodernist or the Cultural Marxist agendas, both of which are now more or less the standard narrative in our society, we will not be in a position to bring the liberating truth of Christ to anyone. We will instead be in very real danger of losing the truth ourselves.

²⁶ Just as you learned to use this PC term, it has become in September 2020 racist, according to a [diversity activist](#). A prime example of “liquid modernity.”

²⁷ Murray, 2019. 35–6.

9 Confusing the Issue with Facts

Science and truth

IN AUGUST OF 2019, a scientific paper¹ made the headlines by saying that any genetic basis for homosexual orientation is weak and indirect. As usual the media reports reduced a complex subject to “There is no gay gene,” but the study was genuinely significant because it was far larger than other comparable pieces of research.

In a way the amazing thing is that the paper was published at all, because I remember reading in medical journals three or four decades ago that, now homosexuality was accepted as normal in society, research on its causes could be construed as unethical. Be that as it may the study showed that even the five genes most strongly associated with same-sex attraction are by no means determinative of it, whether alone or in combination.

It can be confusing for the non-specialist to gauge what is meant by statements suggesting that some small proportion, $x\%$, of a particular behaviour can be accounted for by genetic variation. But the basic message is that correlation is not causation, and we need to look for cause, with no guarantee of success, in the other biological area, the “environment.”

To give a clearer idea of how “influence” does not mean “cause,” the paper’s results section states:

These aggregate genetic influences partly overlapped with those on a variety of other traits, including externalizing behaviors such as smoking, cannabis use, risk-taking, and the personality trait “openness to experience.”²

¹ Ganna, 2019.

² *Ibid.*

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Now, clearly a genetic ally influenced trait such as “risk-taking” or “openness to experience” has no direct link to sexuality, any more than it “causes” smoking or cannabis use, but it is easy to see that a person possessing it might be more likely to risk breaking societal taboos... *if*, that is, they chose to do so, or if they put themselves into a risk situation in which they were coerced. The same indirect link would be true of other genes more obviously related to sexual attraction, such as those related to sex-hormone regulation and smell, mentioned in the abstract.

When biologists speak of “the environment,” they mean *everything* that is not genetic, including both involuntary factors like damage from hormones crossing the placenta before birth, and the voluntary choices one makes.³

It is false, then, to say that our sexual orientation is “in our DNA.” Certainly one cannot assume that complex behaviours such as sexual expression are “simply a choice,” any more than growing up speaking English is a choice. But neither can one assume that sexuality is biologically fixed, even if it may become very deep-seated. Alcoholism and drug addiction also have predisposing genetic factors, and once established are so compulsive as to be frequently termed “illness,” and may resist cure up to the time of death. Yet everybody who actually begins taking these substances makes a choice to do so (unless their drink is spiked), and every addict who has ever kicked the habit—and there are many—has done so by making a choice, whatever other human or divine help they received, and whatever painful struggles they underwent in order to change.

In fact as Douglas Murray, himself gay, points out, exactly how homosexuality arises remains a scientific mystery. He quotes current *American Psychological Association* guidance:

Although much research has examined the possible genetic, hormonal, developmental, social and cultural influences on

³ Many materialists would, of course, assert that even our free choices are determined by physical laws, but that argument need not concern us here.

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sexual orientation, no findings have emerged that permit scientists to conclude that sexual orientation is determined by any particular factor or factors. Many think that nature and nurture both play complex roles; most people experience little or no sense of choice about their sexual orientation.⁴

Perhaps this last point should not surprise us, since most people also experience little or no sense of choice in lesser matters too: how they came to fear spiders and hate bananas, or to love fishing or football. Therefore, the Christian teaching that homosexual acts are sinful, and ought to be avoided, is as compatible with the scientific evidence as the societal wisdom that over-indulging in alcohol or using addictive drugs is blameworthy, and that it is a good thing to find ways to overcome addictions through rehabilitation, 12-step programmes, and so on. The Christian with a genetically- (or epigenetically-) linked predisposition to irascibility is no less responsible for controlling their temper than the placid or timid person who has no need to try, and this self-evident reality is even recognised in the secular provision of “anger management” courses.

This book is not about how churches can best advise and help those caught up in sexual aberrations, any more than it is about dealing with the believer who is alcoholic or aggressive. It goes without saying that immense love and wisdom are both essential. My point here is that much of the discussion in churches recently has taken a one-sided, radical, agenda for granted, and has accepted the narrative that sexual orientation is fixed and even God-given, to be accommodated by changes in Christian doctrine rather than in individual behaviour. That necessarily means diminishing the authority of Scripture, for:

The more conservative wing of queer theology has failed in its attempt to reconcile a high view of Scripture with a consistent hermeneutical approach that highlights how and why the Biblical prohibitions on same-sex practice are no longer applicable. Even if this were achieved, however, it would still be in

⁴ Murray, 2019. 26.

danger of arguing from silence as there are no positive references to same-sex practice in the Scriptures.⁵

Each pastoral situation is different, and highly individual. For example, I know an elderly man who was seduced as a teenager by an older man, and knowing no better at the time regarded his situation as both normal, and pleasurable. By the grace of God, only a short time later he was converted, and when counselled to renounce known sin, without any instruction was convicted by the Spirit that his homosexual relationship was wrong. He blesses God that his salvation came before he had been fully immersed in the gay lifestyle, and his tastes, habits, relationships and even self-identity conditioned by the initial consent he gave. Had his salvation come ten years later, things might have been more difficult.

Other cases might be even more complex: the child abused or badly role-modelled as an infant, the “girlie” boy or the tomboy feeling life-long discomfort in the conventional pursuits of their sex, and so on, including the common case of there being *no* immediately obvious issues. All complex behavioural patterns resulting from such factors, and not just sexual orientation itself, are of mixed and mysterious cause, and none should be viewed as representing “the real me.” Our true selves are, after all, what we are called to become in Christ, and not what we bring to him at the start. He will often use our individual talents and acquired tastes in his service—but he must also purge what is sinful. That, we must frequently remind ourselves, also includes the far more common heterosexual lust of the eyes, which Jesus treats as heart-adultery, and which is no less in need of change than any other aberration of God’s created order.

Silencing science

My main reason for mentioning the homosexuality paper in this chapter is that its findings are by no means new. They only confirm what I believed, from a whole range of other scientific evidence, to be the case throughout my medical career.

⁵ Wood, 2017.

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It has been known, since the *Human Genome Project* and even before, that *no* complex human behaviour is genetically determined—there simply aren't enough genes to dictate a taste for Hindemith over Hip-hop, or even a preference for music over photography.

As the *American Psychological Association* statement cited above implies, scientists stopped looking decades ago for hormonal abnormalities (intrinsic or extrinsic) or other medical explanations for sexual orientation: nothing very significant to causation has ever been found. It became obvious that complex life experiences and choices, and not “how we are made,” are predominantly involved in our sexual desires and behaviour, as they are in pretty well everything else we do. That is shown, if by nothing else, by the radical differences in the sociological patterns of homosexual practice in different cultures over the centuries.

In Roman times, for example, “same sex attraction” was not even an issue in homosexuality, but social status was: pederasty was acceptable for high-status and usually married adult males, but only with socially inferior (and socially despised) youths. Such a man would also abuse slave girls, with society's sanction. However, passive homosexual activity by a high-status man was considered utterly shameful.

“Same sex attraction” was presumably involved, in that it can scarcely have been engaged in as a disgusting civic duty—universally abhorrent practices never become social norms. But “orientation” was sociologically irrelevant and, we must assume, male to male attraction was as widespread as pederasty itself was. Bisexuality is a minority of a minority today,⁶ but was a social norm then. That bespeaks cultural, not biological, causation.

In archaic and classical Greece, one historian has described pederasty as *“the principal cultural model for free relationships between citi-*

⁶ The Office of National Statistics reports 0.8% in 2016, compared to 1.2% identifying as homosexual. Females and young adults predominate, and the percentage has been slowly growing. ONS, 2016.

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zens.”⁷ Yet it was only so alongside the institution of marriage: “orientation” was a product of culturally-mediated choice, not of biology and certainly not of individual creation.

The environmental origin of homosexuality is also shown by the fact that sexual orientation not infrequently *does* change in a single lifetime, one obvious example being the brief period of same-sex attraction through which many adolescent males quickly pass. Our culture has come to treat “sexual orientation” as a fundamental of our individuality, but history and biology disagree.

Yet in the churches, as in our society as a whole, it is sometimes as if such knowledge does not exist. For example, a comprehensive review of the scientific literature on both sexuality and gender was published in 2016, and made freely available online.⁸ But although its findings have been used by concerned Christian medical professionals both here (*Christian Medical Fellowship*⁹) and in the United States (*American College of Paediatricians*¹⁰), they are virtually unknown in the churches, despite the turmoil the denominations are in over the handling of these issues.

Church leaders appear to take the activists’ word for it that “conversion therapy” is intrinsically abusive because sexual orientation is God-given, even as they increasingly endorse radical medical and surgical “transitioning” for those with gender dysphoria, though these therapies are now known from research to have dire long term effects,¹¹ and to end increasingly commonly in a desire to “de-transition.”¹² Even that terminology, though, is profoundly misleading.

⁷ Dawson, 1997. 193.

⁸ Mayer, 2016.

⁹ Since I drafted this passage, Dr Peter Saunders’ CMF video explaining this scientific evidence to other doctors has been banned from *YouTube* under its “Hate Speech” Policy. The censorship of science could not have a clearer demonstration.

¹⁰ Cretella, 2018.

¹¹ Dhejne, 2011.

¹² This led Andrea Williams, of *Christian Concern*, to ask pointedly at a General Synod meeting in which celebratory liturgies for transitioning were

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“Transitioning” has nothing to do with changing sex, for the patient’s sex remains the expression of the chromosomes given by nature in each and every cell of the body. Transitioning is simply surgical and medical mutilation. “Detransitioning” is simply further mutilation.

The churches’ confusion, if we exclude deliberate complicity, is probably because such scientific findings are also absent from the public discussion, which is led by media and politicians whose information appears to come almost exclusively from activist groups. Unbiased science is therefore vigorously, and systematically, suppressed, and where that is not possible, vilified. It is especially sad that sectional activism appears to be the major voice influencing the policies of mainstream professional societies too.

This pattern is particularly noticeable in the more recent controversy over transsexualism and gender fluidity. Douglas Murray points out that society’s certainties about this virtually new phenomenon are even less well-grounded than in homosexuality:

Then finally we all stumbled, baffled, into the most uncharted territory of all. This was the claim that there lived among us a considerable number of people who were in the wrong bodies and that as a consequence what certainties remained in our societies (including certainties rooted in science and language) needed to be utterly reframed.¹³

Possibly the first major intellectual to assert the social origin of gender differences¹⁴ was Simone de Beauvoir in the early 1960s, in the context of feminism.¹⁵ Although a philosopher, and no biologist or even

proposed, whether they would also suggest liturgies for de-transitioning.

“General Synod update: Calls for clarity on transgender liturgy and baptism,” *YouTube*, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AYcCoFWOWFA>

¹³ Murray, 2019. 6.

¹⁴ Note that “gender” was coined only in this historically recent discussion as distinct from “sex.” Prior to this it was a grammatical term for the threefold masculine, feminine and neuter nouns in some languages, and was only applied jocularly to people.

¹⁵ De Beauvoir, 1961.

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psychologist, she argued that conventional female roles and attitudes are entirely socially constructed, imposed on women (by men). Women could, and should, take on the all the roles performed hitherto by men. “Second wave” feminism has made this assumption such a commonplace now that it is deemed bigotry to contradict it even by Evangelicals, whether the issue is that of enlisting women for combat-roles in the armed forces,¹⁶ affirmative action to abolish unequal sex-ratios amongst corporate CEOs, or the appointment of women as bishops.

De Beauvoir’s claim has since been largely refuted by scientific research, which shows very clear trends in personality differences across cultures between men and women,¹⁷ but the seed had been sown and has increased a hundredfold.

As it happens the importation of the idea of “cultural sex roles” into the medical sciences was in progress during my own social psychology studies. In lectures on what determines the differences between the sexes, the “big new thing” was the work of paediatric psychologist Dr John Money, who was dealing with gender issues at Johns Hopkins University.

In 1967 he was sent an infant twin boy, Bruce Reimer, who had suffered a botched circumcision at 7 months old. Money decided the best solution was to perform further surgery to imitate female genitalia, and to advise the parents to bring him up as a girl. “Brenda” (now so renamed) was six when I learned how successful this policy was, suggesting, I was told, that gender is purely an assigned characteristic, with little biological influence.

In fact, it was later shown that Money falsified much of his clinical data to exaggerate the benefit and suppress the problems. He sought to

¹⁶ The US “Soldiers Project” reports that rates of PTSD are twice as high amongst female combatants as men, and to blame themselves more. They also report high rates of sexual harassment. “Female Veterans and PTSD.” *The Soldiers Project*, <https://www.thesoldiersproject.org/female-veterans-ptsd/>.

¹⁷ Maestripieri, 2012.

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enhance the socialisation process by making the brothers engage in sex play in his clinic, with “Brenda” in the female role. As the patient entered adolescence, he was given oestrogen to feminize him.

Unfortunately by the age of thirteen he was suicidally depressed, and insisted on being told the truth by his devastated parents. He immediately started to live as a male (changing his name to David) and tried to reverse what had been done to him medically. In 1990 he got married, but never adjusted to what his parents had been induced to do to him, to being treated as a girl though he identified as a boy all his childhood, to the bullying by his peers and all the rest. He shot himself in 2004. His twin brother, incidentally, developed schizophrenia.¹⁸

But by this time Money had achieved fame and co-founded the gender clinic at Johns Hopkins, pioneering hormone and surgical reassignment for gender dysphoria, which has now become the standard treatment.¹⁹ It is the only medical situation in which the body is fundamentally altered for an incongruent belief.²⁰ The condition itself has been progressively de-medicalised, in order to reduce its “stigma,” from a “disorder,” to a “dysphoria” and, in the latest guidelines, to an “incongruence.”²¹ But it has been carefully kept close enough to being medical to retain medical funding and professional regulation, given the extent and great expense of the treatment, continued over many years.

In the absence of any known physical abnormality, it is difficult to know on what scientific basis the assumed gender can be said to be fundamental. Philosophically and theologically, too, quite what is

¹⁸ “David Reimer.” *Wikipedia*. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Reimer.

¹⁹ Though after Money’s departure, Johns Hopkins discontinued their program because of poor results.

²⁰ It is not commonly realised that transition may also involve cosmetic surgery on the facial skeleton, speech therapy, and even training in how to walk as the opposite sex. All this, however, is essentially cosmetic: every cell of the body retains its original sex-chromosomes and their natural effects.

²¹ Note how this terminology shifts the problem from the subject’s pathological belief to society’s reaction to it. Hence gender reassignment becomes a treatment for everyone else’s bigotry towards a “victim.”

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meant by being “in the wrong body” is difficult to clarify. And so both diagnosis and treatment are based primarily on belief and assertion, rather than science. That matters when those who disagree can be “cancelled,” as J. K. Rowling has been in 2020.

Paul McHugh, John Money’s successor at Johns Hopkins for forty years (and now characteristically demonized by the “trans lobby”) considers that the incidence of the rare condition of gender dysphoria—and subsequently of the proliferation of new genders—has grown and mutated massively as a result of Money’s theories,²² especially after the LGBTQ lobby’s campaigning changed from promoting gay marriage to promoting trans-genderism, reaching children and adolescents *via* social media, and latterly through state education.

Numerically this increase is indisputable: in the last nine years the Tavistock Clinic, Britain’s principal gender reassignment clinic, has seen the rate of referrals of gender-disturbed children, formerly stable at around 0.07 percent, increase by a factor of 45 times (from 40 in 2009/10 to 1,806 in 2017/18),²³ and the sex-ratio has also been reversed. A number of news articles in 2019 have described how increasing numbers of staff, and even one of the governors, at the Tavistock Clinic have resigned or are afraid to speak out, because of the now vastly greater workload, the decreasing age of referrals (as young as 3), and the uncritical recourse to transitioning with poor scientific knowledge and inadequate psychological exploration,²⁴ together, necessarily, with the intimidation of dissident voices. In September 2020 the first legal action against the Tavistock Clinic by a patient has begun, and there will be many more.

The issue of pre-pubertal children’s competence to give informed consent for irreversible treatment that will inevitably render them sterile is a very serious one, as is the potential harm caused by presenting the option of gender-change, by law, to primary age children. Churches need to be acutely aware of such issues as they consider this matter. It

²² McHugh, 2015.

²³ Ashenden, 2019.

²⁴ For example, Tingle, 2019.

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is far more than a question of “affirming real identity.” In fact, it is about instilling false identity by indoctrination.

But apart from the weakness of the evidence base for the therapies,²⁵ and the adoption in a kind of domino-effect of the policy of not questioning a child’s (or adult’s) self-affirmation of a particular gender by most of the professional medical organisations,²⁶ it has become the norm for activists to intimidate scientific institutions into withdrawing research²⁷ or funding for research,²⁸ and to bandy accusations of “transphobia” and even threats of violence at sceptical researchers.

As if that were not sufficient, such accusations are not simply a matter for hostile posts on social media, but have become a serious *legal* abrogation of human right to conscience. A judgement was made by a UK employment tribunal at the end of September, 2019, against a Christian doctor, Dr David Mackereth.²⁹ He was dismissed from his work doing medical assessments for the Department of Work and Pensions because in both scientific and Christian conscience, he said, he would be unable to refer to transitioning men as “women” and *vice versa* in reports, should that issue ever arise (which it had not, by the way, when he was sacked).

The judgement commented on Genesis 1:27, on the creation of male and female as the fundamental basis of humanity, thus:

...belief in Genesis 1:27, lack of belief in transgenderism and conscientious objection to transgenderism in our judgment are incompatible with human dignity and conflict with the fun-

²⁵ See Mayer, 2016. The massive long-term suicide rate after transition, 20 times normal in this study, is especially worrying.

²⁶ The common pattern is that the attitudes and policies of dedicated units like the Tavistock Clinic are adopted by the overseeing bodies of, say, psychiatry and paediatrics, which in turn are accepted as authoritative by unrelated professional bodies like those of surgeons or GPs, and then imposed as best practice on individual clinicians, who face serious sanctions for dissidence.

²⁷ For example, Dr Lisa Littman in 2018: Transgender Trend, 2018.

²⁸ For example, James Caspian in 2017: Wheale, 2017.

²⁹ Williams, 2019.

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damental rights of others, specifically here, transgender individuals (para 197).

...

...in so far as those beliefs form part of his wider faith, his wider faith also does not satisfy Grainger [the requirement of being worthy of respect in a democratic society, not incompatible with human dignity and not in conflict with the fundamental rights of others] (para 231, cf. para 157).

Let the implications of that for your church sink in fully. As Andrea Williams of *Christian Concern* comments:

The ruling itself puts a belief in the Bible on a par with the racist and neo-Nazi ideologies which have been held to be “*not worthy of respect in democratic society*” in earlier judicial decisions.

Now you may not be in a comparable professional role. But if you are a biblical Christian in the UK, and your “wider faith” is now legally deemed “not worthy of respect in democratic society,” then you, and your church are now *de facto* outlaws. That is a very serious development in a country that developed through Christian values and faith over 1,500 years. As Williams notes, the judgement amounts to coerced speech. Someone like Dr Mackereth must say what he does not believe to be true, and in a signed medical report too. That is very little different from coercing thought, as well.

But it is even worse than a matter of freedom of religion: truth itself has been outlawed. Since it is the conscientious objection to transgenderism itself that renders biblical faith unworthy of respect (that is, objection of the kind attributable to Dr Mackereth, being unable to accept that someone who says they are of the opposite sex from their biological sex literally is), then exactly the same must apply to a *scientific* conscientious objection as to a religious one. Indeed, Dr Mackereth’s case included both aspects. The “wrong” scientific belief,

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however strong the evidence, has been deemed “not worthy of respect.”

As Theodore Dalrymple has pointed out in a comparable context, this legal decision rules that for a doctor’s judgement to be considered ethical, and worthy of respect in a democratic society... he has to lie deliberately about the science. In this area, then, even science has become a politically censored tool of activist policy—or in other words, it has been reduced from its historical role of fearless objectivity to a mere branch of state propaganda.

This ought to shake our faith in the use of science as an objective source of truth. It could never really be that anyway, being a human activity. But it could come pretty close to truth by being a means of minimising human bias. But that is no longer true: we are forced to treat “scientists say...” in the same way we treat “politicians say...”.

There is at least one other branch of science in which the same kind of distortion and suppression may be seen. That is the field of environmentalism, and in particular of climate change. It will require a separate chapter to unpack why this should concern Christians.

Politics with everything

I SUSPECT—NO, I AM quite certain—that it will prove considerably more difficult for many readers to entertain any connection between the sexuality and gender deception, which everyone acknowledges is a moral minefield, and concern for the environment. After all, what can be objected to about Christians caring for God’s creation? It can even be said to be a matter of long-overdue involvement from the churches, which are increasingly aware of having lagged behind on an issue the world has championed for decades. Our inaction has contributed, we fear, to the imminent disaster forecast in the next few years.

I don’t at all argue with having a passion for conserving the environment. My own book, *God’s Good Earth*, has a section entitled “The long history of trashing the planet”¹ and its cover endorsement by the scientific director of the *Eden Project* said the book “demands positive action.” The Christian conservation group *A Rocha* was founded by a good friend from university, and my church currently has a silver “Eco Church” award from them, and is going for gold. I have even turned my paddock into a wild-flower meadow to help the environment, at the cost of significant ongoing muscle-power.

But the role of hard-left activists in founding Germany’s Green Party, including the very same man who coined the phrase “the long march through the institutions,” (see Chapter 7) should give us a hint that environmentalism may be a little more ideologically complicated than we are led to believe.

As far back as 2009, journalist Nick Davies was pointing out climate change as a matter that had become a prime example of a propaganda war. He pointed out how “climate change denial” had been promoted by oil companies using the panoply of propaganda; how NGOs like

¹ Garvey, 2019. 171–6.

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Greenpeace and *Friends of the Earth* had also used disinformation and exaggeration on the other side, and how other big oil companies had taken to propaganda to paint themselves as part of the solution. So, he concludes:

The facts of climate change have become the site of a three-cornered battle in which truth, as ever, has been an immediate casualty.²

He mentions that even scientists have engaged in the information wars, though his overall position is that of deference to “the consensus” of scientists. He fails, in my opinion, to realise how from the very start, publicity-minded and ideologically-driven scientists too were selling spin, and how the very idea of a scientific “consensus” is anti-scientific, not to mention a dubious propaganda claim in this case. I have therefore come to a different conclusion from Davies amidst the information morass.

My own, quite recent, journey to “climate scepticism” began when I wrote a piece on someone else’s science blog about the misleading use of footage of walrus falling off a cliff in a David Attenborough *Netflix* documentary, supposedly victims of climate change. I had fortuitously discovered, by following up a small mainstream news item, that the story was a clear fraud.³

The documentary’s narrative was that owing to decreasing sea ice, the diminishing population of walrus was forced to crowd on to unsuitable beaches, and many spontaneously fell off sea cliffs to their deaths.

The truth turned out to be that walrus mass haul-outs have been recorded for a century, at times of population boom rather than bust, and falls from cliffs have also been noted on such occasions, since walrus despite their size are easily panicked. In this case, a fully documented investigation had identified the beach in question to be near a

² Davies, 2009. 186.

³ Crockford, 2019.

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particular settlement in Siberia. There in September 2017 a band of twenty or so polar bears (also booming in population, contrary to the usual story), that had been harassing the village, procured some easy eating by spooking walrus on the cliff into falling. The film crew, alerted by an NGO, travelled from a larger beach haul-out in North America in time to catch a few late deaths—it is even possible that the easily-scared beasts in fact reacted to the crew on the beach, and the drones they were using.

The producers, who refused at first to say where they had filmed the scene until photographic evidence proved it incontrovertibly, denied that bears were present, even though some out-take footage used for trailers shows bears prowling amongst the carcasses on the beach.⁴

The focus of my web post was the abuse of science in TV science documentaries. But the comments I got, including some from professional scientists, followed this form: my main source, Dr Susan Crockford, was also a climate denialist and therefore not to be trusted. She was probably paid well by oil companies to discredit global warming. Furthermore, since I cited her, I was clearly a climate denialist too and not worthy to comment on science.

My surprise at this was that they ignored the actual data that I (through Crockford) had presented, and based their conclusion on *ad hominem* guilt by association, both of myself in citing a particular scientist, and of that scientist for her position on a separate scientific matter (climate change), accompanied by an unsubstantiated insinuation that she was financially corrupt. This is not how I was trained to assess scientific evidence, and it suggests that even scientists have become susceptible to propaganda. But whose propaganda?

⁴ Astonishingly, in November, 2019 another Attenborough documentary has drone-footage of the same event to *show* polar bears driving the walrus off the cliff, a direct contradiction both of the Netflix documentary and the later denials. Crockford, Susan, “Polar bears precipitated Netflix walrus deaths, new Attenborough TV special shows,” *Polar bear Science*, 04/05/2019. <https://polarbearscience.com/2019/11/04/polar-bears-precipitated-netflix-walrus-deaths-new-attenborough-tv-special-shows/>.

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Only marginally interested in climate change beforehand, since it seemed irrelevant to my current work on Cultural Marxism and so on, I was annoyed enough to start looking both at the science of climate change, and the social and political world surrounding it.

Not to go into too much detail here, the biggest *scientific* issue soon became clear: pessimistic climate projections are being made using computer models that not only have failed to be properly validated against the real world, but have proven to be overestimating temperatures over several decades, thus casting doubt on their theoretical assumptions.

Actual temperature trends are lower than *all* the many models, being closest (probably coincidentally) to the outlying Russian model.⁵ An old adage goes, “All models are wrong, but some are useful.”⁶ They are all highly simplified simulations of highly complex realities, and should generally be tested against the real world, and rejected if they fail to match new data.

And yet rather than concluding from failed predictions that the common theory behind all these models, that carbon dioxide levels are leading warming trends, is wrong, the whole gamut of faulty models is still retained amid ever more strident claims that things are worse than was thought. The multiple models are, in fact, retained for purely political reasons—each is the product of a particular UN member state, all needing to be kept on board the train.

Indeed the data itself has been retrospectively adjusted on a number of questionable and often *ad hoc* grounds (but is still erroneously deemed “data” rather than “extrapolation”), invariably in favour of more and more warming now, and colder temperatures in the past than those

⁵ Spencer, 2019.

⁶ Statistician George Box actually said this in various ways. Closest to the common abbreviation is: “The most that can be expected from any model is that it can supply a useful approximation to reality: All models are wrong; some models are useful”. Box, 2005. 440. Fellow statistician William Briggs points out that philosophically this is not strictly true, but the general point remains “useful”.

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actually measured. Published graphs routinely use cherry-picked dates which obscure previous hotter periods, and so on. The only plausible reason for this is to generate needless fear. But why?

The UN climate change body, the IPCC, was actually set up not to research the climate—there is little government funding for that general but important field—but to demonstrate the progress of *assumed* anthropogenic warming to guide political policies: its conclusions are included in its very mandate. Funding will not be given for research likely to challenge that paradigm. Furthermore its research papers are subject to editing—and substantial alteration—by the UN-appointed politicians who actually produce the final policy reports. Some scientists have resigned because of this interference. IPCC final reports have sometimes excluded unfavourable scientific papers in favour of polemical claims from interest groups, press reports or even travel brochures. Needless to say I was surprised, as someone holding science degrees, that science would be practised this way, especially at an international level.

Apart from the official IPCC forecasts, over the last forty years leading scientific proponents of climate change have made quite firm public predictions: that the polar ice would melt by the new millennium, that Manhattan's West Side would be underwater by 2008, or that millions would be dying from drought by now. In 1988 the Maldives, only a maximum of 2 metres above sea-level, were predicted to have disappeared entirely by 2018, and their water supply lost a couple of decades ago. But although headlines even in the week of writing say that world sea-level rise is far *worse* than predicted, water's edge hotels in the Maldives built well before 1988 are still open for business, and billions are being invested in erecting more. Three new airports have been opened recently. Sea level rise *cannot* be worse than predicted if it was predicted that the Maldives would be flooded by last year.

Not a single one of these apocalyptic predictions has come true. Not one. "This is all wrong," to quote climate alarm's child star Greta Thunberg—but it is not obviously wrong because of sea level rise.

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The wonder is less that these predictions have failed, than that those who made them are still hailed as visionaries as if they had succeeded. In 1970 the celebrated ecologist Paul Ehrlich predicted confidently that pollution would make the oceans dead within a decade, that US water rationing would come by 1974, and food rationing by 1980. At that time he was predicting global cooling and a new ice-age, before shifting his auguries to the direct opposite, global warming. Yet he is still lauded as a prophet. People seem to be able to look out on a world that is still very much as it always was, and yet see a wasteland if they squint—whilst forgetting that the originally predicted wasteland was quite a different, colder, one. It seems unjust that televangelists are mocked for their false prophecies of the end of the world, whilst Ehrlich has been made a Fellow of the Royal Society for the same thing.

Greta Thunberg urges us (and the political leaders who applaud her) to listen to the scientists, but when I did so by looking behind the headlines, I discovered that the claimed “97% consensus” of scientists affirming climate disaster did not exist. There was a significant body of them not only disagreeing, but appalled at the politicisation of climate science, and of environmentalism generally. Some had worked on programming IPCC climate models and some had contributed papers to the IPCC climate change reports. All were vilified, and found publication of their work to be blocked. In some cases they lost their jobs. It all seemed to me strangely similar to the situation over gender.

At the end of September 2019, five hundred of these dissidents⁷ sent an open letter to the same United Nations conference at which Thunberg was apportioning blame for her lost childhood, denying the existence of a serious climate problem and presenting supporting evidence. Although the group included six expert reviewers of papers from the IPCC, their report was not even mentioned in the mainstream press,⁸ unlike a less rigorously vetted petition of 12,000 respondents to a

⁷ ECD, 2019.

⁸ An earlier sceptical US effort, the “Petition Project,” has gained over 31,000 signatures of scientists and science graduates. Petition project, 2008.

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website collecting names on the opposite side of the argument, published in November 2019.⁹

Why should this matter to Christians, of whom many are active in climate protest? Against this background of politics and muddy science, I soon became intrigued that the same kind of Post-Marxist progressives who were pushing intersectionality also seemed to be militantly advocating climate alarm (and, prior to that, panic over other apocalyptic events like overpopulation, dead oceans from pollution, global cooling, nuclear irradiation, acid rain, and the hole in the ozone layer). Is this coincidental?

This was about the same time that *Extinction Rebellion* came to prominence, and the radical left political links of its PR-trained organizers, uncovered by a few diligent researchers, contradicted its “grassroots-up” billing (showing it to be in reality what the PR industry terms an “AstroTurf” organisation¹⁰). Indeed, some ordinary *ER* participants reported how the “people’s assemblies” used to plan its London assembly at that time were, in fact, highly manipulated in a way very reminiscent of the Marxist-controlled student sit-ins I had once known at university. This phenomenon was well-attested enough to be echoed by Richard Walton, a former Metropolitan Police counter-terror Commander, and covered in the mainstream press.¹¹

Since this must surely have been known to the Government too, how was it that politicians of all parties fell over themselves to approve the group’s demands, and how was it that the highly publicised screening of another major propaganda documentary, the BBC’s *Climate Change: The Facts*, just happened to coincide with their mass-protest?

⁹ Like the first edition of the “Petition Project” this suffers from containing a few totally fictitious names, and a considerable number of musicians, counsellors and other non-scientists. The real point is that scientific truth is not a numbers game, but that claims that scientists all agree are *never* true, and certainly not on this issue. It is unscientific, and highly misleading to the public, to silence dissent and feign consensus.

¹⁰ Davies, 2009. 168.

¹¹ Read, 2019.

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Greta Thunberg herself is evidence that it is not coincidental, for although her plea is to listen to the scientists, her own agenda faithfully echoes that of Cultural Marxism:

After all, the climate crisis is not just about the environment. It is a crisis of human rights, of justice, and of political will. Colonial, racist, and patriarchal systems of oppression have created and fueled it. We need to dismantle them all. Our political leaders can no longer shirk their responsibilities.¹²

There is enough going on here to require more explanation than oil-company backhanders to climate sceptics, and to concern the Christian concerned about deception in society, even at the risk of appearing “unworthy of a democratic society” oneself.

I suggest that it is possible that Marxism, having ultimately failed to persuade the world by a false narrative of class conflict that violent proletarian revolution would fulfil its agenda (as Gramsci rightly concluded), and having failed to win sufficient support even after its “long march through the institutions,” might seek to achieve the same aims by instilling the institutions—and the people themselves—with panic about the imminent end of the world¹³.

The new religion

Not surprisingly, a number of people have tried to make sense of these trends, ranging from political conservatives like the late Christopher Brooker to the dyed-in-the-wool socialist meteorologist Piers Corbyn (brother of the former Labour leader). Although they place different emphases on the various roles of governments Eastern and Western, NGOs like *Greenpeace* and *WWF* that have become politically

¹² Thunberg G., Neubauer L., & Valenzuela A. “Why We Strike Again,” 29/11/2019. <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/climate-strikes-un-conference-madrid-by-greta-thunberg-et-al-2019-11>.

¹³ Hying a viral pandemic might work, too!

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weaponised by Cultural Marxists,¹⁴ or global corporations and financial oligarchs, one consistent conclusion emerges.

This is that environmental catastrophism has more to do with changing the political world order than it has with scientific issues of climate change, pollution and so on. All the big players seem to share a conviction, from a whole variety of motives, that the political, economic and social state of the world is all wrong, and needs to be replaced with an entirely new one. This is conceived, as in classical Cultural Marxism, in rather utopian terms that are thought to justify the astronomical cost of such change in terms of both money and human well-being.

Climate change proponents actually admit these intentions themselves. Four quotations from disparate sources might help establish this. Many more could be provided.

- “The common enemy of humanity is man. In searching for a new enemy to unite us, we came up with the idea that pollution, the threat of global warming, water shortages, famine and the like would fit the bill. All these dangers are caused by human intervention, and it is only through changed attitudes and behavior that they can be overcome. The real enemy then, is humanity itself.”

*Alexander King, Co-founder of Club of Rome, explaining their influential 1972 “Limits to Growth” report forecasting the collapse of world resources, 1991.*¹⁵

- “One has to free oneself from the illusion that international climate policy is environmental policy. This has almost nothing to do with environmental policy anymore, with problems such as deforestation or the ozone hole.”

¹⁴ The experience of *Greenpeace* co-founder Patrick Moore is revealing. See his book Moore, 2010.

¹⁵ King, 1991, 75.

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*Ottman Edenheimer, co-chair of IPCC Working Group III, and lead author of the IPCC Fourth Assessment Report 2007, 2010.*¹⁶

- “This is probably the most difficult task we have ever given ourselves, which is to intentionally transform the economic developmental model, for the first time in human history.”

*Christiana Figueres, executive secretary, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, February 3, 2015.*¹⁷

- “The interesting thing about the Green New Deal is it wasn’t originally a climate thing at all. Do you guys think of it as a climate thing? Because we really think of it as a how-do-you-change-the-entire-economy thing.”

*Saikat Chakrabarti, chief of staff to Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, 2019.*¹⁸

Now, the justification for such a fundamental revolution in the world order—involving the deliberate reversal of economic growth in the West, and globally-managed constraints on human behaviour and, presumably, beliefs—is predicated on the assumption that the dire *political* and *economic* forecasts lying behind their dire *physical* forecasts are correct (unlike, so far, the *actual* physical results, such as the absence of the drowning of whole nations and the exhaustion of fossil fuels or food by 1980). Neither is there any guarantee that the new order will actually work as well as the one humans have been tinkering with, under God’s providence,¹⁹ for several millennia. The plan, like classical Marxism, is thoroughly utopian.

The experience of such ideologies in the last century has been that the *real* end has been neither the revolution itself, nor the hope of a better

¹⁶ Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 2010.

¹⁷ Darwall, 2019. 13.

¹⁸ Montgomery, 2019.

¹⁹ Daniel 4:17; Romans 13:1.

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world, but the naked exercise of power, because once power is gained, in spiritual terms Satan no longer needs to disguise his motives. Once again, George Orwell nailed it:

Power is not a means; it is an end. One does not establish a dictatorship in order to safeguard a revolution; one makes the revolution in order to establish the dictatorship.²⁰

But what is indisputably the case is that nobody has consulted the world's peoples about their *willingness* to transition to such a global centralized state. Instead, they are drip-fed propaganda to generate such terror about the future that they will, it is hoped, acquiesce in the impositions of government, from escalating fuel prices to the increasingly mooted suspension of democracy to "save the planet." And in the COVID panic, digital tracking of entire populations.

There have already been moral consequences from this for the human population. Fuel poverty is becoming a significant issue for many of the poorer people in Western nations,²¹ and is one of the factors behind the Yellow Vest protests in France. The true costs of renewable energy *to people* are simply not discussed much, though estimated costs like 49 trillion dollars over ten years for America's "Green New Deal" alone are not implausible,²² which would be economically catastrophic for most families. An impoverished population leads to a collapsed economy, and perhaps a failed state. This should be of concern to Christians.

But that is taking the Green New Deal to be a viable plan for a carbon-free world. Another analysis, by environmental scientist Roger Pielke, Jr.,²³ demonstrates that in order to make the world carbon-neutral by 2050, starting from now, we would in fact require either one new nuclear plant (*anathema* to environmentalists) or 1,500 new wind tur-

²⁰ Orwell, 1954. 211.

²¹ Darwall, 2018.

²² O'Neil, 2019.

²³ Pielke, 2019.

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bines *each and every day*. It is an impossible ambition, but if it were achieved, the world's economy and resources would be in ruins.

In developing countries, the West's discouragement of the exploitation of their fossil fuel reserves has one sure effect: that of hindering development. This is presumably part of the plan, if the plan began by anticipating limits to world growth. The poor also die in these nations because lack of electricity necessitates cooking over open fires indoors, leading to respiratory diseases, and our banning of plastic straws is unlikely to help them much. Surely this is a relevant concern for the churches?

“Let them eat solar power!” The well-heeled Marie-Antoinettes of the West say. Well, perhaps, though not at night or in the rainy season: there are hospitals in Africa that have to choose between using their meagre solar power for lights, or for cooling the drugs and vaccines in the fridge. But in any case, solar power renders them, once more, dependent on outside high technology rather than the plenteous indigenous sources of energy, which conditions of aid and trade prevent them harnessing.

I suppose that if countries like China and India continue to ignore UN recommendations on renewable energy, whilst Western governments impose draconian policies on their own populations, then at least *some* of the world's economies will grow, at the expense of severe poverty in both the developed world and the poorest nations²⁴. Such outcomes can only be imposed by force from above, because no sane democratic people votes for its own decline. Considerations like this are, in the public discussion, virtually unheard. They are swamped by sheer terror, especially amongst the indoctrinated young, over ever-escalating claims of our imminent doom.

²⁴ The *annual* increase in these countries' fossil fuel use is larger than the entire UK energy use, according to figures release in June 2020. Even if we abolished energy and sank beneath the waves, it would not dent rising carbon emissions.

A Climate of Fear

An increasing number of sceptical commentators are noticing how much the whole situation now resembles an apocalyptic religion, or perhaps better an apocalyptic *cult*, since the fear of the end is engendered by mind control from above rather than by rational beliefs, and is maintained by the silencing of all dissent.

In the context of this book, it is interesting that the phenomenon I have been seeking to connect with climate alarm—the whole Cultural Marxist social agenda culminating in the victim culture of “intersectionality”—has *also* been likened to a religion. In fact, one might usefully view the two strands as two poles of one new world religion.

Apocalyptic environmentalism is this religion’s cosmic and eschatological wing. Mankind, though industrialisation, has created a fallen world which is now doomed to end unless the race redeems itself by repenting of all that it has done to improve its physical well-being in the past. We may be permitted to live on, but only provided we do so in perpetual ashes and sackcloth.

This wing has its prophets of doom—the climatologists—and its saints and messiahs making documentaries and lambasting governments. It has its mass pilgrimages to avert the end somehow, complete with those sinister looking processions of red-robed and white-faced priests. It even has the sale of indulgences, in the form of buying carbon credits to justify offending behaviours like air travel. And instead of believers abandoning their work to gather on the appointed mountaintops, it has schoolchildren walking out of school to join the Crusade.²⁵ We await, for the time being, “signs following.”

The personal and ethical wing of the new religion is the new moral code dealt with in the previous chapters. It has its own version of conversion (as one suddenly becomes “woke” about either one’s own oppression, or confesses one’s “problematic” whiteness or maleness). It

²⁵ The traditional “Children’s Crusade” ended in slavery for many of the children. The difference from today seems to be that the older story is mainly legendary, whereas ours is all too real. “Children’s Crusade,” *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Children%27s_Crusade.

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has its dietary restrictions in demanding veganism. It has its own intersectional moral system, incoherent though that is. Like Christianity, it demands confession of past misdeeds, but unlike Christianity, there is no forgiveness, because the sin is who you are, not what you do. And so a *Facebook* comment made decades ago at university can be used to cancel someone twenty years later, or a bad joke used to end the career of a Nobel Prize winner.²⁶ Its high-priests are the Postmodern academics who interpret the otherwise impenetrable scriptures of Foucault or Derrida, and its scribes, increasingly, are the judges.

This resemblance to a new religion ought, surely, to be a matter of some note to Christians. Not a few writers, like Douglas Murray, attribute its rise to the vacuum left by the loss of “grand narratives,” especially Christianity, over the last few decades.²⁷ There is much to be said for that, for more than one wise man has said that when men stop believing in God, they will believe in anything.

But it should also draw our attention because, as was discussed earlier in this book, the nature of the final delusion of antichrist will be primarily religious in nature. If we fail to notice a false religion, or worse still if we buy into its doctrines, then we are in great spiritual danger.

In linking this chapter to the next, I want to introduce one more theme about deception, in connection with the specific areas I have been examining. In the Revelation of John, the final assault of Satan against the saints is actually threefold in character. Satan’s first agent is “the beast who comes out of the sea,”²⁸ and the various descriptions of this beast suggest that he represents political powers.

A second beast comes out of the earth,²⁹ and his activities show he is none other than the false prophet named, and punished with the first

²⁶ McKie, 2015.

²⁷ Murray, 2019, 1.

²⁸ Revelation 13:1–10.

²⁹ Revelation 13:11–18.

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beast, in chapter 19.³⁰ And so we see religion and political power combined against Christ's kingdom.

Revelation chapters 17 and 18 deal at length with the fate of another character, the "great prostitute" whose mysterious name is "Babylon." It would seem from the context that in some way she particularly represents the merchants of the earth—the commercial world, apparently riding on (profiting from) the political "beast" on which she rides, and yet actually hated by it and finally to be destroyed by it.³¹

In our look at the instruments of our present confusion, I have suggested in this chapter that there is a strong religious dimension. There has also been abundant evidence that political power is very much tied up with it, whether that be national governments or the supranational "umbrella" organisations like the European Union or the United Nations, whose stated purposes include a new global order³².

Can we complete our "unholy trinity" by finding a role for commercial interests in conjunction with these other elements? How could big business be associated with forces which, to all appearances, are more connected to Communism and Anti-Capitalism than they are to filthy lucre?

³⁰ Revelation 19:19–21.

³¹ Revelation 17:15–18

³² Check out the scope and details of the UN's *Agenda 21* and *Agenda 2030*.

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Unlikely bedfellows

IT ACTUALLY COSTS A GREAT deal of money to change a system of government, even when the aim is to bring down the rich or privileged. Once upon a time this was a conceptually simple matter. The opposing armies of the English Civil War were largely financed by sympathetic wealthy families and institutions (such as the university colleges) melting down their “plate” for the cause.

The American War of Independence was, likewise, mainly funded by the self-sacrifice of revolutionary farmers and tradesmen, but about 6% came from the treasury of the French Government of Louis XVI, who of course had his own political reasons for wanting to damage its rival colonial power, Britain. Between 1778 and 1783, six huge French loans were negotiated by Benjamin Franklin and Silas Deane. In fact, the depletion of France’s coffers in their support of the colonists was one of the main triggers of their own revolution as the home economy suffered. Investors sometimes get things badly wrong.

By the time of the Russian Revolution, we naturally assume that it was all about the overthrow by force of the wealthy by the impoverished workers. But in fact, vast amounts of capitalist money were involved in the Bolshevik revolution, though the paper trail to the origin of the money remains shadowy even now. That is partly because it was another investment which, both politically and economically, proved in the end a tragic failure, rather than something to boast about.

There were wealthy donors in Russia itself, paradoxically amongst the greatest capitalists. One such was Savva Morosov, a textiles magnate who, although he strove improve his workers’ conditions and pay, was nevertheless the same kind of mill-owner stereotypically condemned for the Victorian industrial horrors of Britain, from which country most of his machinery and some of his staff came. He and his wife

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organised lavish balls of unparalleled luxury and wealth, though they were exclusively for the élite rather than for ordinary workers, of course.¹ But he also funded the Bolsheviks up to his death by gunshot in Cannes in 1905.

Other capitalist donors lived abroad, and had motives apart from pure socialism. In the 1910s, the American Red Cross had been essentially bought out by donations of New York “philanthropists,” most prominently banker J. P. Morgan. Accordingly, when a Red Cross mission was sent to Russia after the Revolution in 1917, ostensibly to provide relief, it was funded and led by William Boyce Thompson of the Federal Reserve Bank, and consisted mainly of financial and commercial people. The few medics left after a couple of weeks, realizing that no useful work would be done. And in Romania, where a *real* Red Cross mission was dealing with a wartime humanitarian crisis, thousands died because the Petrograd mission simply ignored its pleas for support. However, a great deal of money was channelled to the Bolsheviks for agitation across Europe, resulting in the Spartacist Revolt in Germany,² to which the rise of Hitler’s National Socialism was, in part, a reaction.

It was also through Wall Street financiers that the German government, eager to lose an enemy on its eastern front, provided the otherwise impoverished Leon Trotsky with \$10,000 (around \$216,000 today) when he returned to Moscow from New York after the fall of the Tsar in 1917. It would be used to help fund the ousting of the more democratic Provisional Government by the minority Bolsheviks.³

American and British tycoons were linked to the Bolsheviks both before and after the revolution. Their motives were in most cases purely mercenary, for whether or not there is a profit in fomenting revolution, there are certainly good pickings to be made afterwards. The record suggests that in the first Soviet Five Year Plan (1928-32) every single

¹ “Savva Morozov,” *Wikipedia*.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Savva_Morozov.

² Sutton, 2011, 71–88.

³ Sutton, 2011, 21-37.

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one of the new industrial efforts was funded by, and therefore profited, Western companies. As John D. Rockefeller said:

The way to make money is to buy when blood is running in the streets.⁴

Rockefeller himself certainly made a lot of money through Communism, and is an interesting example, because his motives are so complex. He had become incomprehensibly rich through oil, and also through the utterly ruthless elimination of his rivals. His dictum was:

Competition is a sin.⁵

Tsar Nicholas owned the Russian oil field interests in which Rockefeller (together with Royal Dutch Oil, now Shell) held stock, and so stood in his way commercially. Once again, exactly how he spent his money in furtherance of his Russian interests is now opaque, and certainly deliberately obscured. But direct support for the revolution, as well as documented involvement in Russian affairs afterwards, would make sense to a man who, despite his lauding of Protestant values, said:

Giving should be entered into in just the same way as investing. Giving is investing.⁶

What was true for him was also true for international bankers like J. P. Morgan. Tsar Nicholas had long been an opponent of the establishment of a foreign-owned central bank in Russia. It would serve their interests if he was no longer there, provided his successor could be manipulated in their favour.

These names are merely examples. Many others can be found in histories like the meticulously documented work of Antony Sutton. What is interesting, and perhaps familiar from today's world, is how virtually

⁴ "John D. Rockefeller Quotes." *BrainyQuote*.
<https://www.brainyquote.com/authors/john-d-rockefeller-quotes>.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

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all of these men are commonly described both as “billionaires” (or the equivalent) and “philanthropists.” Perhaps because they were so unimaginably rich, they looked, or pretended to look, beyond the bottom line to how they could use their wealth to change the world.

As the above examples show, this might be because of political or personal ideology, or in order to gain even more power and wealth, or a comfortable mixture of the two. It is certainly the case that, whatever their motives, every one of them was, to quote Tom Lehrer’s cynical take on drug-dealers, “*Doing well by doing good.*”⁷ If your wealth is effectively infinite, and your social circle consists entirely of those similarly endowed with wealth and power—the businessmen, bankers, kings and presidents—then it is a small step from realizing that your wealth can change the world, to deciding both *that* it should actually do so, and *how* it will, in accordance with the ideas and aspirations of your own small élite. You will give little consideration to how the rest of the world might feel about it, or even to the solidity of your grounds for thinking that it will work out as planned. Bolshevism did not, after all.

The Rockefeller Foundation is one classic case of a man deciding that his vision for the world must be the one to prevail, be that in promoting (and purchasing) particular models of education, health and science at home, or of eugenics abroad; and, of course, in forging monopolies across the whole world. The richest men in the world are nearly always rich because they put their own interests first, so it is almost inevitable that they will also put their ideas, and themselves, first in *changing* the world—with every confidence that they will succeed in that ambition as well as they have in business.

This provides an understanding of why an apparently incompatible comradeship should exist between the Capitalist—or more accurately, the Global Corporatist, for the mere capitalist who owns a factory or a chain of shops is a completely different beast from the oligarch—and the Communist revolutionary. Both have internationalism, tight con-

⁷ Lehrer, Tom. *The Old Dope Peddler*.

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control of markets, and elimination of competitors at the centre of their vision. As we have seen, each needs the other. So H. G. Wells, writing after his visit to Russia and his meeting with Lenin in 1920, wrote:

Big business is by no means antipathetic to Communism. The larger big business grows the more it approximates to Collectivism. It is the upper road of the few instead of the lower road of the masses to Collectivism.⁸

Antony Sutton argues just how dependent the whole Soviet system remained on investment, both overt and clandestine, from big Western corporations throughout its history. The Soviets had shot all their own innovators, and the system itself stifled the arrival of new ones.

In our own time it is not controversial that China has only stayed a viable Communist State by its incorporation of capitalism. That has involved massive investment of Western money, so that the global corporations' well-being has become dependent on the survival of the Chinese Communist system. Inevitably, it has led to uneasy compromises of much-vaunted democratic values, which came to public prominence through the COVID-19 pandemic.

One might single out Google, whose acceptance of political censorship in its Chinese operations is at direct odds with its founding principle of open access to information.⁹ Likewise, the enthusiasm of Theresa May and the EU (the latter very much an industrially-orientated technocracy) for the Chinese firm Huawei's involvement in the new 5G network, despite obvious security risks, invites questions about their priorities. If the motive is political, how could the politics avoid the compromising corporate internationalism that was at work back in 1917?¹⁰

⁸ Wells, 2016.

⁹ That principle is being progressively diluted by Google in the West, rather than strengthened in the East, by Google. See Murray, 2019. 110–17.

¹⁰ There is evidence that Trotsky's return to Moscow was facilitated by the personal involvement of President Woodrow Wilson, a politically progressive internationalist dependent on the oligarchs.

Why would democratic values matter to the international business leader who, whether in London, Washington or Beijing, stays in the best hotels, eats at the best restaurants, and discusses matters with political leaders and home-grown oligarchs in the best houses or on the best golf courses? The only big difference to them between China and the West is that the Communist state has better regimented masses of consumers.

Evil oil

Anti-capitalists in general, and those into environmentalism in particular, see the oil companies as the villains behind all the world's evils, past, present and future. The day of writing this saw the Royal Shakespeare Company withdraw, under environmentalist pressure, from a sponsorship agreement with BP, and at the same time the National Theatre has withdrawn from one with Shell. I discussed in the last chapter how “Big Oil funding” has become the accusation used to dismiss any contrary opinion to the prevailing narrative on climate change.

But this is a smokescreen encouraged, not least, by the oil companies themselves, as well as the others making real money today. The archetypal “evil monopolist” Rockefeller is in people's minds when they think of oil interests and how they have fooled all of us innocent people into depending on fossil fuel for our lifestyle, like large-scale crack dealers. *Exxon-Mobil* is singled out by campaigning NGOs as “knowing about global warming” forty years ago, although the actual evidence is that they had access to the same models that everybody else had, and got their projections equally wrong.¹¹

This is all a distraction from considering what the world will be like if fossil fuels really are outlawed, whilst environmentalists decry hydroelectric energy, and nuclear power is (for reasons dating back to the

¹¹ This has been shown in several court cases. More intriguingly, Piers Corbyn was told by Exxon-Mobil's retiring CEO in 2004 that they were also aware that the models are based on the wrong theory: see Corbyn, 2018. Their *not* believing the world will end makes more sense of their business model.

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beginning of the environmental movement as a branch of the anti-war movement in Germany) considered *anathema*.¹² If abundant energy is no longer available it will not simply mean that we have fewer i-Phones and private vehicles, but that more of us will have to be, as we were before the industrial age, domestic servants to the rich. Washing machines, dishwashers, lawnmowers and vacuum cleaners are all products of cheap power: they replaced human muscle power. It has been rightly said that the main reason for the abolition of slavery was coal.

Yet “Oil = Bad” also ignores the realities of corporate power, which are all about money, not oil. Rockefeller would have had no emotional attachment to oil, had it stopped delivering the bottom line. The Rockefeller family was able to divest from oil in recent years because they could make a nice profit from other things (including, as it turns out, the fund-management of Chinese fossil fuel interests¹³) *and* signal their environmental virtue at the same time. “Divesting from oil” simply means profiting by selling it to somebody else to exploit: they could have shut the wells down, but did not.

The oil companies have enough funds, if they choose, to sense the current and become leaders in ostensibly green technologies. And they *have* so chosen, because they have no need to fight against the tide when they can easily swim with it for a profit. For example, in 2007 the former chief science advisor to Tony Blair, Sir David King, announced the formation of *The Energy Technologies Institute*, with a massive £1 billion budget:

...to “accelerate the development, demonstration and eventual commercial deployment of a focused portfolio of energy technologies, which will increase energy efficiency, reduce green-

¹² Darwall, 2019. 98-9.

¹³ Shepstone, 2016.

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house gas emissions and help achieve energy and climate change goals.”¹⁴

The main investors were *Shell-BP*, power companies *EDR* and *E-on*, and fuel-dependant manufacturers *Caterpillar* and *Rolls-Royce*. Half its current board is currently made up of representatives of these corporations. Like Rockefeller of old, one can either admire them for doing their bit—or wonder if they are just getting their nose to the new trough opportunely. Either way they remain in control of us.

The motives of commercial corporations are not pure. The love of money, as Christians have always known, is a root of all kinds of evil.¹⁵ There is a long tradition of big corporations telling big lies. In 1922 J. P. Morgan’s firm *Guaranty Trust* was simultaneously opening up illicit trade with Soviet Russia, *and* forming an organisation called *United Americans* to spread fear of imminent Soviet invasion, riots and mass starvation.¹⁶ It was rather like making money from oil whilst promoting *Extinction Rebellion*—of which there are some similar suspicions too.

Just last month, my attention was drawn to an article on electric car production in a magazine for US mechanics.¹⁷ It questions why, since studies have shown electric cars to have at best marginal advantages over conventional vehicles in their lifetime carbon dioxide generation, the motor industry has been so ready to produce and promote them. It would be nice simply to think they have seen the green light, but the article describes how, with a saturated world market, vehicle manufacture was stagnating, threatening the collapse of producers. The demonization of petrol engines, and liaison with governments to penalize their use, enables companies not only to profit from the replacement of the world’s entire vehicle fleet, but from producing a whole new infrastructure of charging points, battery manufacture and so on.

¹⁴ “Energy Technologies Institute.” *Wikipedia*.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Energy_Technologies_Institute.

¹⁵ 1 Timothy 6:10.

¹⁶ Sutton, 2016. 163-4.

¹⁷ Malvo, 2018.

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One might charitably consider that such a wise collaboration between governments and manufacturers is to maintain economic growth. Or one might consider it a cynical way to get more money out of consumers, already burdened with escalating fuel prices, to enrich both governments and corporations.

A classic case of the ambiguity of oil interests in environmentalism is that of Maurice Strong, a Canadian oil-man and protégé of the Rockefellers, who retained his massive oil interests even as he spearheaded environmentalism at the United Nations. His initiative founded the *IPCC*, and even set its terms of reference.

He was never far from controversy over his personal and business affairs, as late as 2005 being implicated in the UN's "Oil for Food" scandal, when he removed himself from the spotlight to live in Beijing. This passage on his activities is instructive on how proposed changes to the world order might actually work out:

Some wonder why an "oilman" would be chosen to take on such coveted and respected environmental positions. One of Strong's companies, Desarrollos Ecologicos (Ecological Development), built a \$35 million luxury hotel within the Gandoca-Manzillo Wildlife Refuge where development is restricted and must be approved by the Kekoldi Indian Association, which it was not. "He (Strong) is supporting Indians and conservation around the world and here he's doing the complete opposite," lamented Demetrio Myorga, President of the Kekoldi Indian Association.¹⁸

Personal control over large areas of pristine land and their populations, at public expense, would be envied by English aristocrats a couple of centuries ago. Perhaps this is the shape the new world order would settle in. It's hard to see anything that would stop it.

¹⁸ "Maurice Strong." *Wikipedia*, https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maurice_Strong.

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I have focused on “Big Oil” only because this is the Aunt Sally put up for abuse by the progressive environment movement, yet it is investing in, and profiting from, the great gains to be made from the recasting of the world’s economy. But Big Oil is no more villainous than any other globalist corporations, for none of them are threatened by the changes at all, despite the “anti-capitalism” agenda. They are well able to cover their tracks and divert criticism elsewhere.

Between old players and start-up corporations, the sums involved in the green project are so astronomical that we are rapidly becoming as economically dependent on it as we ever were on oil, and will be even if the science and the economics should prove mistaken. Even back in 2009, Bjorn Lomborg described the massive escalation of this sector of business.¹⁹ In 2019 physicist and engineer Dr Paul Rossiter’s research showed, from publicly available figures alone, that annually:

...the capitalisation of the renewable energy industry is over \$1 trillion; the funding of the NGOs being used as alarmist publicity and lobbying agencies exceeds \$2 billion; and the amount of government research funding committed to the issue exceeds \$1 billion.²⁰

Anti-capitalism threatens not the monopolies, but the small guys, the “little platoons” in Edmund Burke’s phrase, looking to generate new ideas, an honest living, or jobs. These small, independent ventures, it will be noted, include churches exercising their freedom to worship and live as they perceive God to direct in Scripture.

Just as it was Rockefeller’s small-scale rivals that posed the greatest threat to his monopoly, so in Communist countries it was the same “little platoons” that, by being independent, most threatened the state. Whether they are company-owners, kulaks or groups of Christian believers, the first targets of centralized states are the “little platoons.”

¹⁹ Lomborg, 2009.

²⁰ Rossiter, 2019. See also the detailed account of corrupt collaboration between corporations, politicians and environmental NGOs such as Greenpeace in Shellenberger 2020.

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Theodore Dalrymple points out how, in Britain, this process of centralization has operated over many years even with regard to charities:

The destruction of the little platoons has been very thorough: most large “charities” in Britain are now dependent on government rather than on private funding, and hence are in effect departments of state.²¹

Our churches, of course, though not directly funded by government, are still subject to ever-tighter charity law, which therefore finally decides whether their charitable aims are “worthy of respect in a democratic society.” The day might soon come when a choice has to be made between the benefits of charitable status, and the loss of freedom to proclaim the Truth.

The bureaucrats of a global society who direct its affairs need have no worries about loss of *their* freedoms, and neither do the big commercial players. Maurice Strong did not have to consider Kekoldi Indians when he built a hotel in a Costa Rican nature reserve in which *their* activities were constrained by *his* rules. Hear Antony Sutton:

The open-minded reader should bear two clues in mind: monopoly capitalists are the bitter enemies of laissez-faire entrepreneurs; and, given the weaknesses of socialist central planning, the totalitarian socialist state is a perfect captive market for monopoly capitalists.²²

This is inevitably how the new utopia would work in practice, a conclusion not lost on Aldous Huxley when he wrote *Brave New World*. It is only implausible because it has hitherto seemed unthinkable.

Woke philanthropists

So far in this chapter I have used as my examples “old money” from realms like textiles, banking and oil. But we are now in a world where the richest individuals have gained similar wealth from Silicon Valley

²¹ Dalrymple, 2017.

²² Sutton, 2011. 17.

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projects and convoluted financial schemes like hedge funds. This has bred a new generation of eye-wateringly rich people, who like their forbears are termed “philanthropists,” who similarly mix with the movers and shakers of the world, and who want to use their money to “make it a better place”—according, as with the Rockefellers and de Rothschilds, to their own lights.

Ideologically, they are largely products of the swinging sixties—and so indirectly of the changes that began with the student protests of 1968 which I have already discussed.²³ The public image of the internet billionaires is more of hippies-made-good than of industrial aristocrats throwing glitzy parties for Moscow society. Yet they move in the same elevated circles, have the same kind of exclusive parties, and the same kind of conferences about how to improve the world, often with representatives of the older power-structures.

We hear about the informality of the workplace in setups like Facebook or Google. But if we look a little deeper, we also get to hear about an ideological monoculture from which those with the wrong ideas are screened out in a way that was never quite the case with Standard Oil or the de Rothschilds. As the internet has matured, we have heard more and more about the censorship of ideas on social media, and about the misuse of data in order, ultimately, to control both what we buy, what we say—and what we think.

George Soros, for example, made his fortune by currency speculation, though the recession and housing crisis his financial coup helped cause in the 1990s were less beneficial to ordinary people in Britain²⁴ and elsewhere than to him. Since then, his money turns up behind pretty well every shady “progressive” cause. As always, the question unanswered, and unanswerable, is what qualifies rich men to stand behind the scenes determining the future of the world.

²³ From the very start the changes were not just about academia: I had one lecturer in social psychology who, in all seriousness, divided the history of the world into “pre- and post-Woodstock.”

²⁴ Fortunately the economic changes Britain was forced to make on leaving the ERM boosted the economy in the longer term.

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It is tempting, at this point, to quote the dictum of Lord Acton about absolute power corrupting absolutely. But a more subtle and older source speaks more directly to what I have been discussing in the last few chapters. A Frenchman, Alphonse Marie Louis de Prat de Lamartine, in an essay published in English in 1848, says this:

It is not only the slave or serf who is ameliorated in becoming free... the master himself did not gain less in every point of view... for absolute power corrupts the best natures.²⁵

The constraint on freedom of thought and speech on moral matters, as in identity politics, and on global matters, as in environmentalism, is not only abusive to those with other views, including Christians seeking to live out the true freedom of God's kingdom taught in the Bible. It also places those applying the constraints into bondage.

We see that very clearly in the increasing societal madness and distress caused by "woke" culture, and we may infer it from the very existence of people so powerful that, it seems, they have no reason to consult the rest of the human race as they decide to alter the world's future course.

Returning to the Scriptural theme of "the great deception," we may remind ourselves that Satan's strategy in the garden was to put the human race into bondage by offering them unlimited freedom. That snare remains as dangerous for both rich and poor today.

In the next section I will look at how Christians might respond to it.

²⁵ Lamartine, 1848.

Section 3:

The Pillar and Rampart of the Truth

Section 3 Introduction

THIS BOOK BEGAN WITH the realization that the confusion and deception that I, amongst many others, had been seeing in our culture, might soon impact my own church very directly. In theory I was always aware that this was so; like many other churches we had seen Christians in this country losing jobs and being brought before courts for their faith. As a church we were also more aware than ever of the overt persecution facing many Christians abroad. But we contemplated the possibility of needing to stand suffering for our faith as something far off and perhaps hypothetical.

But when I saw the risk of compromise rearing its head in our own denomination, suddenly the issues seemed much closer to home, even in a church like my own, far away from the metropolitan centres, and even from the nearest sizeable town.

There seemed now a very real possibility that some straightforward biblical teaching from the pulpit, or a chance posting on our website, or even a conversation in the street, might plunge us into the kind of painful controversy suffered by an increasing number of street preachers, health workers, teachers and other Christians.

Worse still, we might all too easily become part of the problem, rather than part of the solution. It was not so likely that the whole fellowship would go completely off the theological rails, but more that we might fall into internal dissension over these matters, as some of us succumbed to deceptive teachings, and perhaps others of us reacted unwisely. The leadership team of which I am part began to think very seriously about how these evils might be avoided.

This section will seek to examine solutions to such problems. For since it is the Scripture itself that warns us of deception by “the spirit of antichrist” throughout the church age, as well as at the very end, it

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follows that the Scriptures have also given us sufficient means to resist.

At this point I will point out that the whole discussion of Section 2 has been necessarily incomplete. I have focused on issues and dangers that seem to me most urgent and important today. But there are without doubt other delusions that are of importance now, or might become so.

In the spiritual realm, for example, occultism in the form of New Age spirituality has long been a concern for many Evangelicals. Broadly speaking, it may be seen both in non-Christian practices such as Wicca, Satanism and so on, and in Christian circles in some of the wilder and less orthodox Charismatic manifestations. Now, to me these seem currently to be fading dangers, but I may be wrong and, in any case, the situation might be different next month or next year.

However, much of the Evangelical church has become widely infected with the same kind of experience-based, narcissistic spirituality that underlies New Age thinking. Some Charismatic practices are virtually indistinguishable from it, including even readings from Tarot-like cards, as well as occultic theological ideas like visualisation.

The woeful lack of critical discernment in churches should give us pause, when we consider the false miracles and prophecies associated, by our Lord himself, with the end-times deception. Blatantly false prophecies by leading figures are already widely treated with acquiescence in mainstream Charismatic churches. How can they hope to resist the false prophecies of an Antichrist figure?

Similarly, although I have majored on the threat of what one might call “progressivism” leading to a new socialist form of totalitarianism, it is by no means impossible that the undoubted popular reaction against such forces might fulfil the left-wing’s fears. Society might swing so far to the right that truly fascistic oppression (as opposed to the labelling of *everything* as “Fascist”) might emerge. This, after all, was a good part of what happened in Mussolini’s Italy, Hitler’s Germany and Franco’s Spain. In my view, currently such forces are rela-

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tively small and unpopular both here and in America, but things can change quickly when the forces of chaos are churning.

But these possibilities need not matter too much to the discerning reader. If I have been able to alert you simply to the *scale* of the forces that I find to be at work around us today, and of the forces which will necessarily be at work at the time of that final delusion foretold in the Bible, if that awaits some future time, then you will be in a position to look more critically at current affairs. I sincerely hope that nobody will fall into the opposite error of seeing demons everywhere.¹

But solutions to that, as to other errors, will I hope emerge from the ideas in this section. From the start I must confess that nothing I offer will be a radical new theory or technique. Rather, we need to rediscover, and find ways of implementing, what has been written in the Bible for our benefit, and known to the churches down the ages that have preserved our spiritual inheritance intact through all manner of trials.

Let me first provoke your thought with an assertion which will also be, when suitably fleshed out, my conclusion: problems that *threaten* God's principal Kingdom institution, the local church, are to be *solved* by the local church.

Or, from another perspective, the very *purpose* of the local church is to preserve the kingdom against the assaults of its enemies. It is, after all, the local church of which Paul addresses the church leader Timothy when he writes about:

¹ I am very aware that this book may be seen as falling into just that error. But as a defence, let me remind you that many are still alive who experienced such a universal breakdown of truth in the Soviet Union, China, or Nazi Germany. Remember that in 1946, Aldous Huxley revised the timeline for his "Brave New World" from six hundred years to less than a century: seventy three of those have already passed (Huxley, 1965. 14). At certain points in history there *are* demons everywhere.

§3 The Pillar and Rampart of the Truth

The household of God, which is the church of the living God,
the pillar and support of the truth.²

Let me start with some local church history.

² 1 Timothy 3:15.

12 Learning from history

Continuity of care

WE CAN LEARN MUCH from history. My church, although only a village Baptist chapel in Kilminster, East Devon (population 830), has records dating back to 1654. That is when the church started keeping a church book as a “Particular Baptist” assembly, but they must have been up and running for a while before that, because already they had 105 members in good standing, and no less than 38 who had been expelled or were “withdrawn from” for “sin and disorder.”

Furthermore they had just lost around 70 members to a daughter-church in Lyme Regis, because of the difficulties of travelling to services, and a year later they lost more to another off-shoot in Honiton. Both those churches are also still thriving. In fact, the geographical spread of members at that time reached as far afield as Axminster and Chard to the east and to Ottery St Mary in the west, an area approaching 200 square miles.

Not only that, but they were in the process of building a dedicated meeting house, Loughwood chapel, in the parish of Dalwood, still standing today. It is now in the care of the National Trust but is used for occasional services.

The first Particular Baptist Church had been formed only twenty years before, in Broad Street, Wapping, in London, and the first Confession of Faith was formulated in London in 1644. It must have taken some years for Kilminster to organise to the degree it had in 1654, so it was among the pioneers.

Particular Baptists were mainstream Calvinist Puritans, whose only significant difference from Independents like the great theologian

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John Owen¹ was their conviction on believers' baptism. Hence the first Baptists seceded amicably, after seeking permission, from an Independent church, and it was their practice, if no Baptist church was available, to worship at Independent or Presbyterian churches.

A good number joined Oliver Cromwell's New Model Army in the Civil War, and three of these were prominent early members, probably co-founders, of the Kilminster Church. Colonel William Allen was personally acquainted with Cromwell, and was his Adjutant-General of Horse in Ireland from 1651. John Vernon was a Captain; the rank of Robert Doyle is not recorded.

It seems that the three first arrived in Devon with Lord Fairfax's army to win Exeter back from the Royalists in 1645–6, and Allen and Vernon at some stage married daughters of a former Royalist supporter, James Huish, of Sidbury. These two women, Mary and Ann, are recorded as Loughwood members, and another unmarried sister, Deborah, travelled with the two couples to Ireland in 1654 and subsequently became the subject of a book about her spiritual journey, based on her baptism testimony, entitled *The Captive Taken from the Strong*.

Their army background gave Allen and Vernon both the vision for organising Baptist churches into supportive regional associations, and the opportunity for networking, especially with Irish Baptists.

To summarise briefly the subsequent history of the Kilminster church, it remained faithful to its biblical teaching and active in its neighbourhood throughout the various turns of history, and with fluctuating membership under a succession of godly pastors. It now has a congregation of around 140 in a recently opened new building.

Weathering war

The Kilminster Baptist story only really makes sense in the context of its long history of being politically counter-cultural because of its con-

¹ Not to be confused with another John Owen, who was one of the original Loughwood leaders.

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cern for sound doctrine. That history has much to teach the present generation about how to “do church” in the face of concerted opposition.

Historian Rachel Adcock² has shown how even the new practice of keeping a church book, and the publication of the spiritual testimony of Deborah Huish³, were typical of Baptist strategies of the time to maintain the faith and identity of their churches intact against what was, much of the time, frank persecution.

Of the mainstream Nonconformist denominations, the early Baptists were regarded with most public suspicion. Although entirely unrelated to them, the Particular Baptists were branded “Anabaptists” in an attempt, malicious or ignorant, to associate them with the European Anabaptists forming part of the radical Reformation, who stressed individual experience, the Holy Spirit, and indifference to civil authority rather than Scripture. It was falsely rumoured in polemical tracts of the time that the Baptists abducted daughters from their parents, forcing them into naked baptism rites and orgies. Even Richard Baxter railed against baptism by immersion’s “murderous” effect on health. They were the feared, “fictional far right” of the day.

Perhaps this irrational suspicion is why the first meeting in the Kilmington church book, in 1654, records that a Chard man had publicly accused some members of being witches. A deputation was sent for him to justify the charge or face prosecution himself.⁴ Clearly excessive superstition was not one of their faults.

We cannot overestimate how the Civil War not only polarised religious opinions, but ruptured the entire fabric of society. It was the impasse between “an impractical Parliament and a shifty king,”⁵ that led to armed conflict (a fact that has led informed commentators like historian David Starkey to draw sombre parallels with the state of current

² Adcock, 2016.

³ Adcock, 2011.

⁴ Whitley, 1914. 132.

⁵ Robinson, 1927.

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British politics). But once hostilities broke out all the normal certainties of life unravelled, from the unity of families to any consensus on religion or even on morality⁶. As in the case of Brexit or Black Lives Matter, neutrality was more or less impossible, all the more because freedom of conscience was at stake.

Religion was already in a state of flux: Roman Catholicism amongst Royalist sympathisers was still a threat, realised when a Catholic monarch, James II, briefly gained power. The state Anglican Church, as today, had irreconcilable streams from the pompous statecraft of Archbishop Laud to the Puritanism of Richard Baxter. Presbyterians (the majority in Parliament) looked for a complete reform of national religion, and Independents for the freedom of each congregation.

But in the confusion of war, and its aftermath, a plethora of political movements, such as the egalitarian Levellers and Diggers, and heterodox religious sects including the Quakers, the Behmenists, the Grindletonians, the Muggletonians, the Philadelphians, the Ranters, the Sabbatarians, and the Seekers arose. It seemed as though any tailor who could claim a visionary experience might gather followers.

Many of these movements were of little importance, just adding to cultural chaos. The more serious are shown by the careful efforts made to refute them: John Owen, for example, writes at length against Catholicism, Arminianism, and the Socinian heresy which led to the explosion of Unitarianism in the next century, and which still has its echoes in Open Theism today.

Baptists in the army, doctrinally part of the Evangelical mainstream, saw in Cromwell a man of faith who would, once a despotic king was removed, bring godly men around the table to establish a national church that was both Scriptural and tolerant of godly dissent. Both

⁶ It is easy to forget that the war for a true Christian state was also the beginning of the “golden age” of piracy.

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order and liberty were their goals, for they were the most tolerant of the orthodox denominations⁷.

But like many, William Allen in Kilmington began to see Cromwell's real aim as consolidating power in himself, and once he did so as Lord Protector, he turned against the Baptists who had helped him gain power. As Richard Baxter writes:

In a word, he did as our prelates have done, begin low and rise higher in his resolutions as his conditions rose, and the promises which he made in his lower condition he used as the interest of his higher following condition did require, and kept as much honesty and godliness in the main as his cause and interest would allow (but there they left him).⁸

Allen concluded much the same, and in a 1660 pamphlet, *A Word to the Army*:

[H]e reviews the decline of the true cause, and speaks of Cromwell in his virtual kingship as “a ghost from the grave” of the Stuarts. The army has been guilty of “King-craft and worse than Bishop-like trapannings.”⁹

A scathing letter was sent to Cromwell by another Baptist officer, accusing him of favouring Baptists when he needed loyal soldiers, but turning against them to “new courtiers” once in power, showing the same duplicity as King Charles. The basis of the Baptists' complaint was natural right, rather than the ascendancy of their own beliefs, as this extract demonstrates:

[T]he Anabaptists are men who will not be shuffled out of their birthrights, as free-born people of England.¹⁰

⁷ Anonymous, 1913. 24.

⁸ Baxter, 1931. 89.

⁹ Robinson, 1927.

¹⁰ Neal, 1844. 375.

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To be fair, Cromwell had limited options, for by 1653 Parliament had become, as in 2019, an ineffective talking shop of uncompromising factions, and *had* to be dissolved. But the writing was on the wall as early as 1648, the year of the king's execution, in an Act of Parliament (probably never enforced) prescribing imprisonment for “blasphemies and heresies” including rebaptism and denying the validity of infant baptism, and denial of the lawful authority of Presbyterian rule.¹¹

This looming menace may explain why the Loughwood Chapel was built deep in an isolated wood. The site may simply have been what was offered, and so coincidental, but the plot actually straddles the old Devon-Dorset border, which would enable harassment from one county authority to be evaded by escaping to the other. Trained military men were, after all, involved in the decision to build.

Baptist soldiers like Allen had seen it as their godly duty to remove one despotic king, but not to replace him with another. He argued privately with Cromwell about it in 1655, though professing his loyalty. According to the intelligence officer put on his case:

...he “did nettle the protector extreamly” and the two parted “in a huffe.”¹²

Accordingly, Allen was under state surveillance on his subsequent return to Devon, where he was put under house-arrest on suspicion of plotting. He was cleared and returned to Ireland, but resigned in 1657. After Cromwell's death he was reinstated, only to be sacked, imprisoned, and then exiled (with Vernon¹³) at the Restoration of Charles II.¹⁴

The Kilmington Baptists, including Allen and Vernon, were therefore by necessity close to political events, and tried to handle them as Christians. Theologically, they sympathised with the movement called

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Adcock, 2011.

¹³ Vernon actually stayed in London, where he helped victims of the Great Plague in 1665–6. Adcock, 2016.

¹⁴ Robinson, 1927.

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“The Fifth Monarchy,” which was popular in Baptist circles and may have been their greatest theological weak spot.

Such was the turmoil of the times that the Fifth Monarchists saw the overthrow of Charles as part of the traumatic end of the fourth empire prophesied in Daniel, and therefore hoped that the godly kingdom of Christ would replace it, soon to augur in the return of Jesus. Given the political chaos throughout Europe, attention to these prophecies was rational and spiritually prudent. But carried into state politics the detailed and conflicting prognostications contributed to the paralysis of Parliament and to public rejection of the whole Puritan cause.¹⁵

Their vision was “postmillennial,” in that they anticipated that an England governed wisely by true Christians would signify the victory of Christ’s Church, which would then welcome its Lord’s return. To see Cromwell overturning Parliament to become, in effect, another king of the old regime not only dashed their raised hopes, but suggested that Cromwell might be none other than the “man of sin” of 2 Thessalonians, who had even deceived the saints into supporting him. Those who consider the Commonwealth a dark blot on Christianity’s reputation might agree even now that the spirit of antichrist was at work in the Protector. Others would be more ambivalent.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the English were glad to be rid of both Cromwell, *and* the factious saints in the restored Rump Parliament, who replaced him.

Imagine how a disillusioned personal friend like Allen, who had fought alongside Cromwell and considered his faith genuine, must have felt. Some Fifth Monarchists undoubtedly wanted to redress the situation by disposing of Cromwell by force, but there is no evidence that those in Kilmington did. They were, however, *suspected* of it because they were unwilling to endorse Cromwell’s policies. From the beginning, then, Kilmington Baptists had to contend with public misconception, and the suspicious opposition of the state.

¹⁵ Anonymous, 1913.

¹⁶ For example, the historian of the Reformation J. H. Merle d’Aubigne: “... if he committed a fault—which is still a matter for discussion—it was a virtuous fault.” D’Aubigne, 1983. 165.

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Upon the brief return to Parliamentary rule in 1659, the church book records a day of thanksgiving for:

the late Publique blessinge in changinge the Governm^t and streame of Affaires in the Nation.¹⁷

That September the Loughwood elders endorsed a broadside “humble testimony” expressing renewed hope for the end of autocracy and for liberty of conscience.¹⁸ But the 1659 church book entry was to be the last until 1668, because frank persecution of all the Nonconformists, and even the Puritans within the Church of England, began almost as soon as Charles II was restored to the throne.

Restoration repression

School history taught us, back when school history taught about religion, that the Nonconformists suffered under legislation like the 1661 Corporation Act, excluding from public office and universities all who would not take Anglican Communion; the Act of Uniformity of 1662, requiring episcopal ordination for all ministers; the Conventicle Act of 1664, which forbade unauthorised religious assemblies of more than five, apart from family; and the Five Mile Act of 1665, forbidding ejected ministers to come within five miles of any town, unless they swore an oath endorsing the 1662 prayer book. In modern terms, all dissenting Christians were cancelled from the culture.

Loughwood was clearly a target for such laws, and local church tradition records an instance of a soldier being sent by a magistrate to run through anyone entering the chapel. After an uncomfortable standoff a young woman ran past him “with a shriek,” and the service proceeded.¹⁹

Less well known, but equally intense, was the illegal, or quasi-legal, harassment of Nonconformists. Another local tradition records the congregation arriving to find a huntsman in the pulpit, blowing his

¹⁷ Adcock, 2016.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Whiteley, 2000. 3.

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horn whilst the hounds jumped over the pews. This was unofficial harassment, but equally demoralizing since there was no legal redress.

Elsewhere, far more serious abuse occurred. As early as 1661 one Baptist minister, John James, was dragged from his pulpit, tried for treason in a kangaroo court, and within a short time executed. Many of his congregation were imprisoned.²⁰ King Charles II considered it a job well done.

Neal's *History of the Puritans* documents many instances of ministers and worshippers being imprisoned, sometimes for considerable periods or ending in death, of services being disrupted legally by law-officers or illegally by mercenary soldiers and mobs, of household goods being forfeited (sometimes being sold for paltry sums so that a limited fine meant destitution), of serious assaults during arrest, and so on.

In many cases Baptists were imprisoned without any legitimate charges, but were kept in jail anyway until they could make their representations at the next assizes—sometimes they languished until several court sessions had passed, as in the case of John Bunyan. This is the seventeenth century equivalent of “the process is the punishment.” We see that increasingly today in cases of street preachers arrested by police and eventually released without charge, one recent instance in London involving the black preacher being driven out of the city and abandoned with no means of transport.

In 1661 a gang of the equivalent of *Antifa* activists hauled twenty worshippers out of a service in Whitechapel and caused serious injuries to one who insisted they produce an arrest warrant (which of course they lacked). When church members made an official complaint, the complainants themselves were arrested and jailed for twelve days, and released on a bail bond that was inordinately prolonged before they were finally exonerated. I am reminded of a recent case in which a woman who complained about a Muslim group holding a prayer meet-

²⁰ Neal, 1844. 383.

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ing in a park, contrary to the byelaws, found *herself* being arrested at dawn the next morning.

Yet when at the end of 1662 a well-known Plymouth pastor, Abraham Cheare, was imprisoned in Exeter with one of the Loughwood elders, James Hitt, for declining the Oath of Allegiance, he wrote:

“...the meeting at Dalwood is very large and increasing, the Lord being a covert to them.”²¹

What allowed such growth under these pressures? I will look at this question in more detail later, but will first sketch some of the obstacles faced by Loughwood even after toleration was granted.

In the eighteenth century distrust of Nonconformity persisted, but it was also weakened from within, across its denominations, by the rise of Enlightenment rationalism and particularly Unitarianism. The nearby daughter church of Honiton, amongst many others, became frankly Arian at this period. Many churches closed. Although records are sparse and not always easy to interpret, Loughwood appears to have remained faithful to both its Calvinism and its Athanasian catholicity. Numbers at one stage became very low, but it is not clear whether this was because its doctrine was unfashionable, or because of the weakness of its beloved, but aging, minister. In any case, numbers subsequently grew under a succession of pastors, holding firm to biblical doctrine.

Loughwood remained evangelical during the nineteenth century too, despite the onslaught of Biblical criticism. An address concerning the church's history given at Upottery in 1896, probably by longstanding Kilmington pastor Richard Bastable,²² portends today's theological struggles:

The battle for religious belief was won at last and the principle which had been so despised became triumphant. Many of

²¹ Whitley, 1914. 136.

²² A new chapel was built in Kilmington in 1833, and served the church until it burned down in 2009.

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them I have no doubt were called “bigots,” “narrow-minded,” “straight-laced”; be it so. They preferred the commandment of the Master to the goodwill of men.²³

This assessment was made in the wake of C. H. Spurgeon’s “Downgrade Controversy,” combating liberalism in the Baptist Union: until the 2009 Kilmington chapel fire a picture of Spurgeon still hung in the foyer. The church was very aware of having struggled, and overcome. In 1902 the church book records that Rev Bastable was himself penalised by the law, with seven other members. They had felt constrained to withdraw their children from the parish school because the incumbent curate was teaching them that Baptists, being heathen, had no right to call God their Father.

But the new Education Bill levied a local rate for Church of England Schools, and their consciences would not permit them to pay for what their children could not receive. As the church book records they appeared before Axminster magistrates, and:

A warrant was issued to seize our goods which was done on the fourth of March and on 11th it [*sic*] was sold by public auction in our schoolroom. A public meeting followed to protest against the Education Act. The chapel was crowded with sympathetic people and stirring speeches delivered.

Celebrating one’s punishment for remaining faithful is, perhaps, a custom worth reviving! The same happened the following year, but the Education Act was eventually repealed, presumably because of protests like this across the country.²⁴ There is a close parallel with parents now protesting against the imposition, by law, of teaching on same-sex sex relationships in primary schools. The difference from 1902 is that parents are now to be forbidden even to withdraw their children. Such are the times.

²³ *Address Delivered at Newhouse Upottery, August 13th 1896*. Typescript.

²⁴ Whiteley, 2000. 20.

Survival strategy

But the church book otherwise scarcely touches on politics. Politics cannot, and should not, be avoided altogether, but they are never the main focus of effective churches. The first impression gained on skimming early the church books is, instead, the number of cases of members being disciplined, up to and including eventual excommunication when serious offences did not lead to repentance.²⁵

In the seventeenth century, most of the cases are for non-attendance, and some for doctrinal deviation into Arminian views, or in one case becoming involved with the Quakers. There are one or two cases of drunkenness, of gossiping and dissension, and of defying the church's advice and authority in connection with offences.

In the eighteenth century moral issues seem to predominate, and perhaps this reflects the general decline in public morality across the country. There are several cases of women excluded for "whoredom" and illegitimacy, but men were not exempt from expulsion for immorality either.

The church was careful to pursue accusations carefully, delegating individuals to interview offenders, and thereafter if necessary calling them before the church meeting to defend themselves. It might take a couple of years before "withdrawing from" (to use the church book's term) became full excommunication.

There was always, however, the opportunity for restoration. At the November 1752 meeting one man was excluded for persistent drunkenness and rejecting the church's authority, and two women for sexual immorality. This was not done in haste, for one of the two women had had two illegitimate children by a married man before losing membership. She was only finally excommunicated after her failure to repent two years after exclusion. The second woman, named Nanny Samption, was rejected for "filthy conversation" and pregnancy before marriage, and for trying to induce an abortion. Yet a note underneath

²⁵ See Whiteley, 1986.

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the account of this sad church meeting, dated 1760, reads simply, “Nanny Samption received back into full communion.”

The most dramatic return was of another woman, Betsy Carter, who became pregnant outside marriage “despite admonitions,” was “withdrawn from” in 1760, and excommunicated in 1762. The church book records her restoration to fellowship in 1809, after nearly half a century.

Such cases show the faith the Baptists had in the reality of God’s work in human hearts. They had no leverage over expelled members, who could attend other churches or none at all, except the spiritual authority of speaking the truth in love. A little reflection shows that the strictness of church discipline was one of the reasons the church survived. There is very little point in a church trying to maintain doctrinal and ethical purity distinct from compromised churches outside, if they are not maintained *inside*.

Incidentally, some of these disciplinary records show the prominence of women in church affairs. Although they were, according to Scriptural precedent, not permitted to dispute the doctrine of sermons as the men did, they had their own meetings where they could raise such issues. But it is apparent that at church business meetings they had a full voice like the men. One woman was disciplined for trying to veto the appointment of an elder against the judgement of the church. She could only have attempted such a thing because she already had a prominent voice in church affairs.

Many entries, however, are about supporting members in financial need, or sending gifts to other churches in trouble. This too was done with care. In one case, a man’s debt through his failure to manage his affairs properly led to rejection of his request for money—but the church nevertheless gave an allowance to his wife, who was unable to help herself by working. In other cases, money was given in concert with financial advice.

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Correspondence with other churches in the western association, but also in early days with those in Ireland, remind us that networking with others of like mind was deemed important.

Records of church meetings are, in the nature of things, unlikely to teach us much about a fellowship's doctrine, but we learn obliquely how they managed their teaching. In 1659, unable to obtain a pastor, they arranged a meeting to discuss the theological question of whether elders could teach, and if so whether they could become the pastor of the church.

The records also name those whose preaching gifts had been recognised, and who were therefore permitted to "exercise gifts" in the services. An entry of 1657 lays out the new Sunday schedule, at least for the months of summer daylight:

1. That the first day's meetings be begun (as near as may be) aboute seaven in the Morninge, and soe continue for the summer season. And the tyme employed as followeth. Vizt.

1. In the tryall of gifts till 9 of the clocke. And that those 2 howers be improved by way of prayer.
2. From 9 in the morninge till well towards 12 in a publique exercise.
3. From one till 3 of the clocke in publique exercise.
4. That after the dismissal of those that are nott members the church spend one hower or 2 in communicatinge their experiences; inquiring after persons absent; trying the things heard and dutys neglected.

2. That the next first day seavennight the church breake bread.²⁶

Singing in church had to await the end of persecution, but was welcomed after some discussion.

²⁶ Whiteley, 2000. 5.

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It will be evident that this long day must have been one of very close fellowship, involving much prayer, testimony, and pastoral concern, but most of all the *teaching ministry*.

I take it that “trial of gifts” involved the developing of biblical understanding and teaching ability. After that, with a break for lunch, there were five hours of “the public exercise (of gifts),” which we know from other references to include discussion of the content after each teaching session: if serious fault were found in the teaching, the teacher was held accountable to the church meeting.

Even before they acquired a pastor, a formidable knowledge of Scripture and doctrine must have resulted from such a schedule, for everyone.²⁷ Add in a trained minister, as they intended to do from the beginning and did when it became possible, and another order of magnitude was also added to the thoroughness of the teaching.

We need also to remember the dramatic increase in personal literacy that resulted, in part, from the Reformation. Apart from the blossoming of free grammar schools in towns, local communities and particularly churches placed great stress on literacy because of the importance of knowing the Bible.

In the 1640s the overall basic male literacy rate in England was 30%, rising to 60% by 1750.²⁸ Virtually all the gentry and merchant class were literate, perhaps 50% of yeomanry and 10% of the husbandry. The literacy of women, too, was rapidly increasing, reaching 40% by 1750, according to *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

Although the humblest peasants remained unlettered, the example of the Baptist John Bunyan demonstrates how far down the social scale

²⁷ I can testify to the effectiveness of a mutually accountable teaching team, having taught in a growing church for over ten years before we acquired a full time minister.

²⁸ “Education in the Age of Enlightenment.” *Wikipedia*.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_in_the_Age_of_Enlightenment#Literacy

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reading ability went. The son of a mere tinker in a small community, Bunyan was nevertheless sent to school.²⁹ Even as an impoverished newly-wed, “*not having so much household stuff as a dish or spoon between us both,*” his wife brought two books to the household, both devotional, which they occasionally read together.³⁰ Two generations earlier, Richard Baxter’s father, a heavily indebted village yeoman, was converted by reading the Bible at home, and set his young son to reading it too.³¹

So we can be fairly certain that, apart from the intense teaching environment of the church itself, if a Baptist family had only one, barely literate, reader and a single book, that book would likely be a Bible, and would be regularly read to the whole family. Without the fruitless distractions of Facebook, TV or gaming that Bible would be the staple cultural diet. The farmer would know more biblical doctrine than most modern Christians, whose knowledge is by historical standards superficial.

The degree of investment of time and fellowship (taking also into account the church discipline already described) we see in this probably typical example of a Puritan church, combined with the individual commitment to the text of the Bible, constitutes a deep *immersion* in the biblical worldview. Even the simplest, illiterate, believer would carry the doctrine and lifestyle they had imbibed on Sunday through their whole week. This, I think, is the main key to their perseverance over the centuries, for in varying forms it was the pattern that prevailed at Kilmington right into modern times.

²⁹ Bunyan, 1983. 9.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

³¹ Baxter, 1931. 4–5.

13 Learning from the Apostles

Paul's pattern

IN PAUL'S FIRST CORINTHIAN letter, he spends nearly all of the first four chapters admonishing the believers for their partisanship regarding himself and his successor there, Apollos. At one point he also mentions Cephas (Peter), who had presumably also visited the church.

Now, quite rightly his teaching in these chapters is usually taken to address the evil of factionalism amongst the people of Christ, and to advocate humility and mutual forbearance. Paul himself is clearly taking this particularly public and widespread example of contention as a foundation for his teaching throughout the whole book, most of which in some way addresses their arrogance and division:

⁶ Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written, so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other.¹

How is it “arrogant” to like a particular preacher (the word literally means “puffed up”)? We don't after all call it “arrogant” to prefer Picasso to Rembrandt, or Fords to Vauxhalls. Is it not a case of “each to his own”? But Paul's point is that they are arrogant because they haven't understood how God has set things up in his Kingdom, which is not about the star quality of speakers, but about their appointment by God to explain his word.

They are to learn, he says, “*not to exceed what is written.*” At four places in these early chapters Paul has already used as his argument, “*As it is written...*”² Paul aims to teach only what is founded on Scripture, but the Corinthians, it seems, want their ears tickled instead. But

¹ 1 Corinthians 4:6.

² 1 Corinthians 1:19, 31; 2:9; 3:19.

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as a Scottish preacher friend of mine once said, “Sheep need grass—not sweeties.”

When I preached on 1 Corinthians 4 recently, I was for some reason reminded of the way that C. H. Spurgeon, the famous Baptist preacher mentioned in the last chapter, was converted in 1849. Kept away from his usual church by a snowstorm, the fifteen year old ended up at a tiny Primitive Methodist Chapel in a backstreet of Colchester. All he knew about the denomination was that they sang so loud it gave people headaches. The minister was presumably snowed in, and eventually a “really stupid” tradesman got up, and spoke on the text, “*Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.*” Spurgeon writes:

He did not even pronounce the words rightly, but that did not matter. There was, I thought, a glimmer of hope for me in that text.

The preacher began thus: “This is a very simple text indeed. It says, ‘Look.’ Now lookin’ don’t take a deal of pain. It ain’t liftin’ your foot or your finger; it is just ‘Look.’ Well, a man needn’t go to College to learn to look. You may be the biggest fool, and yet you can look. A man needn’t be worth a thousand a year to look. Anyone can look; even a child can look.

“But then the text says, ‘*Look unto Me.*’ Ay! Many on ye are lookin’ to yourselves, but it’s no use lookin’ there. You’ll never find any comfort in yourselves. Some say look to God the Father. No, look to Him by-and-by. Jesus Christ says, ‘*Look unto Me.*’ Some on ye say, ‘We must wait for the Spirit’s workin’.’ You have no business with that just now. Look to *Christ*. The text says, ‘*Look unto Me.*’”

...

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When he had managed to spin out ten minutes or so, he was at the end of his tether...³

Spurgeon goes on to recount how the preached-out tradesman, spotting a stranger under the balcony, remarked on how miserable Spurgeon appeared and called publicly on him to “Look.” And that’s how the great preacher was converted. It was scarcely a “seeker-sensitive” approach, but it was certainly a seeker-saving one. As my passage reminded me, “*The kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.*”⁴

Nobody, probably even his own minister, would say that this man had a great teaching gift. But nevertheless he had a clear view of the theology behind his text, and most of all, he knew not to go beyond it, if not how to develop it.

“Do not go beyond what is written” was one of John Calvin’s favourite reminders. He refused, at least when he lived up to his usual consistency, to speculate on why Scripture might say something difficult, and how it would fit with human wisdom. Instead, he carefully unpacked what Scripture does say, so that his readers might submit to God’s word.

That is clearly a lesson that the Loughwood Baptists took to heart, and which can also be our guiding principle in combating the deceptions thrown at us by our culture. If (but only if) duly appointed teachers are teaching the Bible accurately, then to make judgements between them is to judge God’s word arrogantly instead of obeying it. The Loughwood church book suggests that whilst the members who were recognised in order to “exercise their gift” were not above the evaluation of the church, nevertheless none was given spiritual preference over the other.

But there is something of an “elephant in the room” concerning these four chapters, which it seems to me is so obvious that it is often

³ Dallimore, 1985. 18–19.

⁴ 1 Corinthians 4:20.

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missed. And that is that those Paul wants to be honoured and heeded, for their own particular contributions in establishing God's work viewed either as a field of crops ("*I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth,*"⁵), or as his temple ("*According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it.*"⁶) are their teachers.

Paul does not does not criticise the Corinthians for having favourite worship leaders, nor favourite pastoral visitors, nor those giving encouraging "words" through the Spirit, nor those organising the activities. The priority that needs to be got right, in Paul's book, is the teaching of Scripture. It is the teaching, whether of Paul, or Apollos, or Peter, which God uses to produce the crop, or to establish the temple which represents the church itself.

The apostle is surprisingly non-egalitarian in the distinction he draws between those appointed by God to teach, and those who are taught. In 1 Corinthians 4:1 he tells them to regard "us" as "*servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.*" Now Paul and Peter were apostles chosen by Jesus himself, so perhaps expected to be accorded special respect. But Apollos was only an "apostle" in the very loose sense of being sent to the Corinthians to carry on Paul's teaching. Paul therefore is not talking about apostleship: he means that the people in church ought not to score their *teachers*, whoever they are, as if they were their judges, but instead view them as appointed stewards of Jesus, entrusted with the secret things of God.

So there is a distinction being made by Paul between teachers and taught, for the people in the pews have clearly *not* been entrusted with those mysteries, until the teachers impart them. Those truths don't simply come at conversion, though the Spirit also gives the church the ability to weigh what is taught.

Paul has already stated this apparently undemocratic idea in several other places. In 3:1 Paul says he gave them milk, not solid food, im-

⁵ 1 Corinthians 3:6.

⁶ 1 Corinthians 3:10.

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plying that he was the parent, and they the babies. In 3:5ff, he says that he planted or laid a foundation, and that Apollos watered or built the house, whilst God caused the growth: the hearers, in their turn, are God's field, or building.

There is an apparent paradox here, because 3:21–22 says that Paul and Apollos, and indeed all things, *belong* to the believers. So teachers in the Kingdom exist entirely for the benefit of the congregation. But that belonging also carries with it a real authority, which comes only from the Bible's teaching which they are called to minister, and from nothing else. Their teachers belong to the Corinthians in the same way that a steward sent by a master to govern his household belongs to it.

Their arrogance, then, is in going beyond what is written and judging God's stewards, rather than sitting humbly under the word. It lies in refusing to recognise the authority both of Scripture, and of those God has appointed to teach it.

We now need to consider that the nature of this teaching "gift" is largely a gift for the hard work of wrestling with Scripture to find what it has to say to us. It is a gift for graft, and it can work out in different ways.

Paul himself was a Hebrew theologian, trained in Jerusalem by the leading Pharisee Gamaliel.⁷ His speaking skills were, apparently, limited.⁸ Perhaps we would have considered him difficult or boring. Certainly Acts records a young man dropping off to sleep during his sermon and falling out of the window.⁹

Apollos, on the other hand, was a Hellenic Jew who is described not only as "learned in the Scriptures," but as "eloquent,"¹⁰ which means he had probably had some training in the art of rhetoric.

⁷ Acts 22:3.

⁸ 2 Corinthians 10:10.

⁹ Acts 20:9.

¹⁰ Acts 18:24.

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Peter the “visiting speaker” was, we know, an uneducated man, but he made up for it by a rustic vigour—and three years at the feet of Jesus, of course. Perhaps he got the working-class vote.

None of that was important. What mattered was that they were all faithfully teaching the meaning of God’s word, the Bible. We should judge false teachers by all means—and if we do not know the Scriptures well that may be hard, because they tend to be better speakers than the real thing, judged by the standard of TV presenters or slick politicians. Their efforts, after all, are spent on media training rather than on studying Scripture.

Paul is offering us a clear choice: we can either sit in judgement on our teachers, which he says is a form of arrogance and self-importance. Or we can listen with the recognition that Jesus himself has sent this teaching to us, provided, of course, that the teacher does not himself go beyond what is written in Scripture.

One thing that may escape us here, though, is that there is a quantitative, as well as a qualitative, element to this crucial role of teaching God’s word, which we can discover from the accounts in Acts. Paul, we read there, starts work in Corinth with a day job, reasoning in the synagogue.¹¹ But he gives up the job when his support team arrives, “*devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.*”¹² When the Jews reject him, it is his *speaking* that God encourages in a vision¹³, and he goes on to do it for eighteen solid months.¹⁴

Later, in Ephesus, once he leaves the synagogue he hires a lecture hall *every day for two years* to reason with the disciples and any others who came (there is a hint of Loughwood’s practice of discussing the sermon after its delivery here—perhaps a practice that needs reviv-

¹¹ Acts 18:1–4.

¹² Acts 18:5.

¹³ Acts 18:9.

¹⁴ Acts 18.11.

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ing).¹⁵ You can bet he did not spend all that time repeating, “It don’t take a deal of learning to look!”

Apollos is recruited in Ephesus by Priscilla and Aquila.¹⁶ Once they train him up in the gospel, he is sent to Corinth, essentially replacing Paul. There he also “*powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.*”¹⁷

Christian culture shock

These constitute very intense teaching programmes indeed, very far from just a twenty minute “thought” from the minister on a Sunday morning. Why was such a thorough grounding in Scripture so vital for the church? We must remember that most of the Corinthian Christians were Gentiles, who did not know one end of the Bible from the other, any more than do Non-Christians today. They came from an urban pagan culture they had absorbed since childhood, and they needed to unlearn it in order to live by Kingdom values, even as they still lived within it. That was a significant task.

Corinth, to begin with, operated a “client culture,” which means that society ran on backhanders given by the powerful, and favours owed in return. New Christians had to learn to deal truthfully and shun bribes.

It was also a class culture in which slaves were belongings, and low status women and boys were considered available for sexual use as a matter of course. Bruce Winter describes how, if you were of any social standing, your male social engagements would include what were called “after dinners,” essentially meaning prostitutes or slaves provided on the house. This was not secret and scandalous, but normal, and indeed even mandatory for social mobility.¹⁸

¹⁵ Acts 19: 9–10.

¹⁶ Acts 18:26.

¹⁷ Acts 18:27–8.

¹⁸ Winter, 84.

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Divorce was easy for both sexes. Unwanted babies were exposed, or aborted. Idol worship permeated life: the guild you must join in order to work your trade was dedicated to a god or goddess, and sacrifices would be offered at the AGM or the annual dinner. Civic duty meant participation in pagan festivals, and household life involved the worship of household gods and eating meat offered to idols. Christians made a distinctive of shunning all these practices, despite the social and personal costs of doing so.

This was the culture they grew up in, and that they had always considered both normal and even virtuous, just as people today have no idea that our culture is in many ways directly opposed to the ways of the Kingdom of God. There was therefore a huge amount for new believers to learn, for Christianity was, at heart, life according to an entirely different world-view. To be any use as a Christian meant not only knowing about, but internalising, a whole new way of seeing the world. That took serious effort, especially when there were also influential Jewish voices saying the new Christian teaching was misreading the Bible.¹⁹

Internalising a biblical Christian worldview still does require serious effort, which our Evangelical ancestors certainly realised as they invested so much time and effort in church life and discipline. Many Evangelical churches now have no real understanding of that vital need, thinking to follow the secular world's pattern of making us feel good about ourselves and gaining the approval of "the community" outside the church. Indeed, "serving the community" becomes shorthand for serving God, though the Bible makes it clear those are often not the same thing.

Once, we could sometimes appear to get away with that laxness when society was built around Christian values, when primary schools sang hymns and taught prayers, and when the Christian heritage had not been systematically suppressed. But if churches are to survive these times, it is vital that they recover their hunger for in-depth teaching

¹⁹ Acts 18:28.

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throughout church life. We have simply forgotten just how much Christianity emphasised teaching from the start, though it is both explicit and implicit in the New Testament, as I have shown.

Larry Hurtado is one of the leading historians of the early church, and he points out the uniqueness of its teaching ministry, together with its deep fellowship, in his book, *Destroyer of the Gods*. In official pagan religion it was enough to go through the prescribed rituals by rote in order to fulfil both social obligations and the demands of the gods, if you happened to take them seriously:

[I]n the Roman era, as typical throughout antiquity and in many societies to this day, what we would call religious identity was conferred at birth and was not really a distinguishable conceptual category. Practically everybody was presumed to honour the gods, and your own gods were supplied as part of your birthright.²⁰

The so-called mystery religions, by contrast, were voluntary and seem to have catered both for the need for social bonding (rather like the Freemasons) and for personal “spiritual” experience. But:

It is highly likely ... that at least most devotees saw their participation in these groups as an augmentation of their other religious practices and associations, not as a replacement for them.²¹

However Christ demanded exclusive devotion both to himself, and to his teaching. Also, although these cults had to do with secret knowledge and rites, they did nothing that challenged the prevailing worldview, either ethically or in other ways. Their realm was only that of feelings and experiences:

²⁰ Hurtado, 2016. 78.

²¹ Hurtado, 2016. 86.

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[T]here is no indication that grander themes featured, such as the promise of immortality, for example.²²

The churches had more in common with the Jewish synagogues from which, in many cases, they sprang. The synagogues, of course, taught the Scriptures week by week, but the Church had to do more, firstly because most of their people had not, like the Jews, been brought up from childhood with the Bible and traditions, but also because Kingdom values differed from both Jewish *and* Gentile worldviews. Even Jewish believers had to learn to interpret Scripture afresh.

The teaching ministry of the churches was so unusual that, before long, Christianity came to be regarded by outsiders as a philosophy. Take, for example, the second century philosopher-physician Galen:

What especially impressed Galen was that Christians, who were dominantly people of subelite social values and not philosophically trained, demonstrated [valour, temperance and justice] with a dedication that matched “that of genuine philosophers.” That is, Galen admired Christians for exhibiting qualities that he associated more with the philosophical elite of the time and that he regarded as requiring training in philosophy.²³

There *was* training of course: the intense teaching ministry of the early Church. Christianity was even uniquely educated, for the time, by its use of written texts:

Early Christianity was distinctively “bookish,” not only in the place that the reading of certain texts held in their gatherings, but also in the sheer volume of production of new Christian texts.²⁴

But whereas Greek philosophy was only the province of rich males in elite symposia held in their best rooms, the Christians taught both the

²² Hurtado, 2016. 84.

²³ Hurtado, 2016. 26.

²⁴ Hurtado, 2016. 118.

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masters and the slaves, and the men and the women, and the parents and the children, in the same meetings, on Sundays and at other times. For the same reason, in the old Baptist tradition, knowing the Bible inside out, listening to solid teaching, and reading all you could get hold of, was at the core of Christian life.

The early church did not put so much stress on education and books on a whim, or even to increase social mobility. It was absolutely necessary if the Church was to survive as an expression of Christ's Kingdom in the midst of a corrupt pagan society, and witness effectively to it. Such a stress is even more necessary now, because our culture is further from biblical values than Corinth ever was. The Greeks at least believed there were men and women.

Somehow, however, even personal study of the Bible has gone out of fashion amongst many Evangelicals, and the reading of Christian books even more so. Much attention is given to "different styles of learning," but very little of any theological depth gets taught.

There is a great danger that when we prioritize relevance over teaching Truth, we end up losing both. We cannot compete with the world in relevance, and it indoctrinates us constantly in an alternative "truth" through its news, drama, politics, music, advertising, and social media every moment of our every waking hour. It is becoming increasingly clear that, as lies envelop our society, the relevance of the gospel simply *is* that it is true, yesterday, today and forever, in complete contrast to every else in the propaganda society. The very lack of cultural packaging may be its greatest "unique selling point."

The churches have been in steady decline for a hundred years now, despite all kinds of efforts from introducing coloured lighting and electric music to half a century of seeking charismatic experiences, sometimes seeming to mimic the mystery religions of old.

That decline might conceivably be part of God's inscrutable will, if those who remained behind were clearly being salt and light to the culture in which they live and work. But even back in the 1980s, James Wong, one of the key figures of revival in Singapore and now

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Archbishop of the Anglican Province of the Indian Ocean, was asked his views on the church scene in Britain.

He answered, “When I go to Thailand I expect to be confronted by the Buddhist way of life; when I go to India I expect to see shrines to Hinduism; when I go to Muslim countries I expect to make a cultural adjustment to Islam. When I come to Britain, I don’t expect to see living, dynamic, believing Christians. I expect to see a materialist, secularist, hedonistic society. And my expectations are realised.”

I suggest that the New Testament, and the history of the early Church which spread the word so successfully, demonstrates that this can only change through the teaching of words “*taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.*”²⁵ Only in the context of such teaching is the experience of the Spirit, and the spiritual gifts which Paul goes on to discuss towards the end of 1 Corinthians, life-changing for both the believer and for the lost culture surrounding him or her.

The question is how we might somehow recover that worldview-changing depth of teaching for these challenging times.

²⁵ 1 Corinthians 2:13.

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Understanding the problem

NOT SURPRISINGLY, A GOOD number of Christian writers, and not a few unbelievers, have commented on the widening gulf between Christianity in all its aspects, and the “organs of society.”¹ The increasing marginalisation of Christian ethics and beliefs that has been going on for the last half-century or more has given way to the kind of outright hostility represented by Dr David Mackereth’s industrial tribunal case (see Chapter 9), in which his entire Christian faith, insofar as it even *includes* belief in only two sexes, has been judged beyond the pale of a democratic society.

In order to avoid seeming political, some Christians have referred to this change as “secularism.” But it is naïve to attribute it wholly to the Enlightenment model of secular humanism, although that still exists (particularly among scientists, who are prominent in both the *British Humanist Association* and the *National Secular Society*, which might be considered humanism’s polemical wing). It certainly arose there, just as Postmodernism evolved from Modernism. But as I have tried to show, today’s situation does not depend on rational arguments, but on radical political, and even in some sense *religious* forces. The anti-christ, when he appears, will not be a secularist.

Postmodernity revealed what, in fact, should always have been obvious: that human reason is as culturally conditioned as the despised Christian tradition had been assumed to be, and arguably more so. The weakness of rationalism as the cure for all evils was that its particular manifestation of “reason” arose within a quite specific, and localised, social and intellectual climate. As that climate changed, rational hu-

¹ One of the hardest aspects to understand is how many secular commentators are saying, “The problem with society is the loss of Christianity... speaking as an atheist.” Perhaps they should reconsider their theological position if they mean what they say.

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manism turned out to have no solid foundation, and began, inexorably, to shift its ground. The gospel, in contrast, has outlasted the fashionable ideas of two millennia.

A big part of modernism's false assumption, as Os Guinness prophetically pointed out for Evangelicals in *The Dust of Death* back in 1973,² was due to the Enlightenment's unconscious (though vehemently denied) dependence on those two millennia of Christianity. In retrospect, Jean-Paul Sartre's phrase "The Striptease of Humanism," adopted as a chapter title by Guinness,³ was an early harbinger of Postmodernism. For the way that Christian ethics, once its "mythology" was removed, degenerated so rapidly into the totalitarian movements of (true) Fascism, Marxism and Global Corporatism, was a part of that story which should have been better heeded by the intelligentsia at the time.

It is important that Christians, and particularly church leaders, have a good understanding of what is behind current events, or otherwise in all likelihood "resistance is futile," to put it frankly. I hope this book may provide one source, amongst many others, for furthering this purpose. For example, I have discussed in previous chapters how the assumption that LGBTQ activism is purely the cry of the marginalised for understanding risks accepting an agenda of "compassion," from organisations whose ideology is, in fact, all about *power*. The same is true where other areas of propaganda are identified because, remember, by its very nature propaganda is not about the expression of an opinion for consideration, but the manipulation of the will for compliance.

Anyone who defends biblical teaching in public now is virtually bound to experience the combined wrath of social media and the press, and quite possibly, if their particular issue is public enough, the trumpeting of disgust by leaders in government. In a recent interview, psychologist Jordan Peterson, who was himself thrust into the lime-

² This was the book which, read at the time of my social psychology studies, first set me on the path to considering the forces operating behind the public face of the world.

³ Guinness. 1973, 1–39.

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light of controversy three years ago over the imposition of novel gender pronouns in his native Canada, points out that to ordinary decent people, the disapproval of a mob is deeply painful, and actually psychologically destructive. He compares the storms of condemnation of “guilty” individuals which appear on social media as like waking up to find all your neighbours baying for your blood outside the house—except that on *Facebook* or *Twitter*, the accusations number in the thousands, not the tens.

The natural, and universal, response is to feel instinctively that the majority must be right, to experience overwhelming shame, and to want to apologise. We see that happening to offending media personalities every week, their abject apologies under vicious intimidation, for some offence against this week’s fashionable sin, resembling what older folk heard about during Soviet show trials or Mao’s Cultural Revolution.

It takes considerable courage to respond like Luther (reputedly) before the Diet of Worms:

“I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen. Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise.”⁴

Peterson also notes, from his own abundant experience, that the number of people with such “nerve” is vanishingly small.⁵ It is hard to find any other reason than such a failure of courage for the mass-capitulation of the British churches to gay ideology when, before same-sex marriage became law just a few years ago, they were all waving the flag for “marriage between one man and one woman for life.” If we are charitably tempted to suppose there might be any other reason for this than moral cowardice, then the same vacillation of churchmen during the religious upheavals of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is in the historical record for all to see. To swim against the tide is hard, and most people choose not to.

⁴ Bainton, 1983. 185.

⁵ Peterson, 2019.

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How, then, in the face of such pressures, and the patterns of psychology, are Christians to maintain any kind of faithful witness to the truth?

Varieties of solution

A number of writers have suggested answers to this conundrum, and it is interesting how convergent they are on what needs to be done, as I will show from a few examples. All of those I have selected conclude that there is a need for Christians to reach much greater depths of community, gathering together to support and learn from each other, whilst somehow keeping hold of the sense of mission to the world that is inherent in the teaching that we should be “in the world, but not of it”:

¹⁴I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. ¹⁵I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil *one*. ¹⁶They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. ¹⁷Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. ¹⁸As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.⁶

Clifford Hill has vast experience of the changes occurring in society, including friendship with several Archbishops of Canterbury (though he himself was ordained as a Congregationalist), and participation in parliamentary consultations. He recognises the lack of understanding amongst denominational hierarchies:

Church leaders throughout the past fifty years of radical and rapid social change did not understand the significance of the processes of social change and therefore they did not discern the spiritual nature of those processes.⁷

From his own prophetic ministry he stresses, as he always has, repentance, but seems to envisage the coming together of scattered Christians who perceive the problem:

⁶ John 17:14–18.

⁷ Hill, 2018. 309.

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The word of the Lord to his church today is to mobilise the faithful remnant of believers scattered across the churches and fellowships of all traditions.⁸

He goes on to describe this as a kind of Christian “populist movement” arising from the grassroots. How this would work out in practice I am not sure: in the days of his *Prophecy Today* magazine small groups called “Issachar groups” were encouraged to form, based on the “*men of Issachar who understood the times and knew what Israel should do,*” in 1 Chronicles 12:32. But I found that our local group (which I did not join) seemed focused on charismatic revelations, rather than seeking a genuine, in depth, understanding of the times, and still less what should be done about them.

Grassroots populism may well have a place, but it appears to me that the teaching of the New Testament emphasises the role of gathered churches, organised in such a way as to maintain both the faithful witness of apostolic doctrine, and effective evangelism. This, after all, was the pattern both of the early church, and the reason for my own church’s survival as a living body since Cromwell’s days, as I have describe in the previous two chapters. To a great extent it is what the Church is for.

Bishop Gavin Ashenden believes that churches are supposed to be “workshops for transformation,” and I am certain that this is the right model, understood in the first place as their being communities of the Kingdom of God in which individual lives are transformed into the likeness of Christ—or into his worldview—from their pre-conversion compliance with the world. And how is this done? Paul tells us that it is by the renewing of our *minds*:

² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.⁹

⁸ Hill, 2018. 315.

⁹ Romans 12:2.

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I have already suggested that that must entail an intensification of the teaching ministry. How it works out in detail is a matter for individual churches, but it should be clear that Clifford Hill is right in saying it will not usually be matter of denominational policy, but of local faith.

Baptist churches like mine like to think of themselves as part of the “Baptist family,” and of course they have many ties to the Baptist Union in everything from annual conferences to ministerial pension funds. But nevertheless, Baptist churches have a congregational polity: we are under no denominational discipline, which might be a weakness for national uniformity of doctrine, but is a huge strength when it comes to deciding on one’s own church strategy. If an effective leadership with clear vision is able to carry the Church Meeting with them, then all things are as possible as they were when Kilmington’s first Baptists gathered their fellowship.

It is harder for those in more hierarchical denominations such as the Church of England. Melvin Tinker, vicar of St Johns, Newland, in Hull, has faced both media censure and the opposition of his bishop for the stand he and his church have taken on biblical gender and sexuality issues. The church has found support from membership of the Anglican worldwide “splinter group,” GAFCON (Global Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans), but conflict is still, in fact, inevitable. In 2017 the *Church Times* reported:

Other conservative Evangelicals have also been organising. The PCC of St John’s, Newland, in Hull, has withheld its free will offering and demanded that the Archbishop of York “repent” of comments he made at the Synod.

In a resolution passed unanimously, the PCC accused Dr Sentamu of responding with “theological ineptitude” and in an “intemperate and ungodly” manner to an amendment during the “state of the nation” debate at Synod (Synod, 14 July). The amendment had been moved by Ms Minichiello Williams and was voted down.

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The resolution goes on to decry how the Synod “ridiculed, mocked, and scorned” the teachings of Jesus.¹⁰

Politically, of course, such action is “divisive.” Scripturally though, they are justified because church leaders are accountable for their teaching to those they lead, as was the regular practice of the Loughwood Baptists when they evaluated the pastor’s sermon in their afternoon meeting. However their standing in the national church works out, St Johns is functioning as the local church was intended to function in the New Testament. Their leadership appears united, and by all accounts the church is growing through mission and discipling believers of all ages, on three sites.

Melvin Tinker accounts for his willingness to “stand up and be counted” as partly a function of his working class origins in a Nottingham coal-mining town. It helps to be counter-cultural if you are not born into the Establishment, so in that sense perhaps he embodies Clifford Hill’s idea of Christian populism.

Tinker, like me, stresses the crucial importance of the teaching ministry, though there is no reason why teaching strategies should not be as varied and creative as spiritual ingenuity allows. He therefore also stresses sound theological training for ministers. But echoing Clifford Hill’s critique of the naivety of church leaders, he also emphasises the need for “cultural literacy” as part of his concept of a “literate leadership”:

One of the maxims of war is “know your enemy,” and presumably if one is to engage effectively, one must also “know the territory” in which the fight is to take place. Not educating Christians about what is taking place in their society, (exposing the influence of the “hideous strength) will be like sending a soldier out with the “sword of the Spirit” (we have

¹⁰ Wyatt, 2017.

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“preached the Word” after all), without instructing them how to wield it and against whom.¹¹

This, after all, is nothing less than Jesus taught:

¹⁶“Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves.”¹²

However the inner nature of the antagonistic culture, whether in Hebrew Judaea or in pagan Corinth, was probably much clearer to the early Christians, because they had not grown up, as we have, like frogs slowly boiling in a society that was once Christian.

Other Anglicans, and those in other denominations, have found it necessary to resign formally, and to gather their churches independently on new premises, without any of the traditional apparatus, but also without the interference of a hierarchy that has compromised biblical teaching.

The last model I want to touch on is that put forward by American Rod Dreher in his important 2017 book *the Benedict Option*. Originally a Methodist, he converted to Catholicism, but in the wake of the abuse of minors in that church joined the Eastern Orthodox Church. This eclectic background helps account for his interest in the whole breadth of Christian tradition, from which he came to see the parallels between today and the time of St Benedict.

Active in the first half of the sixth century, Benedict lived in a period of political chaos and Christian compromise, which struck him hard when he visited Rome. His solution, perhaps a more radical version of Clifford Hill’s “grass-roots” groups of believers, was to form a voluntary community out in the desert, which would form a “school for the Lord’s service.”¹³ That sounds rather similar to Gavin Ashenden’s description of churches as “workshops for transformation.”

¹¹ Tinker, 2018. 115.

¹² Matthew 10:16.

¹³ Dreher, 2018. 15.

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Compare Dreher's description of this community with what we found described in Kilmington Baptists' church book:

These monasteries kept faith and learning alive within their walls, evangelized barbarian people, and taught them how to pray, to read, to plant crops, and to build things. Over the next few centuries, they prepared the devastated societies of post-Roman Europe for the rebirth of civilization.¹⁴

Dreher stresses the simplicity of Benedict's slim rule book, basically laying out a timetable of manual work, rest and spiritual activity. Their one big difference from the Kilmington people is, of course, that they lived and worked in community, whereas the Baptists had their own homes and trades and spent only the Lord's Day together.

Dreher has been criticized by some Evangelicals for reviving "monkery" and encouraging Christians to withdraw from the world, but this is unjust. In the first place, the Benedictines in their original purity were open in their hospitality to strangers, and in their evangelism and mission to those around them. There is no doubting the role of Benedictine monasteries like Jarrow in enriching—or even preserving—the spiritual life of Saxon England, as the intellectual and spiritual work of a boy educated there, St Bede, demonstrates.¹⁵

Interestingly a comparable idea was raised, half in jest, by Roger Scruton, in a discussion with Douglas Murray following his own "de-personing" by the media and government in 2019. Commenting on the dire state of the "woke" universities, he suggested that people like them should start their own unofficial centres for teaching the humanities properly. The conversation was not primarily about religion, but Scruton, as a Christian, was actually touching on a deep tradition. Apart from the ancient Benedictine model of preserving learning, early Nonconformists too formed their own centres of higher education when excluded from the universities. Perhaps this is part of the way

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Sherley-Price, 1988.

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churches must go, but in any case Scruton is recognising the need for self-contained communities for learning, when society teaches lies.

A second answer to criticisms of *The Benedict Option* is that Dreher uses the rule of St Benedict only as a launching point for a very flexible model of Christian communities, some based on churches, and some on informal communities gathered from several churches, as well as full-blooded monastics following the complete rule.

To me it seems that the strength of the idea lies, as with the others I have described, in the realisation that in our day, believers need to cultivate more the sense that they are “not of the world” through a much stronger concept of fellowship, based around a disciplined spiritual life in which the apostolic teaching figures highly. This, I believe, is what is necessary in order to inculcate amongst Christians a worldview that is truly Christian, and therefore salt and light in the world.

In the Puritan model, the daily community of the monastery in which a Christian worldview develops was not so much abandoned by the more limited, though intense, Sunday teaching community. Rather it was *devolved*, where literacy permitted, to the private devotional life of individuals and families in their homes.

My landlady at University, also a Baptist as it happens, showed me a pulpit-sized King James Bible she had inherited from her parents. According to custom, the title page carried the inscription, “APPOINTED TO BE READ IN CHURCHES.” Underneath, some long-dead Nonconformist hand had scrawled, “and in the home!”

It would appear that the daily study of the Bible, once the mainstay of the Evangelical “quiet time,” has come to be regarded as optional, when indeed it is taught at all. But for believers to develop, and maintain, a truly counter-cultural Christian worldview in a hostile environment, it will be increasingly necessary for churches to inculcate it once more.

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To be effective, this will need to be almost as great a discipleship commitment as it would be to join a Benedictine community. For the dawn to dusk distractions built into the modern Western lifestyle, from absorption in social media to binge-watching *Strictly Come Dancing*, militate against worthwhile time spent with God's word.

The old study-aids of Bible reading notes, commentaries and note-taking need not exclude modern technologies like Bible-reading apps and *YouTube* sermons. But there is always a danger that by catering to the short modern attention span in our study-aids, we will lose the very essence of Christian teaching, which is to transform our minds by *deepening* them. We must be aware that it is the *purpose*, conscious or unconscious, of modern media to divert our attention from deep truth and make us passive consumers of both material goods and packaged information. It is against that whole mindset that today's Christians need to learn to rebel.

Swallowing a gyroscope

"You are the salt of the earth," said Jesus.¹⁶ Modern westerners see this, I think, in terms of a condiment sprinkled sparingly (to avoid hypertension!) over wholesome food in order to improve it. Sometimes the idea of salting food to prevent it rotting is also in mind. But the fact that Jesus speaks of the salt of the "earth," or "land" (*ge*) suggests that he had in mind the unrefined salt that was used then as fertilizer to produce a crop at all. Salt was used thus in Britain in mediaeval times, and even during the Second World War. It apparently keeps down weeds as well.

This kind of salt could lose its worth if the relevant minerals leached out, which is why Jesus said it was then unfit for either the soil or the manure heap¹⁷ (rather than for the fish and chips). It is tempting to suggest that it will lose its savour by not being kept together in a heap, and spending too long outdoors, but that is probably pushing the metaphor too far.

¹⁶ Matt 5:13.

¹⁷ Luke 15:34–5.

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Still Jesus's picture, taken in the context of the "workshops for transformation" I have been describing, gives much light about how a church organised as the New Testament envisages affects the world. For the person schooled in the worldview of Christ in such a church will be a witness to Christ without having to seek out "opportunities to witness."

A person actually *living* an alternative worldview which has become second nature sticks out like a sore thumb in their culture, for good and ill. We are told to expect persecution (and for it to be a blessing to us),¹⁸ but ideally that is not because people discover, accidentally, that we are Christians, but because our entire lives cut across the ways of the world simply by our being who we are in Christ. It follows that if people hated Christ they will also hate us *for who we are*, and that is what we find today. But it is also true that those who are intrigued by our difference will wonder how it arose, and perhaps be saved.

Such people, however much their lives currently follow the world's pattern rather than Christ's, will find a true welcome amongst Christ's people, yet no compromise with the world's values, because these Christians will be certain of who they are, and of the reign of Christ as King.

That is, perhaps, why the New Testament tells us very little about evangelism training, but a lot about faith and character building. As persecution broke out, the Jerusalem church was scattered, but:

...those who had been scattered went about preaching the word.¹⁹

It seems unlikely that all these ordinary people were standing in the market place doing street-preaching, and so this verse is commonly interpreted as their "gossiping the gospel." But if it was literally "gossip," then it arose from such deep convictions that it spilled out in normal conversation. If your hairdresser is an ardent feminist, you

¹⁸ Matthew 5:11–12.

¹⁹ Acts 8:4.

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discover it because it comes over in her small-talk whether or not she's trying to win you to the cause. Chat for ten minutes to any English tradesman who happens to be working in your house, and you will discover his strong opinions on Brexit.

The Christian who is truly inhabiting the biblical worldview finds it as hard *not* to give the nature of his faith away as it was for Basil Fawlty not to mention the War to a German guest (“I *did* mention the War, but I think I got away with it!”).

There are, then, many detailed models for “doing church” which correspond to the New Testament pattern, and which will likely be necessary for individual churches to develop if Christianity is to survive the current time of deception, whether or not it is part of that last deception of which the Bible warns. But all of these models will have a depth and intensity that is rare today. That depth and intensity will need to touch all areas of the church's life: its prayer, its sharing of spiritual experience, its ministering of gifts, its discipline—but most of all (simply because it has been so neglected in our time) its teaching.

How will the immersion in the biblical worldview that I have been advocating play out in strengthening our hold of truth in the areas in which it is currently most under pressure? Quite simply, I don't know, because it will be in the gathered churches that such answers are found, and not in the thinking of any one individual believer. In my church, we are only beginning to feel our way in these matters. Perhaps we will not even succeed.

But on the question of sexuality, quite apart from honestly interpreting the Bible's specific teaching on immorality (*pornea* in the Greek), it is hard to see how Scripture's talk of the binary sexual nature of the human race as foundational to our being created in God's image, could leave one thinking of sexuality as a range of options.

On the question of gender it is hard to *know* the living God, and also to envisage him planting gendered souls in the wrong body or creating fluid concepts of gender that deny any rationality in the creation at all.

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How can our care for the environment, which arises from our creation as earth's stewards, not also remind us of the covenant promise of God that I learned for the harvest festival in my first year at primary school?

²² While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.²⁰

God has set a final date for judgement, and nothing in Scripture teaches us that it is determined by our energy policies. The end, Jesus said, will come like a thief in the night, not like an express train hitting the environmental buffers.

The point is that people who are immersed in the Truth have little room left in them for lies, even when they do not fully understand the nature of the deceiving propaganda surrounding them. Christ is the truth, but the early Church did not leave it there: they believed that Christ was the truth found in the word of Scripture, interpreted by his Spirit. To draw a false dichotomy between the Word made flesh and the word set down for us on the page is a modern heresy, even when held by an Archbishop. The church community was the very special setting in which, primarily, the living Christ undertook to fill his living people with his living word.

Os Guinness says that the Puritans, committed by their divine calling to please their Lord in single-minded devotion, had in effect "swallowed a gyroscope" that kept them stable in a shifting world. Most people today, he says, have in contrast swallowed a Gallup Poll.²¹ Which of those will be said of our churches over the next few years?

¹⁶ Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. ¹⁷ Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. ¹⁸ In the exercise of His will He

²⁰ Genesis 8:22.

²¹ Guinness, 2011.

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brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures. (James 1: 16–18.)

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