**The Free Society: Its Enemies and Friends**

**or: How Should We Then Live?**

Christian faith is often seen as an obstacle for freedom, while political ideologies usually claim to stand for liberation. This popular view has, however, frequently been challenged. The philosopher Karl Popper criticized political ideologies on the basis of their irrationality while the Christian Theologian Francis Schaeffer argued that a society needs a Christian foundation to maintain freedom without chaos. Today, we have convincing empirical data on the death toll of various ideologies and regimes and also on the correlation of personal freedom and wealth. Remarkably, political ideologies who claim to stand for liberation, justice, and equality are foremost in moralizing and emotionalizing political debates and thus block the way to constructive solutions. In addition, they have proven to be most detrimental for personal freedom and economic success and are thus enemies of a free society, while Christian faith lays the basis for personal freedom and prosperity and is thus a friend of a free society. However, many Christians are unaware of the deception that comes along with certain ideologies and are thus unwillingly supporting the decline that goes along with their implementation. It is therefore necessary not only to realize their detrimental effects but also to discover the contributions Christians can make to maintain or strengthen a free and stable society.

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1. **The Free Society and Its Enemies**
   1. The grand ideologies of the 20th century

The 20th century suffered from two terrible ideologies: National-Socialism and (International-) Socialism/ Communism. The contrast between these ideologies is usually depicted in a simple left-right-schema, but the methods of terror and numbers of victims are comparable. The work of R. J. Rummel (1932-2014), author of *Death by Government* [[1]](#endnote-1), shows that “Democide”, the killing of unarmed people by regimes or governments, adds up to about 170 Mio. victims including 110 Mio. by communist or socialist regimes. S. Courtois et al. describe the horrors of communist regimes and states about 95 Mio. victims of communism although differing in detail of the numbers.[[2]](#endnote-2) In addition to democide, Rummel states 34 Mio. people killed by direct war actions with both sides being armed. With more than 200 Mio. people killed by various regimes with various ideologies, and more than 95% of them killed by totalitarian or autocratic regimes, he comes to the simple conclusion: “Power kills and absolute power kills absolute.” Not the ideology counts, but the amount of power. This agrees well with the warning of Jesus: “You know about the rulers of the nations. They hold power over their people. Their high officials order them around. Don't be like that. Instead, anyone who wants to be important among you must be your servant.” Mt. 20,25-26 (NIRV)

* 1. Karl Marx and his creative (great-)grandchildren

While right-wing ideologies are easily dismissed due to their obviously anti-Christian notions of racism and nationalism, left-wing ideologies seem to be more appealing, even for Christians, as they claim to stand for liberation and justice. At the second look, however, they just follow a different scheme, namely class struggle. Karl Popper (1902-1994), one of the eminent philosophers of the 20th century, described the situation of both as a dominance of ideology and emotions over reason and arguments and termed them a “revolt against reason”.[[3]](#endnote-3) However, Marxists and its ancestors appear to be quite adaptable, both ideological[[4]](#endnote-4) and political[[5]](#endnote-5), even if, as in modern society, the “working class” is not very susceptible for a revolution anymore and hardly anyone evens know the details of Marx’s theories. However, Neo-Marxism adjusted the old ideas to post-war 20th century[[6]](#endnote-6) and set the stage to infiltrate mainstream thinking in a way that nowadays it is close to “immoral” not to think along the pattern they established.

* 1. Ideology as substitute for religion

Striving for “equality”, “justice” and “identity” has achieved a quasi-religious status. People are not primarily seen as individuals but as members of certain classes. People belonging to a minority are victims and those belonging to the majority are guilty and have to support the minorities morally or financially. This support serves as a kind of catharsis and the pattern is nowadays known as “identity politics”. [[7]](#endnote-7) However, no final redemption is achieved, the support has to go on and on. The “new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2. Pet. 3,13) are never achieved. Instead, it is a gospel of guilt.

1. **The Silent Societal Transformation**
   1. The path to a new society where there is justice

The “recipe” to create a new society includes manipulation, propaganda and destabilization. Many of the ingredients of this recipe were or are of course also used by other ideologies. The application and dosage of the ingredients must be adapted to the current conditions and their success depends on the skills of the actors and the favor of the circumstances. For this transformation, it is especially important to create an emotional setting that blocks unwanted arguments right from the start even to the point that the concept of truth is abandoned altogether.[[8]](#endnote-8) Historical evidence such as the numbers of victims provided above have to be suppressed as completely as possible as they jeopardize the impression of the fight for justice and liberation. Particularly in wealthy societies it seems to be easier to maintain an impression of noble motives since most people do not really imagine that their vote for “progressive” ideas may lead to substantial disadvantages. This transformation not only limits economic and personal freedom but targets in particular Christian faith[[9]](#endnote-9), marriage and family[[10]](#endnote-10).

* 1. The result: A shattered society

The efforts described above divide societies by stimulating envy of men against women, young against old, rich against poor and so on. The old working class is replaced by a multitude of classes struggling against each other. If at the same time reason is replaced by emotion, a common basis of understanding is destroyed and society fragments. It’s a loose-loose situation and a revolt not only against reason but also against nature and God.

1. **Democracy – Friends and Foes**
   1. The basis for a free, stable society

The philosopher of law and former member of the German federal constitutional court, Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde (1930–2019), coined the famous phrase: “The liberal, secularized state lives on conditions that it cannot guarantee itself.” A free and stable society requires people who are convinced of moral values, but a secularized state, can by definition, not impose a specific moral or world view on people. The previously generally accepted moral base of Christianity has been the foundation of this stability. This does not even require that most people are Christians, it only requires that most people accept Christian values.

* 1. The benefits of freedom

Economic freedom means to have personal choice, freedom of trade, personal safety and protection of private property. In addition, freedom also include freedom of opinion and belief. These factors obviously heavily depend on the conditions governments impose on their people. Economic freedom is an important factor for economic success, but not only that, it also correlates with increased life expectancy and lower infant mortality, it increases social trust and tolerance.[[11]](#endnote-11) Obviously, persecution of Christians and other minorities goes along with lack of freedom.[[12]](#endnote-12) On the other hand most democracies have Christian roots.

* 1. The friends of freedom

Christians have a responsibility for the society they live in (see e.g. Jer. 29.7), they should respect law and government from their heart and not only as a result of fear (Romans 13, 1-8) and actively support the development of free society by their example. (1. Pt. 2, 13-17). Christians should therefore be friends of a free society, especially of democracy. On the other hand, the exercise of governmental power is limited. It has e.g. no right to demand worship. (Mt. 22, 17-22) or prohibit evangelization (Acts 5, 27-29). In the preamble of the German constitutional law the knowledge of the limitation and terrible abuse of human power in its past is expressed in the famous words: “Consciousness of their responsibility before God and man, […] the German people have given themselves […] this basic [constitutional] law.” However, these roots are more and more cut off in the western world and Christians as well as others experience that relating to this understanding is not self-evident anymore in previously “Christian” countries.

1. **Helping Freedom to Survive**
   1. Think free, speak free, act free

In the western world, a feeling of a limitation of free thought is creeping into the minds of more and more people. “Am I discriminating others by my Christian conviction?” “What right do I have to speak about the gospel in view of the guilt of my fathers considering racism, colonialism, exploitation, the holocaust and other crimes?” Alvin Plantinga, one of the eminent contemporary Christian philosophers said in view of the right of free thinking[[13]](#endnote-13): “So the Christian philosopher has his own topics and projects to think about; and when he thinks about the topics of current concern […], he will think about them in his own way, which may be a different way. He may have to reject certain currently fashionable assumptions […]-he may have to reject widely accepted assumptions […]. And […] the Christian philosopher has a perfect right to the point of view and prephilosophical assumptions he brings to philosophic work; the fact that these are not widely shared outside the Christian […] community is interesting but fundamentally irrelevant.” That is mental freedom for Christians, or as Paul says: “Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” (Ro. 12,2; NIV) It is, however, a long way from the liberation of mind to free speech and action. The famous conformity experiments of Solomon Asch[[14]](#endnote-14) (1907-1996) demonstrated that a single person who tells the truth in a setting where others are instructed to give wrong answers liberates many people to stick to what they recognize as obviously true. From observations such as this one, one can work ones’ way from inner to outer freedom.

* 1. How should we then live?

In his book *How Should We Then Live*?[[15]](#endnote-15) Francis Schaeffer (1912–1984) describes the rise and fall of civilizations as a consequence of them being rooted or not in God. In his less well known book *A Christian Manifesto[[16]](#endnote-16)* he wrestles with the question of how Christians can work against decay and the limits of obedience. He and other have pointed out a number of ways to work as Christians for the benefit of society. These steps may be, apart from praying for governments, helping society to develop, talk and write about the gospel, communicate with politicians in a politically informed way, penetrate and influence society and enter key areas of public opinion. As a consequence, everybody should do as Christ calls him or her to do. If we do not shape society, others will. So do not bury your talents!

1. **On the Crossroad between Freedom and Chaos**

We may be living in a critical transition period! In many countries, formal law is still on the side of Christian freedom, the understanding of law, practice and social “mainstream”, however, not any more. Ultimately, we are faced with an alternative: We are going on a path in which living together is more and more subverted by self-appointed guardians of virtue in combination with anarchic or other undemocratically-minded social groups while others abuse high government positions in order to transform society according to ideological categories. Or we go an alternative way in which people, through the power of faith, shape societies in freedom in responsibility before God. The first-mentioned path is the path to utopia, which history has always proven to be a nightmare of bondage, dictatorship, murder and general decline. The other way is that of a new spiritual reformation with the goal of restoring freedom!

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