

Repairing or Embracing Human Imperfection?

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Abstract

The search for the fullness of human existence manifests itself in a secular society on two levels: first, the predominant claim is that the fullness of existence is within the reach of human effort, any reference to the transcendence is not necessary; second, the fullness of existence also needs to include transcendental dimensions. Modern Pelagianism, cultural Marxism, soft totalitarianism and the ideology of social justice belong to the first level. Despite their positive energy and unprecedented potential, they remain exclusive, i.e., not able or not willing to explore alternative options, even though they claim to be all-inclusive and free from possible constraints. At the same time, they are unable to embrace the limitations of human nature. Today, as in the past, the search for the fullness of human existence remains a spiritual challenge, reopening the question of how to discover a meaningful life within the boundaries of an imperfect human nature.

Keywords: modern Pelagianism, cultural Marxism, totalitarianism, social justice, spirituality, meaning.

Introduction

Referring to Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*, we moved from a society in which it was virtually impossible not to believe in God, to a society in which faith is one possibility among others.¹ In a secular society, faith in God becomes an option among many other options. Through his pivotal work, Taylor demonstrates that it would be too simplistic to conclude that belief and unbelief should be now seen as two rival theories and that it is just a matter of time

¹ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 3.

when one of them will lose and disappear. What is true is the following: by living in a secular society, both believers or unbelievers struggle in their search for and the experience of the fullness of human existence. Resurging in a secular society is the possibility of exclusive humanism, which somehow ends the era of “nave” religious faith and argues in favor of the option that the fullness of human existence can be found without any reference to transcendence, i.e., without any good that is beyond human flourishing.² The new humanism argues that human flourishing should be found exclusively within the domain of human power. It is up to humans to create or discover a new global order of mutual benefits, grounded in human benevolence and the aspiration to universal justice. The creation of this new order will be based on activism and an interventionist stance towards nature and towards human society. Viewed as universal, the new order will re-organize all restrictions and exclusions on a global level, and it will be energized by the idea that we humans are motivated to act for the good of our fellow humans. Even though this new order seems to be open and all-inclusive, in reality it remains exclusive because in its search for better solutions and the actualization of human flourishing, it avoids any reference to something higher than human flourishing, something that humans should reverence or love or acknowledge.³

This article argues that modern Pelagianism, cultural Marxism, soft totalitarianism, and the ideology of social justice are attempts at creating such a new world order on one hand, and on the other, they are expressions of the modern search for the fulness of existence. This search radiates an incredible amount of energy and originality, something unprecedented in the entire human history. However, as effective as this modern anthropocentrism might appear, it remains exclusive in its approach; it dismisses the option that the new order should be based on the transcendental and beyond purely human horizons of significance.

Modern Pelagianism

Whether secular or not, modern society and culture have been profoundly influenced by the idea of freedom. The call to freedom might include a spectrum of intensity moving in various directions: from freedom from family, tradition, God and community, towards freedom based on self-creation and celebration

² Ibid., 20.

³ Ibid., 245-247.

of the individual. As appealing and as triumphant this search for freedom might be, there is an irony within: creation of a new hierarchy of values and a new elitism with freedom at the upmost position is paradoxically destroying the framework that makes real freedom possible.

Overemphasizing the importance of freedom as the primordial feature of human nature is nothing original in our time. 1600 years ago, Pelagius – a highly educated and gifted British monk and theologian, advocate of a harsh asceticism and well known by his persuasiveness in public speaking – claimed that God gives all men power to obey God's commands. Once acquitted with this power, it remains up to individuals to achieve their salvation by the force of their own will and effort; God's support is not necessary. This position can be summarized as "since perfection is possible for man, it is obligatory."⁴ By working hard enough, every individual can become perfect, if they decide and will so. It is up to their free choice to create themselves, and to fix their own future and destiny. Believing it to be the right way to his salvation, Pelagius personally turned to asceticism, self-punishment and strict outward morality. His decision was partially due to his genuine desire to reform the church in Rome from its spiritual shallowness, indifference and moral laxity. Pelagius believed that both church reformation and individual conversion should not be based on God's grace and help; rather, it is a matter of one's choice and free will to do what God expects us to do.

As a critique of this position, Augustine – Pelagius' contemporary – taught that man's free will is not as powerful as it seems to be. Due to our fallen and sinful human nature, humans struggle to believe in God and respond on their own to God's call. It is through God's grace that man believes in God, and only by depending upon God, can mankind reach their salvation and sanctification. However, human dependence upon God and God's intervention does not take away an individual's moral responsibility and efforts. Augustine states that the solution to moral laxity and moral transformation is not primarily a matter of human effort, as Pelagius claimed. He viewed it as a matter of grace from God, which touches the human heart, transforms it and evokes a life of surrender to God in joyful gratitude.

Even though Christian tradition endorsed Augustine's theological position and considered Pelagianism as heresy, Pelagius' teaching has resonated throughout Western history

⁴ Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2000), 342.

continuing into the present time. According to W. Farley, the theological and philosophical conflict between Pelagius and Augustine, as well as two millennia of Christian tradition teach us, firstly, that the cure for human lukewarmness should not be based solely on more discipline, rigidity and asceticism, as Pelagius claimed, but on the repetitive and clear proclamation of human sinfulness and unworthiness of God's favor, as well as of the human need of God's helping grace and loving presence. Secondly, the Augustine – Pelagian conflict reminds us that a true and clear doctrine in the matter of our faith is crucially important. Clarity about the depth, power and debility of human sinfulness needs to be clearly presented in Church doctrine in order to avoid confusion. The same teaching reminds the Church to be humble and needful. Through solid teaching regarding the power of sin, believers will understand better the nature of sin, and consequently have better control over it. Thirdly, Augustine's battle and opposition against Pelagius' teaching is the battle of every generation. Since Pelagius' teaching has been spreading throughout the contemporary church and society, Augustine's position remains an inspiring source for our reflection. Fourthly, since Pelagianism is the default religion of humanity, repetitive clarifications and teaching about sin and its manifold effects on human life are necessary, otherwise Pelagianism will proliferate.⁵

Within the frame of this reflection, it would be too nave to arrive at the conclusion that Pelagius' emphasis on self-reliance is something that is contained only within the secular ambient with the lucrative industry with its self-help books, pervading all facets of culture, education, social policy, fashion, crafts, psychology and spirituality;⁶ the institutionalized churches share the same culture. Narratives of many contemporary theological and spiritual writings include exhortations to "just have faith, make a decision for Christ." As pious and as religious they might appear, they can be seen as a revival of Pelagian teaching. For example, many church leaders express an indisputable wish to build a larger church with an expensive membership. This wish just might be imbued with the Pelagian's spirit of *we-can-do-it*. This kind of thinking struggles to

⁵ William Farley, "Augustine vs. Pelagius, and Why it Matters Today," *William P. Farley*, September 18, 2019, <https://williampfarley.com/augustines-vs-pelagius-and-why-it-matters-today/>.

⁶ Alan Apperley, Stephen Jacobs, and Mark Jones, "Introduction: Therapeutic Culture," *Culture Unbound: Journal of Current Cultural Research* 6, no. 4 (2014): 725-726, <https://doi.org/10.3384/cu.2000.1525.146725>.

integrate the fact that, first, it is God who is calling us with an invitation to listen to Him, and, our reply comes only as a response. As Christians we believe that God is our Savior and that we have already been saved. Church teaching, acting, and our daily lives are supposed to be an answer to God, who is within, calling us. The Bible offers us a myriad of examples of God's calling. Since God, and not we believers, is the primordial actor, we are not drawn to God by our efforts to give our lives to God and follow Christ. Christ is the one who gave his life for us. Since Christ has already chosen us (Jn. 15:16), we can follow Christ, have faith in Him and live out of the love God has for us.

The experience of faith can be compared with our experience of falling in love. We do not choose when and how we will fall in love. Falling in love happens to us following a certain consequence of events with which we have been voluntarily or involuntarily involved. The act of falling in love is beyond our control; it is a gift offered to us. We are able to accept this gift because of our simultaneous experience of love. So, our answer is much more than an act of free will and choice. In a similar way, we cannot choose when and where we will have faith, which is an act beyond our control. Since it is a gift or grace given to us from God, we suddenly find ourselves facing it. Our acceptance of this gift, i.e., having faith in God, is possible because God has already chosen us and loves us. Augustine in his book *Confessions, Book VIII*, beautifully illustrates his decades long struggle and inner fight with having faith in God. The events of his life added up to the moment when one day he was in a garden and heard voices of children playing a game. That moment was so powerful for him that he was moved from doubt to faith. He was able to do so not because he finally decided on his own to make this step; he experienced God's presence, which enabled him to believe in God. "No one can come to me, unless drawn by the Father who sent me" (Jn 6:44).

Once experiencing love or having faith, our life has been transformed to the point that we cannot continue in the old way. After his conversion, Augustine spent the rest of his life studying, teaching, and spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ, as well as supporting believers around him. In a similar way we can read the story of St. Paul, who converted from being a persecutor of Christians to the greatest missionary of Christianity. Genuine conversion is not a matter of one's choice and human efforts. Genuine conversion is so touching and so transformative that one cannot remain indifferent; nor can one continue living the same life as before his conversion.

The examples of St. Augustine or St. Paul demonstrate, as painful as any personal crisis might be, the same crisis offers the possibility of a turning point in one's life. The Greek word *crisis* literally means “act of decision, separation, judgment, turning point, sudden change,” when one has an opportunity to decide how to continue his life. When in crisis, people who are proud to ground their lives on secular values, as well as members of institutionalized religions, struggle to justify their belief positions as meaningful. However, all of them face a similar dilemma whether the true meaning and fulfillment is something that can be self-created, or something that should be accepted as a gift and invitation to transcend pure human existence. Following this logic, the old Pelagius-Augustine dilemma remains as vital today as it was 1600 years ago.

Cultural Marxism

The term “cultural Marxism” can be controversial, depending upon the person asked for an interpretation. Some might say that such a culture does not exist, it is just a conspiracy theory, while others state that this term refers to everything that is undermining our society.⁷ If a clear and short definition is not feasible, let us list some characteristics of this cultural phenomenon. In general, cultural Marxism views traditional culture, rooted in the values of the nuclear family, marriage, traditional morality, law, order and patriotism, as the source of oppression and division. According to this way of thinking, these traditional values should be replaced with multiculturalism and political correctness in terms of equality, diversity and inclusion. Cultural Marxism is not an invention of Karl Marx. Marx did not pay much attention to culture as such. His main concerns were economy, class struggle, capital, division of labor, alienation and a classless society. However, Marx's successors, especially the members of the Frankfurt School, soon realized that culture is a critical element to any social change. Once culture changes, economical change will follow organically.

Whether we call it cultural Marxism or not, the fact is there are some aggressive advocates and institutions in Western culture

⁷ Andrew Lynn, “Cultural Marxism,” *The Hedgehog Review-Critical Reflections on Contemporary Culture*, Fall 2018, <https://hedgehogreview.com/issues/the-evening-of-life/articles/cultural-marxism>.

who work to replace traditional Western values with an imaginatively more progressive, liberal and critical ideology based on relativism. Their liberal ideas gradually introduce a growing imbalance in society. They are especially attentive when referring to the ideals of equality, diversity and inclusion, the importance of minorities, homosexuals, immigrants, people of color and non-Christians. At the same time, they become aggressive critics, lacking sensitivity, when referring to the traditional roles of parents, father and mothers, heterosexuals, tradition, the relevance of local societies and Christianity. What once was considered to be an absolute is now releasing its place to what is relative, which in terms of political correctness calls for recognition and inclusion.

This kind of culture and mindset is progressively occupying its place in the field of academia, from philosophy and sociology to English, literature, psychoanalysis, history and pedagogy. It would be simplistic to conclude either that cultural Marxism now blankets the world, or to ignore, simplify or reduce its importance. A. Mendenhall suggests that growing interest in feminism, gender studies, critical race theory, post-colonialism, and other similar disciplines call for our attention and require serious study in order to comprehensively understand them by contextualizing their appearance, questioning and challenging their assumptions. The fact is that cultural Marxism does exist. It has a history, followers, adherents, and exerts a strong influence on academia, society, and our culture.⁸ However, this does not mean that academia or our culture must belong to the exclusive domain of the authority of cultural Marxism. Academia, especially in the field of humanities, needs to retain its research rigor, based on its clearly defined mission, purpose and identity, while fostering unbiased research, investigation and dialogue in view of a more complete understanding of the truth. This has been and should remain the mission of academia and its contribution to the social, economic and cultural development of society at large.⁹

While economic Marxism has lost its battle with capitalism, cultural Marxism appears to be much more resistant. Western Europe as well as the USA seems to be breathing a kind of blindness and naivety that totalitarianism cannot happen in their midst. No

⁸ Allen Mendenhall, "Cultural Marxism is Real," *The James G. Martin Center for Academic Renewal*, January 4, 2019, <https://www.jamesgmartin.center/2019/01/cultural-marxism-is-real/>.

⁹ Lorenzo Compagnucci, and Francesca Spigarelli, "The Third Mission of the university: A systematic literature review on potentials and constraints," *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* 161 (2020): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2020.120284>.

one denies that totalitarian regimes exist, but only out there and far away from us; if necessary, we will fight against them. Due to its recent history, Eastern Europe remains more vigilant when faced with the assumption that there should only be one official ideology. Any kind of imposition, or lack of opportunities for free expression and confrontation, one-sidedness, negation of significance of local, or overlooking of the importance of traditional values, are still living memories in many parts of Eastern Europe. This vigilance diminishes in the Western parts of Europe and the USA.

It would be too naive to expect a serious and fruitful confrontation with cultural Marxism from any kind of political power or authority, as if they are the only force able to stop the present crisis. The fact is that some advocates of cultural Marxism as well as certain politicians use an identical language, promulgating ideas similar to cultural Marxism. As already mentioned, the Greek word *crisis* literally means “separation, judgment, decision, turning point,” when something needs to happen in order to avoid more devastating consequences. Resistance against cultural Marxism has become a long-standing mind set, calling for serious intellectual honesty, respectful confrontation and spiritual awakening, based on a serious attempt to critically examine the principles of cultural Marxism.

Soft totalitarianism

It is easy to detect hard totalitarianism because it appears with threat, force, persecution, torture, prison, and execution. It is much harder to become aware of soft totalitarianism, which has the same goal as the hard one, but introduces itself as something therapeutic and beneficial. Readiness to embrace soft totalitarianism depends on people being afraid to lose their comfort, status and conformity. In order to keep these benefits, people are willing to compromise their deepest convictions.¹⁰ How is it possible that willingness to compromise has become so pervasive?

More than 50 years ago, Philip Rieff in his book *The Triumph of the Therapeutic – Use of Faith after Freud* almost prophetically anticipated the development of the Western mindset, remarkably influenced by the discoveries of Freud and the practice of psychoanalysis. In his writing, Rieff states that we moved from a

¹⁰ Andrew T. Walker, “An interview with Rod Dreher on Soft Totalitarianism,” *CBWM*, June 8, 2021, <https://cbmw.org/2021/06/08/an-interview-with-rod-dreher-on-soft-totalitarianism/>.

religious man living in a religious culture to an economic man with an economic culture, and onto a psychological man and a psychological culture. While the religious man searched for the meaning of life within cultural and religious traditions, and the economic man within economic aspirations, the psychological man moved away from everything outside of himself. His primary interest is having a balanced and peaceful mind. His search for meaning is reduced to only that within himself, his prevalent mind feature is indifference, and his primordial goal is to seek his own pleasure. The move from the economic to the psychological man is also a move from the economic toward a therapeutic and psychological society. If once Western cultures were strong with clear ideas and values, committed to certain goals, critical in their intellectual mindset, following the move the same cultures have become more remissive, less ready for serious commitments, uncritically welcoming and absorbing new ideas, standing for nothing, and negating any binding transcendent order. The growing vacuum surrounding the meaning of life has been slowly filled with Freud's discoveries and psychoanalytical attempts to strengthen man's inner resources against what is obsolete in him. The super-ego, presenting the internalized ideas acquired from one's parents and society, has become more relaxed and allows individuals freedom in making their choices about solely what matters for them personally.

The steadily growing emphasis on freedom is accompanied by a gradual raising of inner confusion, calling for external help. So, analytical therapy can be seen as a re-education process, teaching us how to cope with ambiguities, ambivalence and contradiction in us.¹¹ For the religious man, it was culture and religion which offered them consolation, binding social commitments and the promise of salvation. The economic man found solutions and meaning in the principles of economy. Once imbedded in the psychological culture, the psychological man has no mechanisms for salvation. His communal purpose has been impoverished, and his self-absorption with minimal group commitment has strengthen. In short, the psychological man stands for nothing, stays detached from society, and his salvation is left to his individualistic choice. Psychological man should not be judged, but understood and allowed to give expression to any of his instincts.

Some followers of Freud's position soon realized that Freud's understanding of the psychological man was too narrow and

¹¹ Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic – Use of Faith after Freud* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 55.

missing important points for external orientation. Since Freud's followers struggled to refer to traditional religions as pre-established value systems, they searched for a replacement. Accordingly, they attempted to create their own pseudo-religious systems of thought. Jung proposed a religious psychology with archetypes in the collective unconscious; Reich suggested political activism as the way to self-fulfillment; Lawrence proposed erotic experience as a therapy to integrate the self. All of them failed as they were unable to replace the position of religion. Now we live in the aftermath of the psychoanalytical movement with its anti-religious mindset and the introduction of pseudo-religions. Today there is a strong presupposition that we know something our predecessors did not know, and that we should be free to enjoy all the pleasures of our senses. Referring to Dostoevsky, Rieff wonders at this point whether the question "Can civilized men believe?" should be replaced with "Can unbelieving man be civilized?"¹²

As one-sided as Rieff's insights written in 1966 might appear, it touches one crucial point in our reflection. How much is psychological therapy, even when intended as a treatment to relieve or heal inner disorder, opening us to a transcendent reality as the final goal of human existence? ¹³ Assuming that there is a transcendent reality, how is this reality understood, especially within a culture of soft totalitarianism? There is no doubt, a good therapy can bring into our broken reality many benefits and help us on our journey to relieve inner pain and suffering. As audacious as this might sound, the question remains whether the therapeutic culture with its uncritical promulgation of therapeutic approaches is about to become a kind of modern ideology and soft totalitarianism? If therapy is not guiding us towards the ultimate mysteries of human existence, it can easily slide into an illusion and utopia followed by totalitarianism.

H. Arendt defines totalitarianism and totalitarian society as an ideology that "seeks to displace all prior traditions and institutions with the goal of bringing all aspects under control of that ideology. Wherever totalitarian philosophy has ruled, it has begun to destroy the essence of man."¹⁴ While it is easy to detect hard totalitarianism, this is not the case with soft totalitarianism. Often undetected, it comes to us via the surveillance culture,

¹² Ibid., 4.

¹³ Kenneth Pargament, and Hisham Abu Raiya, "A Decade of Research on the Psychology of Religion and Coping," *Psyke & Logos* 28, no. 2 (2007): 761.

¹⁴ Hanna Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, 1973), VIII.

collecting, recording, and storing an incredible amount of data about us. On the psychological and social level, soft totalitarianism comes to us as therapeutic under the guise of helping and healing. This threat is easily dismissed in terms of “political correctness,”¹⁵ which became an excuse for any kind of serious confrontation. Since traditional cultural and religious values are seen as limiting, oppressing and dividing, the solution is a therapy that respects and tolerates only inner wishes, drives, passion, enjoyments, dreams, decisions, and personal preferences.

While the external cultural and religious boundaries have been softened and progressively removed, inner emptiness spreads its roots even deeper. Many people in the Western materialistic societies are deeply convinced that it is their right to be happy all of the time. Their understanding of happiness does not include any notion of sacrifice, which might be necessary now in order to achieve happiness later. A happy life, free of sacrifice and struggle, became a kind of modern dream or ideology, based on the ongoing search of comfort and bodily pleasures. This search can be wrapped in religious language implying that God wants us to be happy. Such a position, of course, leads us towards a moralistic therapeutic deism. God is welcome into our life as long as He only makes us happy. He is not allowed to require anything from us.¹⁶

As attractive and as appealing bodily pleasures might be initially, they can literally become an addiction, transforming our initial search of pleasure into a life of dependence on passion. If one does not learn how to control one's own passions, these passions can easily take control over us by pushing us to search for even more comfort.

Resistance against soft totalitarianism is not possible if it not based on a solid spiritual life. Even though this spiritual life includes both sacrifice and renunciation, it brings joy in that we live for something, not against something. Spiritual life is not the same as optimism which posits that everything will be fine. Spiritual life is about hope that God who sacrificed himself for us is with us.¹⁷

Confrontation with the therapeutic culture with its emphasis on the inner world can be taken as an opportunity to rediscover what really matters, both on the social, cultural as well

¹⁵ Rod Dreher, *Live Not by Lies: A Manual for Christian Dissidents* (New York City: Sentinel, 2020), 2.

¹⁶ Michael Horton, *Christless Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2008), 5.

¹⁷ Ivan Platovnjak, “Christian Spirituality as Sacrifice?” *Nova Prisutnost* XVI, no. 1 (2018): 33-38, <https://doi.org/10.31192/np.16.1.2>.

as on the personal level.¹⁸ Psychological knowledge and therapeutic understanding of the self are legitimate articulations of experiences of suffering, which were formerly confined to a private life. If it does not open us to something life giving, fulfilling and meaningful, the painful confrontation with human imperfections and wounds remain frustrating. Rediscovery of the importance of the spiritual is only gradually catching interest within the field of psychology and therapy.

Ideology of social justice

No one should deny the importance of social justice, which is generally described in terms of a balance between individuals and society, and measured by the fair distribution of wealth, protection of personal liberties, and the provision of equal opportunities and treatments, regardless of one's legal, political, economic or other circumstances. This broad and rather descriptive definition of social justice leaves much room for more or less authentic interpretations. In the light of this article, let us open the question whether social justice can become an ideology as well? If the answer is affirmative, what does this mean?

Referring to Dreher, nowadays “elites and elite institutions are abandoning old-fashioned liberalism, based on defending the rights of the individual and replacing it with a progressive creed that regards justice in terms of groups. It encourages people to identify with groups – ethical, sexual, and otherwise – to think of Good and Evil as a matter of power dynamics among the groups.”¹⁹ This need to identify with groups can be partially explained as a human need to belong to a larger entity, which in turn confers to the members of the groups their own reference points and identity. In the past, the reference points were religious and political authorities. A special place was reserved to holy people who, with their spiritual wisdom, became an inspiration for many. These references, as well as social, cultural and religious boundaries, have been softened in our time, which have consequently led to a weakening of the identification references and to a resistance to adopt the traditional cultural and religious values. Consequently, individuals experience within themselves a frightening emptiness and lack of meaning, as well as a desire to find new orientation

¹⁸ Katie Wright, “Theorizing therapeutic culture: Past influences, future directions,” *Journal of Sociology* 44, no. 4 (2008): 321, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783308097124>.

¹⁹ Dreher, *Live Not by Lies: A Manual for Christian Dissidents*, XI.

references. Today their selection of new reference points is almost imposed upon them by the social media and higher education, proclaiming the new creed and justice in terms of diversity, inclusivity, and equity. The identification reference points, in this case, are not leaders or inspiring strong authorities, but rather, newly created social groups who have been apparently suppressed in the past. Identification with these groups becomes automatically a call to action and, if necessary, even to violent and revolutionary interventions in order to remove past forms of oppression. Not without surprise, today such actions should be seen as peak achievements of a new culture and civilization, as something humanistic, which is finally settling accounts with the past oppressive history, based on capital, class struggle and alienation.

Consequently, belonging to a new identification group turns out to be a moral issue, related to the question of justice in terms of diversity, inclusivity, and equity. Every kind of critical argumentation, confrontation and disagreement about the meaning of these terms should be rejected as hate speech, which is, by definition, something unjust. More specifically, any promulgation of traditional values about family, education, law, tradition, patriotism and heterosexuality should be hindered because it does not support and include multiculturalism, open immigration, homosexuality, moral freedom, LGBT values. Subsequently, the principles of diversity, inclusivity and equity create a new ideology of social justice, which is at the same time a powerful mechanism for controlling and excluding any kind of argumentative confrontation. It is an ideology which, with its all comprehensiveness, tolerates no alternative way of thinking and determines not only how to think but how to act.²⁰

As all other utopian attempts, the ideology of social justice with a seemingly humanistic face can easily become a dictatorship and totalitarianism, leading into new forms of exclusion, separation, injustice and, if necessary, new human sacrifices. As such, it is doomed to fail because it lacks one fundamental truth of human existence, the question of evil. Even though this ideology supports political revolution, social engineering and policy tweaking, it will not be able to stop human envy, strife and deceit.

²⁰ Scott David Allen, *Why Social Justice is Not Biblical Justice* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Credo House Publishers, 2020), 3-4.

It forgets that evil does not primarily reside in politics, society and economy, but rather in human hearts and minds.²¹

This desire to create a new just society based on diversity, inclusivity and equity can be interpreted as an expression of a much deeper spiritual challenge. Williams describes this challenge in terms of the old temptation to play God and pretend to be sovereign lords over one another,²² similar to the biblical story of the Tower of Babel. Added by Williams' reflection, we can conclude that the failed attempt of creating a perfect society as well as the ideology of social justice are revealing two points: (1) In the Babel story, there is misplaced worship of the Creator and negligence of giving Him honor and gratitude He is due. In an analogical way, the ideology of social justice places itself so high that it becomes unable of critical self-examination, which would relativize the same ideology. (2) In both stories, there is a bowing to the cosmos and endowing created things with an ultimate value that they are not due.²³

Conclusion

As stated in the introduction, this article presents modern Pelagianism, cultural Marxism, soft totalitarianism and the ideology of social justice as modern searches for meaning. They are appealing, expressive, and hiding at least the apparent potential to create a new and better world order. They struggle to embrace the true nature of human existence. A. Solzhenitsyn, in his 1978 Harvard commencement speech, proclaimed that “we have placed too much hope in political and social reforms, only to find out that we were being deprived of our most precious possession: our spiritual life.”²⁴ Any form of social or political reform will remain partial, if it does not include the spiritual component of human existence. Supporters of any kind of ideologies too easily forget the fact that human existence cannot be reduced to one or a small number of one-sided principles, such as Pelagianism, cultural Marxism, soft totalitarianism or new forms of social justice. Human

²¹ Thaddeus J. Williams, *Confronting Injustice without Compromising Truth: 12 Questions Christians Should Ask about Social Justice* (Zondervan, Michigan: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 17.

²² *Ibid.*, 14.

²³ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁴ Alexandr Solzhenitsyn, “A World Split Apart,” Commencement speech delivered at Harvard University, *American Rhetoric*, June 8, 1978, <https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/alexandersolzhenitsynharvard.htm>.

existence is in many ways too complex and mysterious, and will remain inaccessible to our comprehension, unless it opens itself to transcendental dimensions. This opening should not be understood in terms of a return to and reconstruction of a harmony between the state and the church, as it might have existed previously in our history. Recreation of history is another naïve, utopian and ideological solution. The present day with all its social, cultural, national, political, economic and religious components is the only time at our disposition, within which we are called to discover life's meaning and inner fulfillment, even though only in a temporary form. The key question remains whether or not are we willing to look further and transcend solutions based on any kind of ideological principles, which by definition are closed and one-sided.

The search for new solutions should not be identified with a desire to look for victory, power and the creation of a more perfect world, as spiritual as this might sound; this is nothing but a temptation, even though many secular as well as non-secular prophets claim to know what the best solution or God's will is. If the creation of a perfect world is not within the power of human reach, then what remains is an ongoing struggle against different forms of injustice and distorted argumentations, calling for more complex solutions.

All humans as spiritual beings, and in particular way Christians believing in salvation through Jesus Christ, are invited to embrace the journey of imperfection and broken hearts. 2000 years ago, Jesus Christ showed us the path by embracing pain and suffering as one of the essential dimensions of human existence. However, this does not mean that our dealing with pain, suffering and death are expressions of our lack of power and silent resignation. Our dealing with them is an expression of honest desire to face our reality, as it is, with all human weakness, imperfection and the need for help. The presence of pain, suffering and death in our life might look cruel, but at the same time, they should not be seen as having the final word regarding our existence.²⁵ Not surprisingly, this idea remains strange and awkward to a secularized mind set, grounded in the ideas of self-empowerment and self-perfection.

The present challenge of Christianity should not be seen as a question as how to return or regain a position of power in a society that was once based on Christian principles and values. The

²⁵ Ivan Platovnjak, "Spiritual Help for Persons Suffering from Depression / Duhovna pomoć osobama koje pate od depresije," *Nova Prisutnost* XVIII, no. 2 (2020): 266-277, <https://doi.org/10.31192/np.18.2.3>.

authentic struggle of Christianity is how to introduce into this broken and imperfect world, colored by different ideologies, the good news of hope and love that go beyond human brokenness and imperfection. This struggle can easily become a place of temptation. As Jesus was tempted at the beginning of his public mission (Mt 4,1-11; Mc 1,12-13; Lk 4,1-13), so too is Christianity in our time dealing with the temptation to possess something better, and consequently to look from above on others and to deserve a higher place of respect in society. The true power of Christianity is not in its being loftier from the rest of the world; the true power is in its being in this world, and at the same time transcending this world by striving towards God who loves all human imperfection.

Let us conclude with the image of human as the *homo viator*, an image borrowed from J. Pieper. As *viator* – travelers, individuals have not yet reached their destination, which is the realization of their potential as an existing being. If this existence is conceived exclusively in its temporality as a “being in time,” the same existence fails to comprehend the true nature of its subject. Anyone who strives to understand human existence within temporality, will find hidden the “life beyond” time, as well as the very meaning of life in time.²⁶

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²⁶ Joseph Pieper, *On Hope* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 16-17.

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