

THE CHURCH AND POLITICAL IDEOLOGY

(How Christians May Respond To the Failure of Conservatism, Liberalism and Socialism)

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1 Corinthians 2:6,

'we speak wisdom among them that are mature: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nothing' (KJV, slightly updated)

A Trio of Ideologies

A cause of great controversy is latent within the Church today, namely the relationship between Christianity and the three Political ideologies of Conservatism, Liberalism and Socialism. Within the United Kingdom, all three ideologies have been viewed with public displeasure since the 1970s. Evidence for this has been provided in the declining turnout in succeeding general elections. A reassessment of both the nature and degree of involvement the Church has with each one will now be made. The facts gleaned from this should prove of value to Christian readers with a political interest.

Those who are true to the teachings of scripture and the traditions of the Early Church would reaffirm that it is right for Christians to be keenly concerned about social issues. Christ never wished for any of us to be so preoccupied with our own inward looking piety, that we ignored the rights and needs of our fellow human beings. However, when viewing the Church as an organisational body, its approach to social affairs has been less than ideal. Indeed, its ability to carry out its own unique ministry has gradually diminished. Throughout its recent history the way of Christ has become mistaken for that of the Conservative, Liberal or Labour party. It has become lost in a jungle of bitter controversy - largely because each Political ideology is by nature divisive. The Church has become caught up in infighting and intrigue and has largely lost its role as impartial peacemaker. In Particular, much of the Church of England has, since the 1960s, moved from being *'the Conservative Party at prayer'* to being *'the Labour Party without prayer.'* Neither form of subservience does anything to enhance the Gospel.

In addition to being divisive all three ideologies are seriously flawed as individual systems of thought. Each takes an aspect of Biblical truth and exaggerates it whilst denying other equally important aspects. By claiming to have the answer to just about every social ill, the ideologies may be compared to three stage conjurors each claiming to cause the white rabbit to spring from that upturned hat. They are all united in this euphoric optimism - having similar groundless beliefs in man's own capacity to achieve enduring personal or collective fulfilment, without any reference to spiritual values. This is because each ideology stems from an identical root - the materialistic, anti-religious, man-centred worldview of Secular Humanism. Assuming a separate identity in the Renaissance, this type of humanism grew to maturity in the eighteenth century *'Enlightenment'* before reaching a zenith of influence in the second half of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries. From the Renaissance onwards, European culture was beginning to spill over to dominate the rest of the World. However, before explaining this point any further, the strengths and weaknesses of all three main Political ideologies will now be reviewed. Being – for reasons of space – somewhat simplistic, the following description will virtually ignore the many subdivisions existing within each ideology. Nevertheless, it's hoped that a general guide will have been given.

Conservatism has a tendency to stress allegiance, patriotism, the family and individualism. It takes a cynical attitude toward human nature when it asserts that people are basically acquisitive

and competitive. However, it is hopelessly romantic when it assumes that such greed makes for either personal contentment or social stability. Here, the U.S.A springs to mind - whilst being one of the major Capitalist countries in the World, it is also one of the most dangerous in terms of crime and random violence. In its more purely ideological form Conservatism callously ignores the existence of the poor, the weak and the deprived. It makes a god of material success, reinforcing a destructive sense of class superiority and arrogance. The banal trivialities of mass advertising reflect this huge divide between the rich and poor. By creating unrealistic expectations such advertising can increase a sense of alienation. Among the poor especially, this may express itself in violent terms

For its part, Liberalism is very correct, not to say almost Christian in its stress upon tolerance and the need to accept diversity within society. There is also some merit in its case that the passing of legislation by itself does not produce automatic conformity to high moral standards. However, its overoptimistic view of the goodness of man, and its disbelief in firm absolutes of right and wrong have frequently led to a blatant acceptance of evil – abortion being just one example. Also, the maxim of trying to be *'nice to everybody'* has in the past led to the encouragement of some very nasty individuals. Those people with progressive views in the nineteen thirties and forties were apt to favour the benign policies of Joseph Stalin. Enough said! Throughout its history this very tolerance of diversity has caused the Liberal Democratic Party to suffer from a loss of internal coherence. Exactly who they are and what they stand for remains unclear. In British politics this vagueness continues to retard the growth of the Liberal Democratic Party, who seem largely to depend upon the protest vote of those who resent other parties.

In its turn, there is much to favour Socialism's emphasis upon the need for justice, concern for the poor, and the fact that man is not just an isolated individual, but a member of a wider *'collective unit.'* However, its total blindness to man's capacity for evil tips it into the error of Utopianism, (the belief that man, by his own efforts, can build a completely just society – a heaven on earth). As examples from Medieval Millennial movements through to North Korean Communism show, such attempts usually create a bloodbath – often at the hands of some fanatical Totalitarian regime. The road to an imaginary utopia is often paved with many corpses. Another concern is its stress upon class conflict, which only encourages a loutish backbiting envy squeezing out individual freedom and leads to intolerant self-righteousness. The hate-filled behaviour of many delegates at various Labour Party Conferences during the 1980s did nothing to generate faith in man's ability to build a classless paradise. At best, genuine attempts at reform have led only to an increase in the power of centralized government due to the establishment of mammoth bureaucracies. These in their very inefficiency have failed to meet the needs of the people they have originally claimed to help. The *'tax and spend'* policies favoured by successive Labour governments all too often become *'tax and waste'* policies. Perhaps it's fate of Prime Minister Blair and his Chancellor Gordon Brown to test such policies to destruction. Under them state regulation has been extended until the point that it's rapidly reaping diminishing returns. They highlight the point that Socialists cannot run a modern economy without destroying the centres of wealth creation. Moreover, by ignoring the Christian doctrine of original sin, it's perhaps inevitable that Socialism in its more militant Marxist forms results in the horrors of the Gulag. Believers in Christ, with even the slightest degree of political awareness should question the validity of such a philosophy, which within a few short decades has produced the mass killer regimes of Stalin, Mao and Pol Pot. As Jesus himself warned in Matthew 7.20 *"by their fruits ye shall know them."*

Perhaps fortunately for the United Kingdom, these ideologies have not been implemented in their purest form. Confronted by the harsh realities of trying to stay in *'Office'* a succession of governments have tended to trim their principles in order to pander to the popular vote. Also external economic pressures have forced compromise, e.g. a *'run on the pound,'* poor trade figures and inflationary pressures. With typical British genius for muddled compromise, the United Kingdom has, since the war, often been run on a semi-Socialist economy, with Conservative rhetoric and Liberal principles. However, this has not been so in many Churches. Here, freedom from the duties of civic power has allowed all of these ideologies to thrive in their most raw and undigested forms. Regrettably, by absorbing these philosophies in their entirety, the status of

Christianity in the world has been weakened. The proponents of these ideologies have wasted a great deal of time and energy disputing with one another, but the very noise and din of loud controversy has caused the basic message of Christianity – which is that any person can know God, directly through Jesus Christ – to be forgotten. Consequently, at the local congregational level many of the faithful have become alienated, drifting away from the Church because it has not been spiritual enough! Even worse, the undiscerning absorption of these Political ideologies has led to divisiveness and an indication of a basic poverty of thought. Here, the question could well be asked: *“Surely Christian thinkers, with all their Bible-based knowledge should be able to create their own distinct Political philosophy, without being dominated by any one of the secular ideologies current within contemporary society?”*

A sense of urgency is present because all three Political ideologies are in disarray – all having failed to achieve their basic aims of establishing a better society. This has contributed to the formation of an ideological and spiritual vacuum, which anything can fill. Yet this malaise is a reflection of an even deeper crisis, a crisis not of Capitalism nor of Communism, but rather of Secular Humanism.

A Deeper Crisis

Unlike Christianity, Secular Humanism lacks humility in its approach to man. It holds an optimistic view of people as basically good (or at least morally neutral) having the capacity to make them happy and fulfilled, with little or no regard to God. In effect, man is his own idol. Anything to do with spiritual matters is dismissed as unreal. The material realm – that which can be sensed physically or measured scientifically - is the only thing of importance. Yet, Secular Humanism falls down because it ignores the scriptural warning of Matthew 4:4 which reads *“man shall not live by bread alone.”* Furthermore, it displays a British insensitivity in that it encourages people to try the impossible, that is, to make themselves happy without any reference to spiritual values. From this scramble to find happiness stems all forms of idolatry - including the latest gimmicks of consumer capitalism or the shady perks in *‘Party’* hierarchy. By diverting people from following the one true God, (as revealed in scripture and buttressed by tradition) Secular Humanism has been exceedingly damaging in its effects. This can be seen in all three Political ideologies, each having pandered to the motivations of greed, self-indulgence and envy, with their hollow promises of ready-made solutions to every social ill. However, this is where they have all failed, for Conservatism, Liberalism and Socialism have not delivered (and never will) on their promises, and by not meeting the expectations they once so fervently incited, an ever-increasing cynicism about their claims is all that has remained. All three can be compared to withered branches attached to a decaying tree trunk (itself representing an over optimistic view of human nature) and rooted in the contaminated soil of Secular Humanism. Like the lifeless branches, the present Political ideologies can do nothing but wither.

A Christian Political Philosophy

However, vastly different from this is Christianity, which views man as a sinful, fallible mortal creature, prone to self-deception and evil doing and constantly in need of divine grace to achieve anything of lasting value. Furthermore, the ravages of original sin have ensured that mankind is capable of vast destruction once certain social and spiritual restraints have been removed. Sadly, this means that inside every person lies a caged beast waiting to go on the rampage. Social progress should it take place at all, happens slowly and painfully with many setbacks on the way, whilst true, stable happiness is to be found only in God. From a realistic viewpoint, Christianity is actually far more radical than any man-made Political Ideology. It really gets to the root of man’s problem (which is sin) and also challenges the secular humanistic world-view for its deliberate ignorance of spiritual considerations for the sake of material gain. Indeed, one of the greatest attractions of Christianity is its realistic view of human nature; therefore denying God will never solve man’s problems – it only lead to a greater inability to deal with them.

It should now be clear that any new Christian Political Philosophy must build upon the Biblical view – not the inadequate Secular view of Man and existence (nor the increasingly prevalent Neo-Pagan New Age view). At its very best such intellectual spadework can represent one proper application of Christ's command to act as *'light'* in this world of fallen humanity, (Matthew 5:13-16). More practically, any such Christian Philosophy will be an exercise in damage limitation, in that it will actually suggest ways to curb the effects of original sin.

However, it must be admitted that such a philosophy will only be implemented in the most complete form after Christ's return to reign on earth. Before that momentous event Christians with an interest in Politics can at least give some idea of what such a philosophy would entail. This article did not set out to provide practical guidelines nor write a detailed manifesto. Rather its main aim was to expose the limitations of the three present Secular Humanist based ideologies and to point out the need for a coherent Christian political alternative. It also assumed that the failure of these ideologies could contribute to the formation of a dangerous vacuum, which may then be filled by a satanic based New World Order, which will attempt unite both the political and the religious realms. Here, it must be noted that the devil is always quick to capitalise on human failings.

In the meantime, many Christians should stop indiscriminately absorbing these incorrectly based ideologies, which have served only to bring ruin upon this world and may, even now, be paving the way for a global totalitarianism. Already, far too many well-meaning believers have ended up being second hand Conservatives, vague minded Liberals or dilettante Socialists in their Political views. Those in such a position would do well to ask themselves: *"Why waste time scrounging the stale crumbs of Secular Humanism, when in Jesus we already have the real bread of life, who has promised to meet all of our needs?"* Why indeed?

Summary

This article has argued that: -

- 1)** All three Political ideologies of Conservatism, Liberalism and Socialism are in disarray – having failed to achieve their basic aims of establishing a better society. This has contributed to the formation of an ideological and spiritual vacuum, which anything could fill.
- 2)** This malaise is a reflection of an even deeper crisis in Secular Humanism, which lacks humility in its approach to mankind. It also results in the dismissal of spiritual considerations when approaching social problems.
- 3)** Any new Christian Political Philosophy must build upon a Biblical rather than an inadequate Secular view of human nature and existence. Although such a philosophy will only be fully implemented after Christ's return, Christian's with an interest in Politics can give some idea of what such a philosophy would entail.
- 4)** In the meantime, Christians should stop indiscriminately absorbing incorrectly based political ideologies, whose failure might pave the way for a global totalitarianism.