



Thinking Like a Christian 28th June 2020

Who are we, and do our lives matter? Issues around 'Black Lives Matter'

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

(Revelation 7:9-10)

The modern world is full of the old Christian virtues gone mad. The virtues have gone mad because they have been isolated from each other and are wandering alone.

(GK Chesterton, 'Orthodoxy', 1908)

The brutal murder of George Floyd, and the protests that have resulted under the name of 'Black Lives Matter', has raised very serious issues about what is going on in our society. But these are not only of one kind, and therefore there is great risk of division.

1. The gospel unites races and destroys slavery

The gospel unites races

The gospel destroys slavery

Because man is the image of God

Because our God became a crucified slave

The history of Christianity emphatically bears this out

2. But this is complicated

NOT that there is anything complicated about the murder of George Floyd; nor the fact that racial hatred is a serious sin. Both are horrendous evils. That is simple.

But there is much here which is not simple.

And it all gets more complicated when we look at the leadership, and the nature, of the Black Lives Matter movement

- Of course no-one should disagree with the words! But...
- Why the emphasis on destruction of the past?
- Why the emphasis on destruction of the present?
- Why are the BLM websites not about reconciliation between races, but about antagonism between them?
- And why is there so much on the BLM websites that has nothing to do with race at all?

3. Introducing some dead white men

The Enlightenment: we humans have outgrown God... we can keep the Christian virtues, but we don't need God to tell us what they are.

A Christian view of history

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Georg Hegel

Belief in the human 'spirit'

Hegel came up with the idea that the human spirit is on a journey of continual improvement to a glorious future. It works like this:

One idea

vs

→ A battle of ideas → The result: progress!

Another, opposite idea

This happens again and again...



In each case, it is the competition and violent fight which leads to the progress of humanity.

Karl Marx 1818-1883

Marx saw the whole of history as an inevitable progress arising from class warfare.

- All of history is about power and oppression
- Progress comes by the violent overthrow of oppression
- History inevitably proceeds from feudalism to aristocracy to capitalism to communism
- The future is of a perfect communist state, after the total destruction of the capitalist past, when a state of perfect equality of all has been achieved

Marxism really defined the second half of the 20th Century.

- It is totally dependent on Christian ideas – equality, justice, hope for the future.
- It is therefore often driven by genuine compassion and concern for the oppressed (for Marx, this was the European working class)
- But it totally fails because it cuts Christian virtues off from a Christian understanding of humanity – images of God, fallen, redeemed in Christ
- It has been the most murderous and destructive of all of the ideas of Hegel's children (though European nationalism, including Fascism, has also been pretty bad)

Economic/class – based Marxism has failed.

But 'Identitarian Marxism' is still very much flourishing.

- Marx's classes have been replaced by 'identities' defined not by economics – or by nation or ancestry – but by experiences and feelings.
 - e.g. 'Women' – not defined by nature but by experiences (2nd wave feminism) or by feelings (transgenderism)
 - LGB – Not our nature (male and female) but our desires
 - Race – not really about our actual ancestry but about experiences again (and some are beginning to say, feelings)
- These identities are not considered something to be overcome, but definitive of who we are. So much that none can presume to understand others ('I can't comment on that because I'm not a woman/gay/black...')
- 'Intersectionality' further cuts and dices people based on these things
- History now is the story – and almost nothing but the story – of how these identities have fought and oppressed each other.
- Progress as a society can only be made by a battle between the different identities. Therefore identitarian conflict is a *good* thing.
- Achieving the final state to which history is heading will only come about by tearing down the past as much as possible, so as to leave a blank slate which can be filled in.

This is what is going on with the whole 'Woke' movement. And BLM – the organisation and its leaders, that is – are very much driven by this agenda.

4. A Christian response

A Christian response *must* be nuanced. We cannot be simply for or against. We have a situation where one real, terrible, cultural evil (racial hatred) is providing fuel to drive another real, terrible, cultural evil (Identitarian Marxism, which ironically increases racial hatred, among other things). Christianity provides the only answer to *both*.

- 'Partiality' (Colossians 3:25; James 2:1-7) is a grievous sin, which Christians must oppose wholeheartedly
- Therefore we must take care to examine ourselves for how we have been, and still are, prone to act in ungodly ways based on race.
- Our hope is not in war and conflict – between classes or races or other identities – but through the peace which Christ brings between us (Eph 2:11-22)
- Equality alone is a virtue gone mad. True unity and equality is found in Christ
- There will be no human progress other than in submission to and trust in Christ
- Progress is not in asserting our rights and accusing others but in repenting ourselves and forgiving others
- Christ redeems the past, he does not destroy it – we don't worship our ancestors, but neither are we to despise them
- We must demonstrate to the world that we are by far the most multi-ethnic, united-across-nations-and-cultures body of people in the world. We already are that; let's rejoice in it and pray for us to become so even more.

'In Christ there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.' (Colossians 3:11).