

# **SOFT TOTALITARIANISM**

A wake-up call to churches  
and Christian leaders

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## Introduction

God's people are to watch and be alert to their times, especially when those times pose a threat to the gospel and the church, Mark 13.37.

Totalitarianism is back on the agenda. We thought that, following the end of the Cold War, it was consigned to the dustbin of history. But it is threatening a comeback – in a different form.

Totalitarianism is not so much about domination by a particular individual (dictatorship) but the absolute rule of an approved ideology which brooks no discussion and punishes any dissent. It is a form of government which intentionally sets out to eradicate all previous traditions, outlooks and ideas (like Christian teaching) and replace them with its own way of thinking with the aim of bringing every facet of life under its control.

### **Climate of fear**

When we hear the word 'totalitarianism' we might think of jackboots, secret police and labour camps as in Stalin's USSR or Nazi Germany. But a new form seems to be emerging in the Western world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century – the place where we live now. It has been called 'soft totalitarianism'.<sup>1</sup> It is being promoted not so much by any particular political party or national government but by the emerging culture around us. It has infiltrated politics, business corporations and the media and has begun to change the laws of the land in the name of 'progress'.

Already we find, just as behind the old 'Iron Curtain', we must be careful what we say in public and what thoughts we let slip in an email or text message. There are no secret informers or police raids in the dead of night, nevertheless information on us all is available and monitored via digital technology. Saying what is deemed the wrong thing (what is currently politically incorrect) can bring unprecedented abuse and calls for punishment on social media, with devastating consequences. Free speech is under attack and a climate of fear is being generated.

The church, like the men of Issachar, must understand the times if we are to know what to do, 1 Chronicles 12.32. We must recognize that this new form of

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<sup>1</sup> See for example *Live Not By Lies*, by Rod Dreher, Sentinel, 2020

totalitarianism, which seems on the verge of taking over, is just as atheistic and as determined to annihilate the faithful church and Christian values as any 20<sup>th</sup> century Communist or Fascist regime.

This booklet is an attempt to give a basic understanding of what has been happening, what may well happen and to sound a wake-up call to the churches.

### **An anatomy of totalitarianism**

Historically, totalitarian regimes, whether of the Right or Left politically, displayed three common elements.<sup>2</sup>

- The first is a 'Promised Land' vision of the idealized future which is guaranteed by the totalitarian ideology. The whole forward thrust of society, it is said, must be directed to this end. This defines progress. We might call this the 'eschatology' of the movement.
- The second is a fanatical loyalty to the cause based on the perceived 'rightness' of the ideology. For 20<sup>th</sup> century totalitarianism, this loyalty was focused on the leaders of the movement who were treated like demigods. One thinks of the giant wall posters of Lenin, Stalin or Mao. These were the 'prophets' – the all-seeing 'Big Brothers' of the movement – to whom unquestioning obedience was due.
- The third is the identification of 'the enemy', the psychic personification of something to struggle against. For the Nazis, it was sadly the Jews. For the Communists, it was Western capitalism and the bourgeoisie. The movement must have a 'demonology'.

This is the basic anatomy of totalitarian systems. There are of course, large differences between 20<sup>th</sup> century totalitarian regimes and the imminent cultural totalitarianism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, this basic analysis will serve as a worthwhile guide to what is going on today.

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<sup>2</sup> See for example Christopher Booker in *The Seventies*, published by Allen Lane, 1980, page 72

## **1: Social justice?**

Christians ought to be much in favour of social justice, Amos 5.24. We are called to ‘do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with our God,’ Micah 6.8.

But today’s ‘Social Justice’ – indicated by capital letters – is very different from the Biblical view of justice. Originating in Left-wing university Humanities departments, it is a movement that has sadly taken a hugely sinister turn in recent years. We may well be facing the rise of ‘one of the least tolerant and most authoritarian ideologies that the world has ever had to deal with.’<sup>3</sup>

The promise of the movement is equality. In many ways this is a fine vision. But notice that it is different from the aim of the classic liberal outlook of the Western world, which was personal freedom. Actually, secular ideas of freedom and equality turn out to be a zero-sum game. As we will see, maximizing one requires restricting the other.

How should we understand the Social Justice movement? Here is a brief overview in 5 steps.

### **Secularism**

Exclusion of God – the real God who has made himself known through Jesus, his living word, John 1.1, 14, and the Bible, his written word, 2 Timothy 3.16 – is foundational to the whole of the Social Justice project. Humanity takes centre stage. God and his laws have no place. This is the stable from which this movement comes.

As Christians, that must alert us immediately to problems. Scripture assures us that “the fool says in his heart ‘There is no God’”, Psalm 14.1. Paul the apostle writes of those who reject God, ‘Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools,’ Romans 1.22.

### **Postmodernism**

Without God there is no ultimate frame of reference outside of ourselves to determine what is right and true. The secular modernism of the Enlightenment imagined that human reason and science on their own, could establish truth and

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<sup>3</sup> *Cynical Theories: how universities made everything about race, gender and identity – and why this harms everybody*, by Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay, Swift Publishing 2020, page13.

would produce an equal and just society in which people would be free and fulfilled. But that has not happened. And so this optimistic vision of modernism is now seen as a failure and has given way to post-modernism (PM).

- *First*, PM rejects any absolute truth and adopts a through-going relativism, Judges 21.25. Reason alone cannot establish truth. Reason is a process which will lead in different directions depending on one's starting assumptions.
- *Second*, with this mindset, PM sees reality as incoherent and fragmented. It specifically rejects any overarching explanation of our world (metanarrative) whether it is that of science, Marxism or Christianity.
- *Third*, because there is no common truth on which to build, language becomes a mere system of signs with the meaning intended by an author or speaker impossible to know.
- *Fourth*, all claims to truth on the part of various groups or individuals are seen simply as power-plays designed to manipulate other people. All interaction between people is not really about communication but about power.

It is very negative. Because all truth claims are not true and are manipulative, they must be debunked. This will save you from falling into the clutches of those who pretend to have the truth. Disbelief is the only safe choice. This is the very opposite to the classical approach of 'keeping an open mind'. All claims to truth must be 'deconstructed' – critiqued, problematized and disparaged.

### **Anti-normality**

Many situations in the world are genuinely unfair and should be rectified through compassionate action founded on reason and, where necessary, the democratic process.

But Social Justice rejects this approach to injustice and insists on a radically different line. With its aim of equality and including every group of people on an absolutely even footing, Social Justice deploys the postmodern approach of deconstructionism to undermine and attack any idea of what is 'normal'. Anything accepted as normal in society would inevitably disadvantage any group which does not fall into that category. So norms and the category of 'normal' itself, especially as they pertain to society, must be trashed. This alone will make everyone the same.

Any idea that the majority of people have chosen what is normal because it

works best given the way reality is, must be thrown out. Given such 'critical theory', even identifying people's straightforward physical appearance – like male and female, hairy and bald men, black and white people, able-bodied and disabled – has become a major problem. Such categories cannot be seen as 'givens'. Instead, they are said to be offensive and culturally constructed by 'normal' society to protect itself; to keep its privilege and power. Humans are not born male or female but have a gender assigned to them by the biased expectations of 'normalcy'. E.g., simply speaking, a 'man' is only male because his parents and normal society told him he is. Social Justice's more extreme adherents see science as a construct of White Anglo-Saxon Male culture and say its findings should not be taken as a valid for everyone.<sup>4</sup>

### **Double-think**

However, although the post-modern basis for Social Justice denies the existence of universal truth or any reliable engagement with reality through language, at this point some 'double think' is introduced. With absolute equality as its sole concern, the only 'given' allowed in Social Justice thinking is the truth and reality of suffering and oppression. The pain of the disadvantaged is real (which of course it is). This gives Social Justice theory a foothold in the real world and empowers it to argue and accuse. Suddenly language becomes meaningful and important

Though postmodernism proper would admit that it is not possible to know with certainty whether anyone's suffering is real or not, with this piece of double-think Social Justice ideology appears incontrovertible. Who could possibly argue that 'equality' is a bad aim? To reject 'justice' is, of course, to condemn oneself. And so, as with other forms of totalitarianism, Social Justice seeks to eradicate all previously accepted ideas. 'Normality' must go.

### **Political Activism**

Social Justice advocates set themselves up as judges of mankind. Through their activities, words like 'de-platforming' and 'cancel culture' have entered our dictionaries.

The underlying assumption, which is central to the Social Justice outlook, is that bigotry and injustice are everywhere (except in their movement). The job of the

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<sup>4</sup> This 'anti-normalism' can be related to 'lawlessness' and the end-time 'man of lawlessness', 2 Thessalonians 2.3.

activist is to scrutinize every speech, text, event, supposed mindset and attitude with the purpose of exposing, denigrating and purging the public square of everything and everyone which does not match their ideas and is not 'politically correct'.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the climate of fear grows and the totalitarian ideology, which tolerates no dissent, is imposed.

Meanwhile 'because of its rejection of objective truth and reason, postmodernism (and therefore Social Justice) refuses to substantiate itself, and cannot, therefore, be argued with'.<sup>6</sup> In effect Social Justice has set itself up as the great, unchallengeable 'given' to which everyone and everything must bow the knee.

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<sup>5</sup> A phrase which I think I am correct in saying, first appears in the writings of Lenin.

<sup>6</sup> See *Cynical Theory*, by Pluckrose and Lindsay, page 38, (brackets mine).

## **2: Surveillance society**

Conservative evangelical churches are on a collision course with the agenda of the Social Justice movement.

We believe in God the Creator, Genesis 1.1, who has given mankind freedom to live within the limits of various norms which he built into the world from the beginning. These things were written into the human conscience. But according to Social Justice theory norms for humanity are the root of inequality and therefore must be destroyed and conscience relegated to the status of just another cultural construct.

The Social Justice movement desires a revolution which will root out all the old ways of thinking and those who hold to them. Such people must be identified. Therefore, surveillance becomes a critical tool of this revolution.

### **Underground Christianity**

During the days of the 20<sup>th</sup> century totalitarian regimes, the churches had to go underground in an attempt to avoid drawing attention to themselves and subsequent persecution, Matthew 10.21-23.

This was not simply a strategy of the church. Writing of ordinary citizens in Stalin's USSR, Orlando Figes says: 'In a society where it was thought that people were arrested for loose tongues, families survived by keeping to themselves. They learned to live double lives, concealing from the eyes and ears of dangerous neighbours, and sometimes even from their own children, information and opinions, religious beliefs, family values and traditions...that clashed with Soviet public norms'.<sup>7</sup> They were in fear of being found to have said something 'politically incorrect'.

The great difference between now and the 20<sup>th</sup> century is the surveillance potential of today's digital technology and the internet. Thankfully, Social Justice advocates do not yet govern these powerful tools. But we need to be aware of the direction in which things are moving.

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<sup>7</sup> *The Whispers: private life in Stalin's Russia* by Orlando Figes, Penguin 2008, page xxxii

## **Big brother is watching**

Companies like Google, Facebook and Amazon are inexorably moving towards knowing far too much about us.<sup>8</sup>

In 1998 Google became an incorporated company with a laudable mission to liberate information and make it available worldwide. But as people searched the web, they left their own digital fingerprints. For example, in addition to key words, each Google search query produces a wake of collateral data such as the number and pattern of search terms, how the query is phrased, spelling, punctuation, dwell times, click patterns and location. To begin with this extra information was stored but ignored. It was a young Stanford University graduate, Amit Patel, who it seems, first saw that, using the statistical methods of behavioural science, this ‘accidental’ information could be put to use. He concluded that detailed stories about each user – thoughts, feelings, interests – could be constructed from the wake of every online transaction. This information could be sold to those selling products online. It helps to know your customers.

The future possibilities as the technology advances are frightening. Artificial intelligence can pick up on behaviours which elude the computer user’s own mind. Given enough data it can predict how a person will react to different situations. This ability easily slides over into seeking to modify and even control an individual’s belief and behaviour as the relevant personalized stimuli are placed on the screen before them.

This technology, reminiscent of the two-way screens in the home in George Orwell’s classic dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, is something a totalitarian regime would love to get its hands on in order to monitor and control the population. The internet provides the makings of an all-seeing ‘Big Brother’ for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Many Christians and churches have bought into the new technology without giving it much thought. We assumed that convenience is a greater priority than privacy. But now is the time we must ask ourselves some questions.

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<sup>8</sup> See for example, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: the fight for a human future at the new frontier of power*, by Shoshona Zuboff, Profile Books, 2019

## Capitalism and influence

Despite promises of government safeguards, people's personal information is bought and sold between businesses. At present this information is generally used to market products which will commend themselves to targeted personalities. But there are signs that things are changing.

In his book, *Live Not By Lies*, Rod Dreher asks: 'Why should corporations and institutions not use the information they harvest to manufacture consent to some beliefs and ideologies and to manipulate the public into rejecting others?'<sup>9</sup> The idea would be, for example, 'you cannot use our online banking unless you sign up to our code of ethics.'

And pressure is being applied to companies to try to make sure this happens. If a company is seen not to sign up to Social Justice doctrines then it often faces a storm of social media protest from activists and withdrawal of endorsements from celebrities, which might well devastate the balance sheet. Consumer power and public image has vast influence. This is how the Social Justice movement is beginning to turn the screw and impose its totalitarian vision.

Further, the masters of the internet lean in the direction of Social Justice. The journalist and author, Douglas Murray, writes: 'As anybody who has spent any time there will know, the political atmosphere of Silicon Valley is several degrees to the left of a liberal arts college. Social justice is assumed to be ...the default setting for all employees in the major companies and most of them, including Google, put applicants through tests to weed out anyone with wrong ideological inclinations. Those who have gone through these tests recount that there are multiple questions on issues to do with diversity – sexual, racial and cultural – and that answering these questions 'correctly' is a prerequisite for getting a job'.<sup>10</sup>

Social Justice is on the road to becoming worldwide 'Google ethics.'

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<sup>9</sup> *Live Not By Lies: A manual for Christian dissidents* by Rod Dreher, Sentinel Books, 2020, page 79

<sup>10</sup> *The Madness of Crowds: Gender, Race and Identity*, by Douglas Murray, Bloomsbury Continuum, 2019, page 110

### **3: Christians as the enemy**

The three classic ingredients of totalitarianism we identified earlier are arguably emerging before our eyes in the Social Justice movement.

- *First*, there is a Utopian vision of the promised future to work towards. This is complete ‘equality’.
- *Second*, there is fanatical loyalty to the values of the cause.<sup>11</sup> The Social Justice agenda is seen as unassailably ‘right’.
- *Third*, there is the identification of ‘the enemy’ against which the movement must fight and seek to eliminate.

These three work together to provide the dynamic and momentum of totalitarianism.

#### **Why totalitarianism needs enemies**

Since Social Justice pursues ‘anti-normalism’ in the quest for equality, any group which believes in certain ‘givens’ or norms for society, become the foe. This includes religious people like traditional Jews, Muslims and Christians and also anyone, even secular people, who still operates within the framework of traditional categories, morality and outlook.

Totalitarianism must have an enemy. It is part of the glue that holds the movement together. It is necessary to the Social Justice cause that we, and people like us, be demonized. So faithful Christians and churches where the Bible and its values are taught should not be surprised if they are targeted, by Social Justice activists, with attempts to take us to court in coming days. It doesn’t matter if you are kind to the poor or are poor yourself, if you do not sign up to the Social Justice agenda, you are the enemy.

George Orwell recognized why totalitarian regimes need an enemy. It gives the regime someone to blame for all the woes of the world and to use to divert attention away from themselves when their ideology fails to deliver. ‘It’s all those repressive Christian ideas that are the trouble!’ Further, in his novel

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<sup>11</sup> In the past this was channeled towards icons of the ‘prophets’ of the revolution – like Lenin or Marx. That has not appeared yet for ‘soft totalitarianism’ and perhaps never will. The dominant images of ‘Big Brother’ are too much associated with hardline 20<sup>th</sup> century totalitarian regimes would be counterproductive. However, the endorsement of the Social Justice agenda by the eye-catching icons of ‘celebrity’ culture may well perform something of the same function.

*Nineteen Eighty-Four*, each citizen is required to join in the daily two minutes of hate in which, following a propaganda film depicting the evils of ‘Emmanuel<sup>12</sup> Goldstein’, citizens should loudly and vehemently express their animosity and abhorrence of this enemy. The hate session was a point of unity for the population.

One cannot but note the parallels which exist between Orwell’s ‘2 minutes hate’ and the bullying, judgmentalism and hate that is currently expressed on social media against anyone who publicly fails to toe the ‘party line’ as required by Social Justice.

### **Why faithful Christians are in the firing line**

Think about it. We believe in God in a society that doesn’t. We trust a God-given, inerrant Bible as teaching us the truth when the postmodernism which sustains Social Justice rejects universal truth and caricatures it as a power play. We believe all people (including ourselves) are sinners in need of salvation in a world which thinks that people are good enough as they are with no need to repent of anything. We preach Christ as the only way of salvation in a society which insists there are many ways to find ‘God’. We believe that male and female are norms for humanity at a time when gender is increasingly accepted as fluid. We stand for male-female marriage when marriage has been redefined. We are pro-life in days when our culture has been subverted to become militantly pro-choice. We believe in male servant-headship in both family and the church, because that is what the Bible teaches, at a time when all authority is seen as oppressive. We believe that the natural family is the building block of society after years in which the norm of family life has been under constant attack. We believe that parents have the right and the responsibility to care and correct and decide on their children’s education, when governments are arrogating that right for themselves. And we could add to that list. Therefore, faithful Christians and Bible-teaching churches must inevitably become targets for the ‘soft totalitarianism’ of Social Justice.

Church leaders and pastors should alert their congregations to what is happening and prepare them to be able to stand through the inevitable coming storm, whatever form that may take.

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<sup>12</sup> I am sure the connotations of the name ‘Emmanuel’, Matthew 1.23, were not lost on Orwell.

## **Persecution and propaganda**

The attack on the churches is twofold. There is both threat and the siren voice of compromise. God's people have faced these things before.

In the days of Daniel, the three friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, were called to worship the golden image that presided over the multi-cultural, inclusive empire of Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon. Failure to do so would mean the fiery furnace, Daniel 4.6. But these brave men refused to worship anything other than the true God. 'If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up,' Daniel 4.17-18. Today's Christians may not face a fiery furnace but just see what happens at your place of work if, for example, you fail to endorse 'rainbow' values or a gay pride march.

Pastors need to be teaching and standing alongside their people who face such threats.

But the ways of totalitarianism include not just the iron fist but the kid glove. There is much done through the secular media to gently sow doubts about Biblical truth and values and to cause Christians to question whether they really need to take a clear stand.

The sexual inclusivism of many TV reports and situation comedies parade the idea of what might be called 'secular grace'. The message is that 'morals are relative, a matter of opinion, we are all aware of our own failures, so we just accept everyone – like grace'. It is almost as if this secular grace is more gracious than God's grace; it not only accepts people as they are, it doesn't try to change them. And even Christians can be left with the impression that by comparison the gospel looks narrow and the church too stiff and starchy.

What these things rarely show you is the damage done, especially to women and children, by the permissive society and the mental health problems it leaves in its wake. And, of course, secular grace is cheap. It costs very little for one imperfect person to cut another imperfect person some slack. But for an all-holy God to legitimately forgive sinners, it took the blood of Calvary, Romans 3.25-26.

Pastor you need to teach and inoculate your people against the oncoming cultural climate.

## 4: Christianity and Common Sense

The Social Justice / Politically Correct agenda has serious repercussions for society. For one thing, even without the climate of fear and threats to dissenters, it leads to the death of logical thought.

Writing in *The Sunday Times* in 1999, the late Professor Roger Scruton foresaw this. He said: “Deconstruction”, “difference”, “gender” – these are terms used to create an area of thought in the absence of thought, and turn out to mean next to nothing...The fact is that debate and rational argument no longer have a central place in the world of the young, and not only because of the sound-bite culture has pushed them aside. Children are taught from an early age not to judge between opinions – to be ‘sensitive’ towards other cultures and other ways of thinking. If all options are equally valid, then none of them really matters – such is the inevitable conclusion of the multicultural and inclusive curriculum.’

### **Foolishness**

In Professor Scruton’s words we hear echoes of St. Paul speaking of those who, claiming to be wise, become fools. Thus, with current calls for ‘justice’ we have witnessed the foolishness of a Nobel Laureate being forced to resign **his** university post because<sup>13</sup> he expressed the thought that he found it easier to work with men than women. Similarly, we feel for the plight of women, alarmed by the idea that men who insist they are women must be allowed to use female washrooms.<sup>14</sup> This is the kind of foolishness that ensues when societal norms are discarded.

But more, when children are taught not to engage in discerning thought which reasons ‘this is good but that is better,’ they are wide open to manipulation and brainwashing by totalitarian ideology. Their mental defences have been breached. Good is evil and evil is good, Isaiah 5.20.

But by contrast to the perverse thinking engineered by Social Justice advocates, ordinary people tend to have a default setting of what we call ‘common sense’. For example, they can see that men are not women. They know that only male-female marriage can produce a natural family etc. In fact, ‘common sense’ goes back to creation and matches a Christian worldview.

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<sup>13</sup> See *The Guardian*, 13 June, 2015

<sup>14</sup> See for example, *The Guardian*, 3 October, 2018

## **The God who makes sense**

The Lord Jesus, the word of God, John 1.1, is the true light that lights every human being who comes into the world, John 1.9. The one through whom the world was made is the one who alone makes sense of the world. So it is that the basic tenets of Christian theology lead us to the viability of human thought and rationality. Let's briefly sketch this out under 7 headings.

- *The existence of God*

Genesis 1.1, guarantees the existence of truth. Whether or not we are able to find it, the truth exists, and the truth about any and every person and event, exists in the mind of God. This means that, contrary to the assumptions of postmodernism, the pursuit of truth is a worthwhile exercise. But to deny the existence of God can be likened to rubbing out the axes of truth and error, right and wrong, on the graph of life. We are left with self as our only point of reference and not knowing where we are or which direction is which. Hence the confused state of our benighted world.

- *The faithfulness of God*

Lamentations 3.23, means that God does not change and his truth is therefore not in constant flux. He and the laws which he built into creation are reliable. What was true yesterday will be true tomorrow. Once truth is established, we do not have to constantly rethink everything.

- *The image of God in humanity*

Genesis 1.26, 27, guarantees that we were made with the ability to engage with the real world. Though we may not know the whole truth, as God does, for we are finite not infinite, yet we can know true things because we are like God. We are made, in the astronomer Kepler's words, to 'think God's thoughts after him'. Again, this makes for a 'common sense' approach to life.

- *The revelation of God*

God is the first speaker, Genesis 1.3. This means that language is not simply a human construct. God speaks to man and he can understand, Genesis 2.16,17. Language can truly express reality. Adam's naming of the animals, Genesis 2.19, was significant not futile. Adam's recognizing his wife as a woman, Genesis 2.23, equal with him as a human being in God's image but different from him, means

that he is able to recognize norms and categories which God has built into the world and has himself differentiated, Genesis 1.27. He can trust his senses. Evidence means something and is not to be ignored. What is more, this means that we can share truth as human beings. Indeed, without shared common truth, democracy itself becomes impossible and meaningless.

- *Our sin against God*

The Fall, Genesis 3.11, has not only meant that our world is now fallen and not as God originally made it, but it has corrupted us as human beings. We have become sinners in need of salvation. There are now deep injustices in the world. But those things can only be put right by returning to God's ways, not by rejecting the structures which God built into the world. Sin has made us all prone to selfishness and being self-righteous. Common sense tells us that we can't simply divide the world into 'good' people and 'bad' people as Social Justice tends to do – those 'for' and those 'against'. We all have our faults, weaknesses and blind spots.

- *The love of God*

This is a constant theme in Scripture. God is love and he expects us to love one another, Mark 12.29-31. God has shown us what real love is through the death of Jesus for our sins, 1 John 3.16. But Social Justice theory paints a contrary and very bleak picture of human relationships. It would see every human interaction in terms of power and manipulation on the part of one person or the other or both. Every relationship is viewed through cynical eyes. There is no room for true altruism and love or even real romance. Under this regime our world is becoming a grim and joyless place. But common sense tells us that there are such things as love and kindness which are not to be deliberately misunderstood and denigrated but valued. The Good Samaritan was not on an ego trip when he helped the man who had been beaten up, Luke 10.30-37. In fact he was expressing something of the love of God.

- *The power of God*

This shows us that there is such a thing as the benevolent use of power. God used his power to create us, sustain us and save us. It is good power, Psalm 145.6,7. Social Justice requires an absolute equality for everyone and sees all imbalances of power as detrimental. But God has built structure and authority into the world for mutual blessing. He has given authority within the family and

the state. The strong and those in authority are meant to use their power for the good of those who are weaker. The weak can rejoice in this. For example, we are so glad when doctors and nurses who have knowledge and powers beyond us tend to our needs. And the medics can feel worthwhile and find joy in service and being useful to others. And indeed, those medics, who are weak in another area, say having no ability in the area of auto maintenance, can be blessed when the mechanic, who perhaps they treated in hospital, fixes their car. This is true and helpful diversity.

All this and more gives the foundation for a common sense view of life.<sup>15</sup> It is good for Christians to know that in the problems we are likely to face in coming years common sense is on our side.

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<sup>15</sup> For a more thorough explanation of how Christianity provides the basis for logical thought and a common sense view of the world see, for example, *He is there and he is not silent*, by Francis Schaeffer, in *The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer*, Crossway Books, 1982, volume 1, page 275.

## 5: How can pastors help the churches?

Our world faces a number of problems which require global solutions.

The ongoing crisis with respect to man-made climate change springs to mind. Again, the calamity of poverty in many countries while the rich continually get richer, can only be thoroughly addressed through worldwide action.<sup>16</sup> We think too of the recent coronavirus pandemic which swept across the planet. And the Social Justice movement does its best to piggy-back on such issues and to present itself as a 'new morality' which will be part of the answer to such difficulties and therefore should be adopted across the world.

But while it will engage itself in various countries for things like LGBT rights and condemn national governments where laws oppose such lifestyles, at the same time its advocates strive to de-platform and silence those who disagree with their own agenda. Social Justice only wants freedom for people to say what it wants said. This is a classic mark of totalitarianism.

### **Trouble coming**

Indeed, China has begun to use methods, very like those we have outlined, to control its vast population and conform it to their current Communist ideology. There is a vast machinery of surveillance and a system of 'social credit' in which individuals are assigned points based on what is known of their behaviour. Those who fail to conform are not even allowed to ride on public transport. Churches are kept under surveillance. Many have to meet secretly. Pastors are arrested. In China it is now illegal to teach the gospel to children.

Social Justice is not old-fashioned Communism. However, a number of thinkers have already identified it as 'cultural Marxism'<sup>17</sup> and, as we have seen, it is in close cahoots with the surveillance giants of the internet.

Maybe such things could never happen in the West. But maybe they could. However, what is certain is that the church will not be helped by simply sticking its head in the sand and carrying on pretending that we still live in the 1980s. We don't. Like it or not the world is changing and Christians must wake up.

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<sup>16</sup> Interestingly, the Social Justice movement rarely seems to have directly addressed the subject of poverty.

<sup>17</sup> See for example *That Hideous Strength: How the West was Lost – the cancer of cultural Marxism in the church and the world*, by Melvin Tinker, EP books, 2018

As this movement gains increasing control over our culture, trouble inevitably awaits faithful Christians and churches. Without being alarmist, we should be asking ourselves what pastors and preachers can be do to prepare God's people for the future? This question is particularly pressing in the West. In other parts of the world the church knows what it is like to be persecuted. We don't.

### **Forward thinking leaders**

Understandably Christian leaders like to plan for the growth of the church. But the time has come to think how the churches can survive and prosper in a much harsher cultural and spiritual climate than we are used to.

Pastors must, of course, think these things through for themselves, but let me suggest a 7-fold package of Biblical ideas we might want to get our churches to take more seriously than they have done before.

- *Alerting the congregation*

The apostle Paul warns of 'terrible times' for the church in the last days, 2 Timothy 3.1. He describes the kind of society from which such troubles for the church will emerge, and what he describes looks very like our society, 2 Timothy 3.2-5. During such periods every true Christian will face persecution, 2 Timothy 3.12. Our congregations may find it difficult to receive such teaching. It will not make you popular. But pastor, be brave enough to alert your people to what is going on and what is likely to come – because you care for their souls.

- *Prizing truth*

False teachings, both secular and religious, influence society during these predicted 'terrible times'. Those behind the mischief are described as unable to acknowledge the truth, 2 Timothy 3.7, and as those who 'oppose the truth,' 2 Timothy 3.8. All totalitarian systems are built on seemingly convenient lies. Before all else, the job of the Christian is to prize the truth. Therefore we must continue to teach the Bible to the church. And all truth is God's truth, not just the gospel, because he is Lord of all. Living by truth is the first way to resist all enforced ideologies, including Social Justice. Christians need to be reminded of this and what it means in practice.

- *Teaching about persecution*

Because it is many years since Christians in the West have suffered real persecution, pastors and preachers have tended to neglect this area of Bible teaching. But it is time for pastors to dust it off and put such teaching unashamedly front and centre once again. In particular, it would be good to focus on what the Lord Jesus himself taught in passages like Mark 13.9-13 and John 15.18-16.4. The book of Revelation was partly written with the intent of preparing Christians for persecution. Again, 1 Peter was penned for persecuted churches with the exhortation that they should not be surprised at the fiery trial they are suffering, as though something strange were happening to them, 1 Peter 4.12.

- *Going underground*

Up until now we have been understandably very keen for our churches to have a profile in our communities and to be known by everyone. But when persecution comes often the church needs to go underground and meet in secret, 1 Kings 17.2,3; Mark 13.14,15. It is time to think through what that could look like in today's society. How can you pastor an underground church where it is difficult for people to meet? How does a pastor continue to teach the flock under such circumstances? The time may well come when we need to rethink our church's engagement with the internet which makes surveillance of our activities so comparatively simple.

- *Small groups and families*

Personal support is best done in small groups where people are able to talk truthfully. Even large churches know this. If persecution comes in some form, not only do small groups draw less attention but Christians will need the close support that small groups can give. The 'one another' commands of the New Testament come into their own via intimate fellowship. Confidentiality is key. Is it time for leaders to be strengthening the small group life of their churches? And it is worth bearing in mind that, historically, under persecution, sometimes Christians have only been able to 'meet' in their own families. Is it time to reinvigorate family worship among Christians? 'As twenty-first-century Christians, we are driven back by a militant intolerance of Bible truth and those who adhere to it. Maybe a time will come where family culture will be the only place where we preserve gospel truth and pass on the baton'.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *The Fruitful Home: creating a gospel culture for family life*, by Ann Benton, 10Publishing, 2019, page125.

- *Taking opportunities*

Under circumstances where the gospel is publicly suppressed evangelism has to be personal evangelism. It is interesting that the New Testament speaks to ordinary Christians in terms of taking opportunities rather than making opportunities to share the good news of Jesus, Ephesians 5.15; Colossians 4.5; 1 Peter 3.15. A new understanding of this and how to sense what the Holy Spirit is doing as we look to make Christ known individually would be helpful.

- *Praying always*

When the early church first began to suffer persecution, their immediate response was to pray, Acts 4.23, 24; Acts 12.5. As we move into more difficult times, pastors cannot allow themselves and their people to be comparative strangers to the place of prayer. Prayer is the church's mighty secret weapon in times of trouble.

We believe that always Jesus will have the ultimate victory. His church will be built despite all that the 'gates of hell' can contrive, Matthew 16.18. So, we face the future in faith. But we should prepare and use the means which our Master has put at our disposal.

## **6: The Lord encourages us**

The prospect of persecution is, of course, not something we should relish. In a sense, I really hope I'm totally wrong about the consequences of 'soft totalitarianism' for the church which have been sketched out in this booklet.

However, if some kind of crackdown on Bible Christians and faithful churches is coming our way in the next few years then we need to remember that we are not on our own. The Lord Jesus has said, 'I am with you always, to the very end of the age', Matthew 28.20. That includes the twenty-first century. He has promised his people, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you', Hebrews 13.5 and our response can be legitimately to say to ourselves, 'The Lord is my help; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?' Hebrews 13.6.

### **The Lord and the Spirit**

Moreover, the Lord promises special help for his people when they face criticism and threats from the courts. The advocates of Social Justice appear so adept in their use of words and their political know how. But we will know the Lord's presence with us, 2 Timothy 4.16, 17. Here is a promise of our Lord Jesus Christ which we can hold on to: 'Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit', Mark 13.11.

We can rely on the Lord to give us the strength we need at the time we need it. Here's an example: John Lennox, until recently a professor of mathematics at Oxford University, used to travel behind the Iron Curtain in the days of Communism.

He writes of meeting a man who had been detained in a Siberian labour camp for the crime of teaching children from the Bible. 'He described to me (says Lennox) how he had seen things no man should see. I listened, thinking how little I really knew about life, and wondering how I would have fared under his circumstances. As if he read my thoughts he suddenly said: "You couldn't cope with that could you?" Embarrassed, I stumbled out something like: "No, I'm sure you are right." He grinned and said: "Nor could I! I was a man who fainted at the sight of his own blood, let alone that of others. But what I discovered in the labour camp was this: God does not help us face theoretical situations but real ones. Like you, I couldn't imagine how one could cope in the Gulag. But once

there I found that God met me, exactly as Jesus promised his disciples when he was preparing them for victimization and persecution.”<sup>19</sup>

### **Blessing amid the trouble**

Not only will the Lord sustain us but we often find that amid troubles, God’s people know deep spiritual enrichment. So it’s not all bad. We think of Paul and Silas singing praises to God while in prison in Philippi, Acts 16.25. And the Lord intervened in a remarkable way bringing about the conversion of the jailer and his family.

So though coming days could be frightening and dangerous, let’s keep things in perspective. The Lord Jesus said, ‘Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you’, Matthew 5.11, 12.

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<sup>19</sup> *Against the tide: the inspiration of Daniel in an age of relativism*, by John Lennox, Monarch 2017, p.150-151