

Review Notes from “*Live Not By Lies*”

A Manual for Christian Dissidents

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Reviewer: Larry Keener for The Areopagus Forum

Review clarifications:

All bullet points in the notes are attributed to the author, Rod Dreher, except when denoted as attributed to another individual. Dreher’s points are often quoted directly but, are often paraphrased in the words of the reviewer as well. Nevertheless, the meaning of each bullet point is entirely attributed to the author.

Dreher quotes over 55 Soviet and East Bloc and communist Christian dissidents in the book. I have mentioned several of these heroes in the notes but, have omitted most of those cited in the interest of conciseness. Afterall, the hopeful purpose of this review is to build an appetite for the interested person to read the book and, discover the richness of these personalities and their testimonies personally.

Introduction: It is happening here

“It will not be the same here; here such things are impossible.” Alas, all the evil of the twentieth century is possible everywhere on earth.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

Thesis.

- History, and totalitarianism, did not die with the breakup of the Soviet Union
- Western elites have abandoned classical liberalism¹ and individual rights, for “group rights,” “identity politics” and “social justice.”
- History is being rewritten and language reinvented to conform to a new religion, progressivism.
- Western world founded on Judeo Christian principals is now “Post Christian”
- All totalitarian regimes are constructed of Lies. Progressivism² is “soft totalitarianism” and a gateway drug to harsher forms of tyranny.
- Warnings, resistance methods, and examples from Christian communist dissidents of living in **Truth** in systems built on the **Lie**.

Main Points.

Dreher’s book is divided into 2 parts, nine chapters and a conclusion.

Two Parts:

- **Part 1, Understanding “soft totalitarianism”**
- **Part 2, How to live in Truth**
- Soft and hard totalitarianism have the same goals. *“Everything in the State, nothing outside the state, nothing against the state”* **Benito Mussolini**
- *“The goal of socialism is communism”* **Vladimir Lenin**
- Christian communist dissident warnings.
 - **Father Kolakovic Family: See, Judge, Act** Freedom requires living in Truth

¹ The belief in the freedom, civil and economic rights of the individual as natural rights. Classical liberals believe in small government and the supremacy of individual rights above governmental infringement. The individual is the best judge of his best interest.

² The belief that moral and political “progress” is evitable and can best be made through the government employing experts in science, social science, and technology to shape and advance society. Individual rights only exist as allowed by the government. Society’s rights trump natural or individual rights. Cultural Marxism.

- **Hannah Arendt:** Totalitarianism controls, actions, thoughts and emotions
- **Soft totalitarianism:** Therapeutic versus Coercive.
- Christian dissident challenge today. Small worship groups, families.
- Soft totalitarianism's roots. **Prometheanism**; God like power to shape society.
- Elite control of institutions versus government control.
- Science replaces religion as society's foundation.
- Useful lies of progressives today: 1619 project, critical race theory, social justice, equity, intersectionality.

Part One: Understanding Soft Totalitarianism

Chapter One: Kolakovic the Profit

- **Father Kolakovic**, a Czech Catholic priest escaped Nazism to live under Communism.
- Kolakovic's warning; totalitarian ideologies must subdue religion to rule.
- However, Christians must live Free by "**Living in Truth**"
- "**Families**" and the requirement to **SEE, JUDGE, ACT.**
- All totalitarian regimes are evil. Christians should SEE this evil, JUDGE it as evil, and ACT Free by living in **Truth.**
- **Hannah Arendt**, totalitarian regimes must control mans' essence, not just his actions but his thoughts and emotions
- American elites have remade and redefined American culture and Christianity's historical importance. Elites now have totalitarian control of our culture.
- **The Therapeutic**; natural/political rights surrendered in exchange for the liberation to pursue maximum pleasure in life. Religious man is dead and Phycological man is born.
- **Religious man**, a belief in a transcendent **Truth** governing individual actions.
- **Psychological man**, belief in individual pilgrimage in pleasure seeking. No boundaries.
- Avoid pain if the **Truth** requires suffering.
- **Truth** becomes the sole property of the state.
- "**Live Not By Lies,**" **Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn** The True man lives not by the lies of the state, propaganda, but in the **Truth.**
- Christians should know **Truth** and should dissent by not living the **Lie.**

Chapter Two: Our Pre-totalitarian Culture

- **Prometheanism:** Man has unlimited godlike powers to make the world to suit his desires, a belief as old and wrong, as the Garden of Eden.
- Intellectuals reject religion and believe “**social science**” can take God’s place. This is the foundation of **Secular Marxism, or Progressivism.**
- Rejection of religion and societal breakdowns opens the doors for progressives.
- All institutions fall under the control of the state resulting in declining faith in institutions
- Classical liberal education, which does not serve the state, is replaced by secular progressivism which does. Language is redefined and history is rewritten.
- Elites, as self-appointed saviors, take up the causes of the marginalized to gain power and control of society. Elites become the rescuers and the revolutionaries.
- Guilt is enlisted as a tool to influence those that do not know **Truth.** Social Justice Warriors, SJW.
- SJWs and The Myth of Progress zealotry replace **Truth** and Common Sense.

Chapter Three: Progressivism as a Religion

- **The Myth of Progress:** the present is better than the past, the future will inevitably be better than the present. Progress versus transcendent absolutes of **Truth, Beauty, Good.**
- **The Progressive Grand March:** the infallibility of a future with progress. The classical and traditional prevent progress and happiness.
- Christians also believe in progress but understand human fallibility. No Christian progress “*without the God of the Bible as the author of history and judge of the earth.*”
- **Positivists:** science and technology empowering individuals without the encumbrances of religion and tradition.
- Progressivism and Christianity are competing religions. Progressives believe in creating utopia on earth created by man. Christians believe man is too sinful to create his own utopia. The only utopia for Christians is God created and not of this earth.
- Christians believe the enemy is Satan. Progressives believe the enemy is anyone who doesn’t think like they do and fall in line. Thus, political correctness is required with shaming, shunning and de-platforming to control dissenters.
- **Progressives are totalitarians.** All totalitarian regimes require oppressor/scapegoats; Nazi Germany and the Jews, Leninist Russia and the worker class/capitalist class, Islamic Iran and Israel/America.

- Progressive totalitarians believe that POWER is the only central fact of human existence, POWER trumps objective **TRUTH**. Progressive POWER in the U.S. today is acquired through identity politics which, identifies the oppressed versus the oppressors, and INTERSECTIONALITY which unites all oppressed classes. Class warfare and identity politics are the principal instrument of progressive power.
- Identity politics is anti-Christian in that only the progressive oppressors are in need of confession, repentance and redemption. SJWs target only the oppressors for their venom.

Chapter Four: Capitalism, Woke and Watchful

- **“Information is power,”** Totalitarian regimes require massive surveillance apparatus to maintain and enhance their power.
- Traditionally large corporations and the U.S. government existed in an antagonistic relationship. Today, many large corporations are a de facto arm of the government, existing in a symbiotic relationship of information, money and power sharing. Woke Capitalism and the Techno-state.
- Large Woke corporations have moved left accepting the nostrums of the progressives. In return, the government has allowed these giants to grow unrestricted or lightly regulated.
- Large information corporations (Facebook, Apple, Google, Twitter, ATT) and not the government, are now George Orwell’s Big Brother from *1984*. **Surveillance Capitalism.**
- Woke and Surveillance Capitalism use their immense power to define what is news, what is moral, what is righteous, thusly shaping political discourse. They also own the private digital lives of most Americans.
- China, the complete marriage of a techno-totalitarian state and an increasingly materialistic society.
- **Social Credit**, China’s method of using surveillance technology to punish and deprive dissenters of normally available privileges.
- In American, SJW warriors with corporate and governmental backing, use a form social credit to identify and ostracize believers in traditional American values.
- **Post Christian:** Good and evil are no longer Biblically defined but are defined by your acceptance or rejection of progressivism.
- **In this Post Christian culture Living in Truth has evolved from the once easy acceptance of classical liberalism to become a personal choice of courage and conviction.**

Part Two: How to Live in Truth

Chapter Five: Value Nothing More Than Truth

- **Vaclav Havel:** The Power of the Powerless. Save your soul by living in **Truth**.
- Knowingly living within the **Lie** is demoralizing. It destroys the dignity of the individual even when it provides comfort and survival.
- Living in **Truth** is lonely but, powerful and liberating.
- Free Speech, the greatest enemy of the Lie.
- You may live in a world of lies but, you chose if that world lives in you.
- Be courageous but also prudent. **Truth** does not require martyrdom.
- Totalitarians, both hard and soft, use propaganda to control the common narrative. A **Lie** repeatedly told as **Truth** is propaganda. Political correctness.
- In America we do not risk the gulag or death by challenging the **Lie**. We risk only loss of status, acceptance and possible advancement.
- **SEE, JUDGE, ACT**

CHAPTER SIX: Cultivate Cultural Memory

- *“Who controls the past, controls the future: who controls the present controls the past.”* **George Orwell 1984**
- **Truth ultimately triumphs.** The greatest **Lie** goes untold and unremembered. **Progressivism, and its brothers, socialism and communism, have never worked despite state coercion.**
- For progressives, socialism/communism’s failures are of execution, not of intentions or core objectives. In contrast, progressives believe Western civilization’s roots are racist, imperialistic, and paternalistic.
- The media and the educational industrial complex have conspired to destroy our Western cultural roots. They are succeeding.
- The new targets are the family and the church.
- **Vaclav Benda:** dissent inside the **Lie** via *parallel polis*, the refusal to abandon reason and learning resulting in the loss of tradition and memory. Traditional Cultural preservation provide seeds for renewal.
- *Parallel polis* requires resistance to the **Lie** and its attack on traditional values and Christianity through remembrance, celebrations, and transmission to future generations. **Cultural Memory.**

Chapter Seven: Families as Resistance Cells

- **Families:** Incubators of **Love** and **Truth**. Civilization's bedrock.
- Christian family gifts: fellowship of love, freedom, and individual dignity
- Families are the first line of defense against the **Lie** and the first point of attack by progressives.
- Totalitarians of all stripes try to break down traditional families. The courage to resist, the willingness not to conform and the strength to live in **Truth**, starts within a strong family unit, both nuclear and Christian.

Chapter Eight: Religion the Bedrock of Resistance

- Christian Resistance begins with Faith. Faith provides the peace to endure and the strength to resist. (*parallel polis*).
- Christian Faith is our evidence of the eternal **Truth** of the overwhelming **Love** of God and our witness to the unknowing and the unbelieving.
- General disillusionment exits when totalitarian regimes defy common sense and decency to maintain "their truth, their narrative." **The Lie**.
- Christ's teaching of ecumenical love, forgiveness, salvation and redemption are a welcome contrast to the totalitarians' Lie. **The Truth**.
- The Post Christian world will likely challenge and break the faith of "shallow Christians." Only a solid commitment to traditional Christianity produces a Faith **strong enough to resist and defeat the Lie**.

Chapter Nine: Standing in Solidarity

- Father Kolakovic's earlier urging us: Small groups(families), Christ centered versus life, career, and material standing centered. Bible readings to reaffirm what it means to be and act like a Christian, and how to promote active resistance.
- **Frantisek Miklosko:** Secular liberals and Christians were brothers under hard totalitarianism(communism.) Today, secular liberals view oppression of traditional religious views as justified.
- Christians must be present and engaged in this world, but with fidelity to our faith, with honest relations with those who disagree, and with evidence of our faith through compassion versus contempt for unbelievers.
- Shared grief can build shared strength. The internet creates atomization and demoralization while small groups produce unity of thought and purpose, fellowship.

- Therapeutic Christians³ in soft totalitarianism have culturally surrendered to seeking personal happiness above all else, replacing admiration of Christ with love of Christ, and redefining **Love** as desire without commitment.

Chapter Ten: The Gift of Suffering

- Suffering can be a blessing in disguise. Christian maturity should mean understanding that suffering breeds patience, kindness, empathy and greater love.
- **Therapeutic life is not mature.** All suffering is considered some form of oppression. Unhappiness is a form of slavery requiring rejection of unchosen obligations.
- 80% of young Americans believe that the freedom to achieve “self-fulfillment” trumps being a parent, a Christian, or a patriot.
- African American Christians are a notable exception, given their history of courageously braving suffering.
- **Bravely suffering for Truth reveals the world as a Lie.** It is a powerful witness.
- Christianity is not a philosophy but a way of life requiring **followers** and not **admirers**. The follower accepts the wrongness of this world understands the cost of Christian disciplinship is suffering tempered by God’s love and comfort. “The peace that passes understanding.”
- Christians endure suffering without bitterness or hate. As Jesus said, “*Bless those who persecute you.*”
- Christians show mercy for those who are broken.
- **Aldous Huxley:** “Christianity without tears” means Christianity is about creating discipleship and not a self-help cult designed to root out personal anxieties.
- Suffering is a part of the human condition. As Christians, will we accept it as God’s “sever mercy” or will we run from it and betray or Lord.

Conclusion: Live Not By Lies

- Look to the East and not to the West for lessons in living with **Truth** versus **Lies**.
- True freedom is enduring all with **Faith** and **Hope** (examples form the East) and not in eliminating binding commitments to God, marriage and family (The West, the Therapeutic).

³ A term first popularized by Philip Rieff in his book *The Triumph of The Therapeutic*. It means the willing subordination of traditional Christian Faith to the pursuit of individual pleasures and the avoidance of individual pain. The surrender of the eternal transcendent to the temporary immediate.

- **Solzhenitsyn:** *“Acceptance of suffering is the beginning of our liberation...it is the gift from God that invites us to change...the greatest totalitarian ruler of all: myself.”*
- The culture war is largely over—we lost. The Grand March is becoming a Victory Parade. **C.S. Lewis:** *“We are now in enemy occupied territory”*
- **Totalitarianisms of all types are built on the Lie first sold in the Garden, “Ye Shall Be Gods.” The Lie always ends in failure and misery. But the Lie only ends when enough dedicated “insurrectionists” refuse to live the Lie and chose to live in Truth.**