

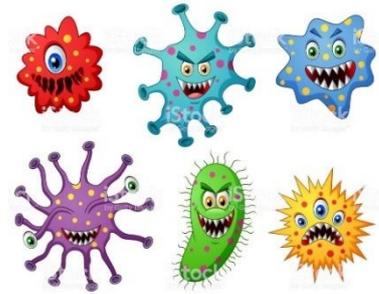


The Corona Chronicles

Reviewing the Church through a time of crisis

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The myth that is called the Social Justice Movement

We know nature abhors a vacuum. It is the same with society. As Church and traditional religion slipped into a rapid decline in the West, people began to look around for something to replace it, something that would provide meaning and purpose something to satisfy their human yearnings. What they were looking for is sometimes referred to as a *successor ideology*, something to replace the now discredited Judeo-Christian world view. What was latched onto was what Ross Douthat described as being *inchoate and half-formed and sometimes internally contradictory, defined more by its departures from older liberal ideas than by a unified worldview* (New York Times, June 12, 2020). He was describing the phenomenon that is called *Ideological Social Justice*. This is no small, passing, modern fad, a passing infatuation. It is having a significant influence on the way businesses operate, laws are made, parliaments function and pass legislation, universities and schools shape their curricula and more worryingly, the way people relate to each other.

From the outset we need to affirm that this new ideology is light years away from our biblical concepts of justice. It has more in common with Marxism than Christianity. People were made more aware of it from a Christian Fellowship conference in St Louis when the keynote address was given by Michelle Higgins. This was widely covered in the press and hotly debated in all sections of social media. What drew attention to this presentation was how she spoke of the urgent need for Churches to get in behind the **Black Lives Matter** movement and give it their full support (more on this can be found in *Christianity Today*, January 4, 2016). One of her memorable phrases was that BLM was *a movement on mission in the truth of God* (c.f. *Religion News Service*, December 29.2015).

There is Black Lives Matter and there is BLM

No Christian could disagree with the proposal that black lives matter. All lives are made in the image and likeness of God and Jesus came as Saviour for all, regardless of colour. Regardless of gender, saints and sinners alike. God does not see colour. However, BLM is another fish altogether.

It is worth making a note about some of its earlier practitioners, two of whom remain very much a part of the neo-Marxist social justice ideology. All of this is on their websites. Alicia Garza describes herself as being a “queer black woman”. She believes that *we must view the epidemic of black violence through a lense of race, gender, sexual orientation and gender identity*. Opal Tometi, another founder prefers to see herself as a “transitional feminist” and an avid student of “liberation theology”. Her mission statement declares a commitment to *disrupt the Western-prescribed nuclear family structure...by supporting each other as extended families and “villages” that collectively care for one another, especially our children*.

One of the worrying things about Michelle Higgins is that she was speaking at an annual mission event at a conference for an evangelical organisation (InterVarsity Christian Fellowship). Those Christians present applauded her for a message that was nothing like a traditional biblical understanding of justice. Here is an example of the kind of support she and the Fellowship received for having her speak...*Michelle Higgins...exposed a central lie at work in the Church...through her Urbana 15 keynote address. The lie is this: White people were created to rule and everyone else was created to be ruled. This lie is the foundation upon which unjust American structures, systems and policies rest* (a letter from Dr L Burnley, vice president for the appropriately named department for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at Whitworth University). It comes as a shock to hear respected academics and Christian institutions propose and accept the truth of these clearly untrue statements.

This is the state of BLM today. No one, especially no white skinned person dares speak up and challenge some of its philosophical and theological goals and expectations. To challenge BLM’s actions, and actions taken in the name of BLM is to choose to side with the problem, with the enemy.

The Social Justice movement has crafted a new definition of justice

For those whose lives are enlightened and guided by the Bible, it is impossible to think of us living in an indifferent universe. Divine justice is a part of the tapestry of the cosmos but if we reject that revelation, we are left with little alternative but to create our own standards and codes for living. If we abandon what God has revealed as the line between good and evil, then we end up being forced to live by flexible, arbitrary man made rules and laws that are more about the whims and fancies of those in power at the time than about what we would call genuine justice.

The Social Justice practitioners are open in their desire to tear down the traditional structures and systems they believe to be oppressive. They seek to redistribute power and resources from the oppressed to the victims and therefore build a world where everyone is equal. Scott Allen sets out a list of characteristics of this kind of justice:

- They are obsessed with power, oppression and victimisation.
- They see the world as being divided between evil oppressors and innocent victims existing together in struggle for power. Importantly though, nothing else exists outside of these categories. All are either oppressors or victims.
- The ends justifies the means – including the use of violence and rioting.
- They are fixated on class, race, gender and sexual orientation as defining characteristics of personal identity – individuals are *nondescript representatives of their taxonomic class* (Noah Rothman).
- They extend hostility towards the Judeo-Christian religion, rejecting in particular its teachings on family and sexuality.
- They have antipathy towards the natural family, and specifically the authority of parents with their children, and the authority of the husband in the home.
- They strive for a re-distribution of wealth and power.

It started with the new Tower of Babel – The Enlightenment

The Enlightenment was a time of great enthusiasm and life, a time when European politics, philosophy, science and communications were radically reoriented during the period from around the time of the French Revolution (1685) and continued on through

until 1815 (alternative dates are sometimes provided for this). It has been referred to as the Age of Reason, or simply the Enlightenment. Prior to that was a time characterised by belief in spiritual realities. The world was governed by a Truth that was Mystery, transcending anything that was possible to imagine or achieve on earth or by human efforts. These were times dominated by the three great religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam. For the many millions forming these religious groupings, the ultimate authority in the cosmos sat at the throne of God. With the Enlightenment this all changed. God and the spiritual world was pushed to the margins or abandoned and scientific reason took the place of the Almighty as the one defining reality. We had a new “truth”.

Around the beginning of the last century, that form of modernism was under attack from what we can call post-modernism. Now reality shifted yet again. Reality was not to be found in God, nor in science and the material world but in the “autonomous human person”. Truth has shifted to what was happening inside of the individual man and woman, to what they felt and experienced. Truth became subjective. “Truth” was now what the ‘I’ thought, felt and imagined. The “I” made things real and true.

The term *autonomous* sets the position out very clearly. The roots of it are two Greek words – *autos* = self and *nomos* = law. To be an autonomous human person means we are all laws unto ourselves. The transcendent no longer exists (if it ever did). There are no objective moral laws and even the natural laws are rejected. Reality is purely subjective. Truth is what we arrive at in our own hearts and minds. What we then have is a rewriting of our understanding of human rights. Our basic right is...*the right to define one’s own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life* (this definition is from Anthony Kennedy a justice of the Supreme Court of the USA in a 1992 decision of the Supreme Court on planned parenthood). Humans are now free to define reality.

The problem here is obvious. It might be possible to live with this philosophy if we are hermits living in some form of splendid isolation in a desert cave. However, if every human person in our cities and towns thinks and acts in this same way, what then becomes the basis for organising and running societies? Who has the final say if we are all gods? What this leads to is an inevitable breakdown in many parts of our culture. When every idea is equal (unless you are preaching a Judeo-Christian theism), chaos and violence must follow.

The ABC won't like it but the Social Justice Movement is Marxist

The standard presumption of Marxism is that it is built upon modern atheistic presumptions. Its philosophical positions were the bedrock for the formation of the Social Justice Movement (SJM). Both philosophies find their roots in the thinking of philosophers such as Kant, Hegel and Nietzsche and in more recent times Foucault and Derrida. When and where these philosophies have been taken up and put into operation they have proved to be wretched disasters. The list of these failures is one of infamous evils: Russia under Lenin and Stalin, China with Mao and other smaller nations such as Vietnam, Cambodia, Cuba and North Korea. None of these produced forms of government that were characterised by a justice acceptable in the Christian traditions of the West. They were all totalitarian and repressive. They are places where gulags are common, genocide a part of the process and millions executed or left to starve or die of treatable diseases. And yet, Marxism continues to maintain a hold over the thinking of those on the Left. It has guided our teachers in schools, professors in universities and made their way into the media which control our news and our perspectives on the world.

Marxism itself changed over time and became neo-Marxism or cultural Marxism. This was made popular in what became known as “critical social theory”. In that world view, the world is broken up into two groups. We are either oppressors who are evil or victims who are innocent. Everyone is in either one or the other of these two camps. The oppressors maintain their evil control over individuals and communities through a network of institutions and structures that re-enforce their authority and position. This gives them the advantage over those without the benefit of institutional support and protection and makes them “privileged”. The word often used for this is hegemony – the power they have to dominate the society. While Marx limited his discussion to matters of economics and classes, critical social theory sees the entire society under these same headings of oppression and the oppressed.

Critical Theory grew out of the writings of German philosophers and social theorists and emerged from within the Western European Marxist tradition known as the *Frankfurt School*. According to these theorists, a “critical” theory is distinguished from a “traditional” theory according to a specific practical purpose:

a theory is critical to the extent that it seeks human “emancipation from slavery”, acts as a “liberating ... influence”, and works “to create a world which satisfies the needs and powers” of human beings (Horkheimer).

Because such theories aim to explain and transform *all* the circumstances enslaving human beings, many “critical theories” have been broadened to cover a wider range of human experiences.

These new theories have emerged in connection with the many social movements that perceive themselves to be under the domination of oppressive systems and institutional beliefs.

Critical theory is then aimed at decreasing domination and increasing freedom in all their forms.

This theory was taken up by groups who thought of themselves as being oppressed and seeking to survive in an unequal world – various ethnic groups, male/female, gender equality groups (LGBTQ++). What critical theory did was enable these people to understand they were oppressed and encourage them to take a stand against those who were oppressing them.

While Marxism encouraged the peasants to rise up against their oppressors, so to critical theory encourages the same course of action from those who feel they are victims in any manner in what is an unjust world.

They were incredibly successful in bringing this kind of thinking into many of our cultural and educational institutions in the West – including many parts of the Church. It dominates the media – being especially influential in public broadcasting such as the ABC – is clearly evident in the arts, our schools, drives the political agenda of politicians, is espoused by business institutions (e.g. Qantas) and leaders and is ever present on our televisions screens, including those prepared for children.

Here is a well-documented example of the way this argument can work. It comes from the radical feminist Shulamith Firestone (*the Dialectic of Sex*)...

So that just as to assure elimination of economic classes requires the revolt of the underclass (the proletariat) and, in a temporary

dictatorship, their seizure of the means of production, so to assure the elimination of sexual classes requires the revolt of the underclass (women) and the seizure of control of reproduction: not only the full restoration to women of ownership of their own bodies, but also their (temporary) seizure of control of human fertility – the new population biology as well as all the social institutions of child-bearing and child-rearing. And just as the end goal of socialist revolution was not only the elimination of the economic class privilege but of the economic class distinction itself, so the end goal of feminist revolution must be, unlike that of the first feminist movement, not just the elimination of male privilege but of the sex distinction itself: genital differences between human being would no longer matter culturally.

Their moment in the limelight had arrived given the demise of Christianity across the West. With no alternative philosophy putting forward a view of life – its meaning, origin and end – critical theory slipped into the vacuum. For people seeking purpose in life and an understanding of the mystery of being, critical theory fit the bill. It provided a new direction. It did everything religion was supposed to be doing. Even better, it simplified the complex nature of society by breaking it down into two categories – the victims and the oppressed. Now the young in particular had been given a narrative for life, a goal to pursue – the ending of oppression and the liberation of the oppressed.

The West had now been given a new, simplified worldview

A worldview is like a window onto the world. It is the lens through which we view the world and interpret the world. It is our worldview that enables us to decide what is important and what is unimportant. It helps form the assumptions about what is real, what is good and about who we are and the way we should be living. Our worldview is shaped over a long period of time and is formed by the culture in which we grow up and in which we live. We all have one even if we have not taken the time to pause and attempt to articulate it. It controls our thinking and acting and most of the time we remain unaware of its workings. What is important to note here is how it controls us, governs the way we think and act. The way we act in particular settings is governed by our worldview...*there is nothing more practical than our worldview, for it determines the orientation of everything else we think and do...what we assume to be real and what*

we assume to be valuable will govern our attitudes and actions (Willard, *Knowing Christ Today*). Such is our Christian faith, the Gospel Way.

Ideological social justice claims to provide answers to the “big” questions posed by all men and women – Who am I? What is ultimately real and true? What are the major problems facing humans today? How can we resolve them? What is our purpose in life? Why am I here? What happens at the end? And many, many more. What social theory offers is a different way of dealing with these questions. Here is a quotation by the social scientist Jeremy Rifkin that sets out what this means in a postmodern view of reality...

We no longer feel ourselves to be guests in someone else’s home and therefore obliged to make our behaviour conform with a set of pre-existing cosmic rules. We make the rules. We establish the parameters of reality. We create the world, and because we do, we no longer feel beholden to outside forces. We no longer have to justify our behaviour, for we are now the architects of the universe. We are responsible for nothing outside of ourselves, for we are the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

The comfortable thing with this view is how there is no God demanding obedience and accountability. There are no natural laws to determine the way we should be living. We are the creators of reality. We are, in fact, gods of the world in which we are living. For Christians, nothing could be further from the biblical view of the world and of reality...*for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him.* ¹⁷ *He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together* (Colossians 1:16-17).

There simply is no way in which these two worldviews can be reconciled. They create vastly different worlds. They establish the ways in which people live and act both individually and in communities. The two worlds stand in total antithesis to each other and sadly, this is the time our Christian leaders have chosen to remain quiet on the sidelines of these new assaults on the Kingdom of God.

Who am I? - the Bible and the post-modernist views

The biblical view of the human person is of someone made in the image and likeness of God. We are the creatures of a loving, holy, good and merciful God. We are created as man and woman *in the image and likeness of God*. What we share is a common humanity that is grounded in the divine and it is this divine rootedness that provides us with our dignity, worth, our life and our freedoms. This is not, however, the way the human person is envisaged in the social justice worldview.

Ideological social justice sees human beings as creatures whose identities are determined (in their entirety) by the groups with which we are linked. This is particularly so in affiliations made according to race, sex and gender identity (LGBTQ+). We do not share a common human nature. Further, there are no individuals per se, only people whose identities are socially constructed...*everyone's ideas are merely social constructions stitched together by cultural forces. Individuals are little more than mouthpieces for communities based on race, class, gender, ethnicity and sexual identity* (Nancy Pearcey *Finding Truth*).

It is possible to see the truth of this with individuals within the LGBATQ+ community. Rather than seeing their sexual behaviour merely as an activity, it is accepted as their identity. They *are* “gay”. It is not simply that they “do gay” sex. Their identity as human beings is their gayness. This is why there is such a massive response to any kind of questioning of homosexuality. Criticism is a denial of their identities, of who they are.

This, of course, is not the biblical way of identifying someone. Every man, woman and child is important, significant creatures on this earth because men and women are *created in the image and likeness of God*. For God, All Lives Matter. We are created by God and invited to collaborate in the Almighty's ongoing creative works. We are created to be free in choosing the way we live on earth but for all of our choices we will be held to account – as individuals. We will not be judged on the basis of our membership of one of the many victim groups around today.

And so, the basic Christian teachings put theology at odds with the ideology of social justice proponents. We are told we no longer have a shared humanity. Race defines our identity. Being LGBATQ+ defines who we are. This is not the same thing as saying

we are social animals, people living in communities. We were *not created to be alone* according to God. Man and woman we were created from the beginning. We are indeed shaped and formed by our engagement with others, beginning with our families and friends. But importantly, we are not defined by them. When we accept Christ in our lives we are returned to our true identities, the identities given to us at creation...*for in Christ Jesus you are all sons and daughters of God, through faith. Form as many of you as were baptised into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:26-28).*

The importance of this is difficult to downplay. Our Judeo-Christian traditions in the West have been built up on the notion of having a shared humanity, a common human nature. Within this common human nature we maintain an individuality, one based on being unique creations of God who bear the mark of the Divine in the world. This world view unites us. Ideological social justice theories divide, breaking us up into competing groups, who, like primitive peoples fight the other, the different tribes in a struggle for power.

The problem of the fundamental obstacle confronting us in life

For ideological social justice theoreticians, the greatest evil in human societies is *oppression*. Sin and evil do not emerge from within the human heart. They are to be found in the societies in which we live. We are all oppressed by social structures, institutions, laws and cultural norms. These perpetuate inequalities because they give to one group power and privileges. This, however, comes at a cost and that cost is paid by “victims”. Some do well but it is always at the expense of other people.

Under this heading of *victims* are all those who do not “enjoy” the benefits of white supremacy, toxic masculinity, patriarchy, a binary expression of sexuality and many more. In the 2017 October edition of the *Atlantic* the social commentator Ta-Nehisi Coates provides an example of this kind of reasoning...*Donald Trump is a white man who would not be president were it not for the fact that he is white*. It is an article worth reading as an example of the kind of dangers arising out of the ideological social justice movement (<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/10/the-first-white-president-ta-nehisi-coates/53790/>). In it he observes...*the power of domination and*

exclusion is central to the belief in being white, and without it “white people” would cease to exist for want of reasons. That is not by any means his worst observation. When the World Trade Centre was attacked by terrorists on 9/11, he reported on how he had explained to his son his feelings as he watched events unfold. He said *they are not human to me. Black, white, or whatever, they were menaces of nature; they were the fire, the comet, the storm, which could – with no justification – shatter my body.* For him, they had become non-humans acting as a part of the oppressive structures oppressing the minority communities. Good riddance to them.

The influential LGBTQ+ writer Tim Gill blames the woes of the world at the feet of the Judeo-Christian teachings on sexual ethics. Not only did he pour millions of his own considerable resources into advancing LGBTQ+ rights but he also openly declares that one of his goals is to *punish the wicked* who oppress those who are not of a sexually binary nature. Upholding male-female marriage and the natural family represented nothing less than an oppression of the gay community.

It is not difficult to find examples where this victim philosophy is applied to other areas. The feminist Philippe Fradet credits “patriarchy” and “toxic masculinity” with the existence of evil in the world...*What all of this comes down to is the simple fact that the masculinity that patriarchy has bred and enable is extremely toxic. It makes everything worse...for those who are subjected to all of its negativity, hatred, subordination and oppression.* In the *Everyday Feminism Magazine* he wrote an essay with the title *7 Reasons Why Patriarchy Is Bad (And Feminism Is Good) For Men...* <http://everydayfeminism.com/2016/11/patriarchy-bad-for-men/>.

The dangers of this kind of approach are obvious. The world ends up being broken down into just two groups: those who oppress and those who are victims, the good and the evil. Once that has been clarified, the next step for those claiming victimhood is to dehumanize the oppressors. This in turn opens them up to all kinds of abuses. This is what happened in 1994 in Rwanda. It enabled Hutu authorities to annihilate a million Tutsis over a very-short period of time. They were not killing fellow human beings. They were exterminating vermin. This is far from the Gospel message where any form of dehumanizing is strictly forbidden.

But this condemnation of individuals on the basis of their membership of a category of people (gay, white, male, etc) is common. **The Federalist** (August 6, 2018) had an

article written by Stella Morabito that offers another clear example of this. It ran under the heading: *The New York Times Has embraced the Bigotry of Identity Politics*

railing against an entire (group) of people...ultimately means rejecting each and every individual in that supposed category, regardless of the personal experiences or human suffering any one of them might have endured as an individual...That's a hideous effect, because it is that very balance that makes human relationships possible...Why should one person's immutable characteristic cancel out their entire experience as an individual human being? How is that not the essence of bigotry? How is that not pre-judging and de-humanizing a person?

Is it possible to move any further away from the biblical world view? For Christians, the fundamental problem in the world, the source of all evil is disobedience, rebellion against God. We understand with St Paul how *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23)*. He sets all of this out in chapter 1 of Romans...

for though they knew God, they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened.²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools;²³ and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles.

²⁴ Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, ²⁵ because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever! Amen.

²⁶ For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, ²⁷ and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error.

²⁸ And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done. ²⁹ They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, God-

haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious towards parents, ³¹foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

Paul moves evil from being out there in the world, in the hands of others and locates it in the human heart where we plan our rebellion against God. The flow from the heart into the world. From our own hearts.

Conclusion:

We have been setting out a broad picture of the kind of world in which we are striving to preach the Good News of Jesus the Christ, to give witness to the love God has for all men and women He has created in His own image and likeness. The West is losing confidence in its history and the very foundations that brought it into being and sustained it through both war and peace. The most destructive agents in this cancer are not from outside forces but from the insecurities and weaknesses within.

John's Revelation recounts the struggles of the first century Church as it strove to remain faithful to *the teachings of the Apostles* in the face of temptations and persecutions of the all-pervading Roman Empire. There too, the persecutions from outside enemies of the Church were not the greatest threats. John's greatest criticism was directed towards those who abandoned the faith, or perhaps even worse, sought to allow Roman pagan ways and philosophies to water down and corrupt the teachings of Jesus and the demands of the Kingdom.

Ideological social justice theories are not just challenges to the mission and ministry of the followers of Jesus Christ. They are, in the Spirit, opportunities to renew the Church by a return to Christ – the Christ of the Gospels, the Son of God who has been taught to endless numbers of Christians from the day of Pentecost down to today. The blood of the martyrs provided fertile soil for the growth of the Christian community in the time of Tertullian. It thrived under persecution. So too in this new millennium, the challenges thrown up by warped ideologies that are far from what has been revealed to us by God, provide us with opportunities for renewal, for reconnecting with the Living Christ. Only in our reconnection with the transcendent and mysterious Almighty God can we feed the world with spiritual food that will endure forever.