

Transformation Through Christ, Not the State

One of the central conceits of the Left is that through education, diet, therapy, state-managed direction and more, man can emerge in a quite improved—if not new—form.

The communist theorist Leon Trotsky, in his hilariously pretentious but influential book *Literature and Revolution*, argued that economic and political conditions, combined with the sheer force of a person's will, could change everything about him and his "monotonous" life on earth. Trotsky predicted that in the epoch ushered in by global communism, "Man at last will begin to harmonize himself in earnest. ... The human species, the coagulated homo sapiens, will once more enter into a state of radical transformation and, in his own hands, will become an object of the most complicated methods of artificial selection and psychophysical training

"Man will make it his purpose," Trotsky continued, "to master his own feelings, to raise his instincts to the heights of consciousness, to make them transparent, to extend the wires of his will into hidden recesses, and thereby to raise himself to a new plane, to create a higher social biologic type, or, if you please, a superman."

Of course, Trotsky was unable to provoke this change in his old pal Josef Stalin, who eventually had his former comrade murdered with an ice pick when Trotsky was living in exile in Mexico.

As Henry Ford said of history, the project of human reengineering envisioned by such sophomoric visionaries as Rousseau, Engels and Marx, and such of their murderous philosophical children as Hitler, Mao, Pol Pot, et al, is bunk. External conditioning, even from the earliest age, can

wear down the edges of our fallenness, but it can neither erase them fully nor change our fundamental nature.

In his landmark work *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Friedrich Engels was so optimistic that communism would produce a society of peace and prosperity that he projected its future would look like this: "No soldiers, no gendarmes or police, no nobles, kings, regents, prefects or judges, no prisons, no lawsuits—and everything takes its orderly course. All quarrels and disputes are settled by the whole of the community affected."

What is the witness of the past 100 years of communism? Blood, death, slaughter, oppression, violence. Guess the former Soviet Union just needed more time, eh, Friedrich?

Some novelists seem to have a better handle on human nature than the political theoreticians. There are numerous dystopian stories about societies in which a narcotized citizenry enjoys placidity and relative prosperity without curiosity, individualism or liberty. They are warning tales: We potentially can take medications that dull our most obvious shortcomings and make us languid and emotionally lethargic, but no drug can alter the true person.

From the Code of Hammurabi to the Uniform Code of Military Justice, man seeks to fence himself in from his worst excesses. This is a good thing; the Bible's Ten Commandments are wonderful guides for human behavior.

But as Jesus taught, internalizing the law reveals the true character of man. Hate, Jesus said, is a form of murder, and lust a type of adultery. These are standards to which no mortal can attain, which is why Christians rely completely on the saving grace of Christ.

Yet our Babel-esque infatuation with self-transformation goes forward. The late Hugo Chavez, strongman of Venezuela, proclaimed that "those of us who want to build heaven on

earth, we will follow socialism.” Really? According to our State Department’s most recent report on Venezuela, “The principal human rights abuses reported during the year included corruption, inefficiency and politicization in the judicial system; government actions to impede freedom of expression; and harsh and life-threatening prison conditions. The government did not respect judicial independence or permit judges to act according to the law without fear of retaliation.”

“The government used the judiciary to intimidate and selectively prosecute political, union, business, and civil society leaders who were critical of government policies or actions,” it continues. “The government harassed and intimidated privately owned television stations, other media outlets, and journalists throughout the year, using threats, fines, property seizures, targeted regulations, and criminal investigations and prosecutions. Failure to provide for due process rights, physical safety, and humane conditions for inmates contributed to widespread violence, riots, injuries, and deaths in prisons.”

It is noteworthy that socialism, communism, fascism, emperor-worship and all other forms of totalitarianism displace God and elevate the state to His position of primary and central Lordship. Thus, invariably they lead to the crushing of freedom, economic stagnation if not collapse, and power concentrated in the hands of those relatively few who have seized authority and become “more equal than others.” This is because power, materialism and godlike authority ultimately are irresistible to the unredeemed sons and daughters of Adam—or at least to those not penned in by allegiance to what they believe is a higher power.

These “isms” also argue that men and women can work wholeheartedly for the “common good” as intensely as they can for their families and loved ones. This imposes upon man the quality of omni-benevolence—the capacity to love everyone with

equal intensity.

Only God is infinite, which is why He ordained family and interpersonal friendships—to enable finite and fallible persons who still bear His image to love and care for one another in small, knowable, intimate groups. For example, no one loves any child more than his own; this is an ineradicable feature of human nature. Attempts to change it are futile exercises in self-arrogation.

Only Christ can transform what Paul calls “the inner man.” The state, operating as God intended, is a means of order, criminal restraint and human freedom (Rom. 13:1-7) but never of internal transformation. We forget that distinction to our grave peril.

Rob Schwarzwald *is senior vice president at Family Research Council. This article appeared in Religion Today on Wednesday.*