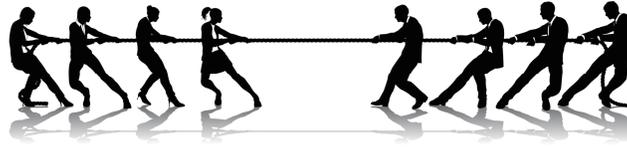


Looking for and Finding the Harmony of Life:
A few Thoughts about Ideology versus Orthodox Christianity



By Calvin Best • 12/26/17

First, what is ideology? Here's a helpful definition from Merriam-Webster from the Internet:

1: visionary theorizing

2 a) a systematic body of concepts especially about human life or culture;
b) a manner or the content of thinking characteristic of an individual, group, or culture; **c)** the integrated assertions, theories, and aims that constitute a sociopolitical program

My position is that ideology is often a way of thinking that underpins a mindset, paradigm, or worldview that involves "isms." The latter is a suffix that we see added to the end of a word, often a verb, in order to generate concept nouns such as communism, racism, utopianism, and so on.

What, then, is an "ism?" From dictionary.com:

[It is] a suffix appearing in loanwords from Greek, where it is used to form action nouns from verbs (baptism); on this model, used as a productive suffix in the formation of nouns denoting action or practice, state or condition, principles, doctrines, a usage or characteristic, devotion or adherence, etc. (*criticism; barbarism; Darwinism; despotism; plagiarism; realism; witticism; intellectualism*)

With these definitions in mind, we can see, then, that an action verb such as criticize can become the noun criticism. An athlete could make these statements:

1. My coach will criticize my performance after football practice.
2. His criticism is often helpful to me and to the team.

In the first sentence, criticize is a verb, and it is transitive in that it requires the object “performance” to complete its meaning. In the second example, what was a verb is now utilized as a subject and noun. The “ism” or suffix causes that shift, but criticism also has an expanded, conceptual meaning such as we see in these sentences.

1. Literary criticism can be difficult to appreciate fully but a necessary tool in college for English majors.
2. Literary criticism can be helpful concerning the understanding of an author’s novel.

In these examples, criticism is more than just a regular, everyday noun. It serves as a concept noun in that it indicates an ideological use of the term concerning a school of thought. Literary criticism, in other words, is a complex system of techniques and practices that critics employ to study, evaluate, and explicate works of fiction. Deconstructionism, for instance, is a type of literary criticism and by definition an ideology.

My contention is that Christianity cannot be an ideology such as “criticism” or any other ism because isms are a way of looking at the world and all people and things in it through ideas or mindsets that are predicated much more upon abstraction than experience. What do I mean? Let’s say for purposes of discussion that we know a woman who is a racist. That woman maintains positions about people who are racially different from her that we

would categorize as falling under the umbrella of racism. We can look up racism and quickly see that it is a negative and non-inclusive mindset or ideology, and most of us would say a bad one. Why?

Nowadays in the 21st Century, most of us know and work with people who are, at least to some degree, different from us in terms of race and/or ethnicity. That does not trouble most of us at all. That's a good, inclusive condition, but why is that now the case even in West Central Texas when just a generation ago or less it certainly was not the situation? Racial segregation was an understood and valued way of life for hundreds of thousands of people and even millions of people nationally. What changed?

For many reasons people in West Central Texas and all throughout the United States became tremendously less racist during the latter part of the 20th Century because there was an amalgamated pressure to look at people through merit and kindness rather than through stereotypes and malicious indifference. Here's what I believe actually happened. First, and as indicated earlier, an ideology is most often based on abstractions that are well outside of experience; therefore, they are intellectual more than physical or real. As people began to work alongside and even befriend people who were racially and/or ethnically different from themselves, they began to experience first-hand that there was nothing to fear. A paradigm shift happened whereby people moved from abstract, preconceived typecasts to actual and routine experiences, and the latter always trump intellectual understandings because experience is what we know to be true rather than what we think may be the case.

Eventually, but in a relatively brief period of time, people who held inflexible, negative ideas about other people modified their thinking because their experiences informed them that their preconceived notions were in error if not in truth imaginary. Psychologists and academics often

call that condition cognitive-emotional dissonance, and that is something we all dislike because it makes us uneasy. The truth is that intellectual abstractions, when illuminated by reality, evaporate like a bad, circuitous dream.

Christianity, by comparison, is not just another political ideology such as socialism because it is not predicated upon abstraction. Why?

1. Orthodox Christians experience authentic character reformation or personality and behavioral transformation through conforming themselves to Christ's directives from the Sermon on the Mount or the Beatitudes in conjunction with the Ten Commandments and other Biblical principles. This practice takes years of sincere effort but yields magnificent results. This process is what causes one to move from being a "natural," unregenerate man or woman to a regenerate one. The change is strikingly obvious.
2. Orthodox Christians, as a result of the points in number one, experience the pull of Irresistible Grace through the Holy Spirit; that may sound abstract, but it is actually one of the most identifiable, powerful forces in Christendom.
3. Orthodox Christians engage in regular worship at church. They do so in fellowship with others. Worship is experiential and collaborative - active more than passive, especially in smaller congregations where people know each other and where more people participate in some kind of leadership role.
4. Orthodox Christians dynamically engage in prayer, privately and with others, and will testify that they have experienced in themselves and seen in others the positive results of prayer.

5. Orthodox Christians engage in Biblical study and explication on an ongoing basis, furthering their understanding of Christ's Kingdom and their responsibilities to it.
6. Orthodox Christians know that fallen, sinful people pollute the world spiritually, emotionally, and politically with specific sins and because of their overall non-regenerate state of sin. That condition creates an overall moral and ethical state of incongruence within society, culture, and interpersonal relationships, and it is the driving force behind personality dysfunction and compartmentalization.
7. Orthodox Christians also understand evil to be the specific work of Satan and complex demon possession in general. Orthodox Christians understand that wicked, malevolent forces work against goodness and Christ in this world within the regular, day-to-day world of Newtonian Physics. Many veteran, orthodox Christians have experienced demonic forces first-hand and know them to be real and destabilizing and not simply matters of mental illness or mythological holdovers from an earlier, unenlightened time. Said another way, orthodox Christians understand there really and truly is such a thing as spiritual warfare and that the latter is not a metaphorical device to explain away human ignorance and stupidity.
8. Moreover, many if not most orthodox Christians study seriously the secular forces of the world that argue against Christianity such as Darwinism, Naturalism, Atheism, and so on. Having done their homework, orthodox Christians know why they will stake their lives on their Christian Faith in Christ Jesus!

Ideology can actually be an imaginary state of mind with little if any connection to reality. When in doubt, we should all look to our experiences in life rather than to ideologies, and we should look to our elders and/or those with extensive experiences concerning whatever the matter is but especially when the issue at hand involves isms. A true authority on something is not necessarily a person who holds a fancy title or who wields considerable power. A real authority is someone who knows what they are talking about (and more importantly doing) because of their experiences. We should not petition a professional chef to diagnose and fix our car's mechanical issues; moreover, we should not ask the professional mechanic to make a ten layered, beautiful wedding cake.

The great thing about becoming an orthodox Christian is that you, yourself, must do the work with Christ and His Holy Spirit, with the Bible and its serious and sincere study, with other Christians in worship, prayer, and fellowship, and with all of your soul, mind, and spirit. Christianity is actually the very opposite of abstract, intellectualized ideology, as the latter comes and goes with the secular trends of the day and, reflective of the graphic at the top of this essay, is always in an ongoing tug-of-war between itself and other competing ideologies:

Fascism versus Democracy

Federalism versus Local Control & Individual Responsibility

Pluralism versus Elitism

Transgenderism versus Biology

Us versus Them

Our Ism versus Your Ism

Does any of that conflict-dualism sound familiar and inharmonious? Is it not incredibly ironic that the orthodox Christian principles of Dr.

Martin Luther King, Jr. and the overall civil rights movement caused - more than any other 20th Century force - the defeat of legally sanctioned Jim Crow or apartheid laws in the United States that were completely incongruous with the 14th and 15th Amendments? The treatment of minorities in America during most of the 20th Century made a mockery of the US Constitution and the Civil War. Christianity, in other words, overcame official and interpersonal racism in the US more than any other force because people conformed themselves to Christian principles by allowing themselves to “experience” other people with an open mind and heart! The contradictions within the United States concerning conflicting racial laws and ideologies just could not hold up under Dr. King’s righteous, public, non-violent campaign against them in the name of peace, love, and Christian integrity.

Ideologies such as racism (and so many others) are often the result of psychological compartmentalization due to sin and the overall incongruous moral condition of Man, causing anger, discord, and mayhem. Christian principles produce actual psychological integrity, generating true peace and harmony, seeking always experience over and above abstraction.

Christ was real, in the flesh, lived and breathed hard reality, performed actual miracles over and above normal processes, was brutally murdered, arose from the dead, defeated death, the Sanhedrin, and Rome, ascended into heaven, and now sits at the right hand of God. Jesus was the only God-Man the world has ever known and the most important figure in all of history (changing permanently the human calendar), with the power to forgive sin, and he clearly communicated to all of earth what we need to do in light of His coming. Christ Jesus is neither an imaginary abstraction nor a trending ideology; rather, He is reality!

Without Christ, human beings are lost, living in hopelessness in the fallen world, chasing after ideologies similar to what we humorously see via the emotional compass showcased in the movie *Pirates of the Caribbean*.

Captain Jack Sparrow utilizes his magical compass in order to know where to go and what to do, as “his” true north shifts frequently, depending on his desires. While that metaphorical device is funny and poignant, it is also an excellent allegorical symbol for the conclusion of this essay. The secular, ideological compass of life always shifts its loyalties, moving erratically all around its circumference according to the fads, trends, and ideologies of the era. We see that destabilizing craziness right now with the transgender movement whereby some human beings cannot figure out if they are a man or a woman, seeking to switch from one gender to the other in the name of human rights, compassion, multiculturalism, cosmetics, and surgery. Sadly, damningly, human beings who do that are actually identifying themselves as slaves of uncertainty, promoting themselves to the position of confused, socio-biological architects, demanding insane changes in normal life whereby a boy who identifies himself as a girl can now righteously and morally use a girl’s locker room at a public school. The former president of our nation even required that to happen by executive order!

Follow Christ Jesus sincerely and with all your heart and you will move far beyond Captain Jack Sparrow’s destabilizing compass, utilizing reality’s actual compass that always indicates True North. Life will not become a magical kingdom of monetary, relational bliss, but you, my friend, will get off the tortuous oceans of post-modern ideology, entering the calm seas of Christian certitude, re-establishing your sea legs through integrity and love, living in hope and with internal peace. Relativism will surely evaporate, and the bed rock of Christ Jesus will anchor your life now and during your pilgrimage home!