

## **The myth of the multicultural patient?**

### **A Critique and Evaluation of Multiculturalism with Particular Respect to its Impact on Medicine**

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#### **Introduction**

There is an almost universal, blind acceptance of multiculturalism. This general acceptance suggests the existence of a clear understanding of the issue of multiculturalism, which every thoughtful and kind person knows to be the correct basis on which to form public policy and the practice of politics.<sup>1</sup> We apparently accept it as good because we are told to do so. And at one level, multiculturalism is a valid concept. Ethnic diversity is increasing, but this does not mean that politically important cultural diversity will influence public policy or professional ethics. For that to happen would require a much higher correlation between ethnic origin and belief system. Fortunately Statistics Canada realizes that it is extremely difficult to accurately describe ethnicity and they ask instead about the more important question of belief.

The 1991 Census asked respondents to categorize their personal belief systems by making a selection from a list of all known belief systems. Perusing the results, I am sure Canadians filled in the form backwards. They decided what they were not and found out what they were by default. I suspect the process went something like this: "I am not a Zoroastrian, nor a Jew or a Muslim, certainly not a nothing ('no belief' turned out to be the third largest category), nor an atheist. Probably, with a mixture of surprise and perhaps horror, they found that if they were formed by any belief system, it was Christianity. The results showed that despite increasing immigration, 90% Canadians identify their belief system as Christian (to the extent they could identify it).

Public policies do not reflect this reality despite Canada's claim to be a democracy. Not all minorities have different beliefs, especially with respect to fundamental ethical concepts. Many immigrants inhabit the Christian explanatory story, so they have little problem negotiating the Canadian cultural milieu. In addition, immigrants from other cultures often migrate for reasons that make them highly likely to adopt the beliefs of the culture they are joining. For example, a significant number of the Asian immigrants to Canada are highly committed Christians rather than Buddhists.

Multiculturalism claims to allow disparate groups to live together peacefully. However, in its more radical versions, multiculturalism is paradoxically culturally homogenizing because its solution to religious diversity is to exclude the influence of different religions from the public square, making religiously based tenets merely personal belief systems

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<sup>1</sup> The website of the Canadian Government devotes 12 pages to multiculturalism without any clear definition. It is mainly an exercise in mouthing platitudes some of which are blatantly untrue. [http://www.pch.gc.ca/multi\\_what\\_e.html](http://www.pch.gc.ca/multi_what_e.html)

that are not allowed to contribute to political and social development. This can be particularly inappropriate for a profession such as medicine, which has traditionally been understood as a moral activity and deals with people as individuals rather than as members of a group.

Patients are always people who belong to particular cultures, but no one has ever or will ever see a multicultural person. The optimal practice of medicine requires the physician to understand the particular strengths and weaknesses of the patient's cultural background in order to encourage their strengths and avoid their weaknesses whilst caring for the patient. It is certainly insensitive to treat Humanists as though they are Christians, but it is equally insensitive to assume, as multiculturalism does, that a bland form of humanistic belief can be imposed on believers. Multiculturalism is intrinsically syncretistic and homogenizing but patients are particular and it's important to consider the details of their cultures in many medical settings. Even within the Christian community, it is important to understand each patient's subculture. Resistant and brittle hypertension can be the result of naive views on the nature of spiritual healing as well as being a biological problem!<sup>2</sup>

### **Cultures: equal or different?**

Despite these obvious incongruencies, most students and academics think that multiculturalism is still a good basis for public policy. They are invariably surprised to find another academic who not only disagrees with their position but is willing to deconstruct it. The first question in this process of deconstruction is: "Are all cultures equal?" The temptation which flows from some versions of multiculturalism, is to say 'yes' for to say 'no' may lead to a label of ethnocentricity or worse, Euro-centricity. Nevertheless there is a vague uneasiness that something is amiss. Further conversation reveals this is a perceptual rather than a cognitive phenomenon, in that they are unable to articulate their uneasiness for fear of the consequences. What is at issue has come to be labelled as the politics of recognition. Certain subgroups in our society feel ignored by the dominant culture and demand recognition of their worth. But as Charles Taylor has pointed out, for this recognition to be real, it must be genuine; otherwise it is "an act of breathtaking condescension." We must indeed take other cultures seriously and recognize the risk that we might decide that they are of lesser value than our own or vice versa.

In these days of political correctness, the raising of questions and the telling of stories, particularly personal stories, offer the safest approaches to engaging sensitive issues. I invariably tell the same story because it happened to me and is simply true. It goes to the heart of the matter of judgement immediately.

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<sup>2</sup> In London many years ago I came across an example. My colleagues in the renal clinic were complaining about the difficulty of controlling blood pressure in a group of Jamaicans. Because I had just returned from five years in Jamaica they were sent to me. I learned that they were Pentecostals who were told at healing services to throw away their hypo-tensive drugs! We agreed that they would come to me to see whether they were the ones who had received the grace of healing.

A few years ago I saw a child with a septic knee. The knee had been totally destroyed because the infection had been neglected. By the time the child arrived at the hospital, close to septic shock and with osteomyelitis, the only option left was amputation. When the parents were told, they requested time to think about it. They were told to please decide quickly because the child would soon die if nothing were done. They returned within half an hour or so, having decided not to allow the amputation. They wanted to take their daughter home to die and they proceeded to do just that. The missionary surgeon who would have done the surgery was busy and I was left with the nurses who were clearly not as disturbed by the result as I was. To them, it was an honourable decision. I asked to talk with them, and discovered that they were in agreement with the parents' choice. Providentially, I asked what the parents would have done with a little boy. They replied quite simply that the parents would have agreed to the amputation. In their culture, a woman has to till the fields, fetch the water, cook the meals and bear the children. A woman with only one leg cannot do these tasks and she will have a life "not worth living".

Now if you are a multiculturalist, you must accept this understanding of the relative value of boys and girls as being equally valid as the understanding that dominates our own society. I have asked many audiences – mainly medical – to raise their hand if they would accept this view of the relative value of girls and boys. Until about 18 months ago, no one had ever raised their hand. Then, in Oregon, a female medical student said she would. I had noticed her at the back of the audience and was aware that she was not happy with the tenor of my presentation and so I was not entirely surprised. I suggested she consider resigning from this medical school to look for one which operated on the basis of pagan ethics, if such a school existed. To her great credit, she did not leave but listened to the rest of the lecture and was obviously deeply challenged by it. I hope and pray that the challenge leads to an acceptance of Christian ethics and, more importantly, of our Lord, but that is not the crux of this story.

A story like this confronts the multiculturalist with the fact that no one is a multiculturalist. Everybody lives within an informative story and I will explain that a little later. We all have cultural biases – if that is the appropriate word - or perhaps cultural insights would be better. We have now deconstructed, in a preliminary way, the concept that “all cultures are equal,” a concept made necessary by our modern obsession with making everyone feel good. All cultures are clearly not equal and the argument should be pursued.

In this little girl's story, I have no doubt that readers in the West feel that their understanding of the equal value of little boys and little girls that has developed through our history is better than that of the African village. Lest anyone accuse me of blind ethnocentricity, let me point out that those same Africans have many things to teach us about cultural insights in relation to ethics. They, for instance, will not accept that we in the Western world have homeless working poor. They say, “Surely, people in a rich nation such as the United States or Canada can help each other build a house?” And that is true. Their insight that everyone in the community has a moral responsibility to help the less advantaged to build houses is right. The fact that there are fifty thousand dollar

cars in the same streets where homeless people are forced to live is obscene. We will be judged for this, in my view. The judgement will be both now in terms of the alienation that stems from this, and again finally when we face divine judgement.

As physicians, we should be very aware that our own tradition and our own practice of medicine goes back, by the grace of God, to a polytheistic pagan, called Hippocrates. He understood that the key elements required for the ethical practice of medicine were all moral insights and convictions, which required a firm belief in transcendence and divine judgement. Such convictions would then be powerful enough to truly order the life of the physician and enable him to resist the temptation to swift income by killing patients for the convenience of their heirs and enemies. These beliefs in their turn produced a moral ethos in which the sanctity of all life was pivotal. Hippocrates also understood that, because these truths were so important, the moral integrity of the physician rightly trumps the demands of the patient. He understood these things twenty five hundred years ago and we should be grateful that he did. Our society has certainly forgotten.

### **The Philosophical Problems with Multiculturalism**

Charles Taylor<sup>1</sup> is succinct on the philosophical shortcomings of a multiculturalism that thinks Western liberal democracy can provide a meeting ground for all cultures. Western procedural liberalism, Taylor says, "is the political expression of one range of cultures and quite incompatible with other ranges." He uses the Muslim response to Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* and the Quebec language laws as examples where procedural liberalism breaks down in this way. For mainstream Islam, he says, "there is no question of separating politics and religion the way we have come to expect in Western liberal society." I suspect that even in Western societies an issue such as legalising the right to partial birth abortion would destroy the current consensus on separating politics and religion. Taylor shows that the modern demand for recognition by various marginalized and victim groups is a major reason for the growth of multiculturalism. The irony is that multiculturalism started out as a means to hold society together and has become an engine of Balkanisation.

And so, if multiculturalism is so wrong, how did it come to be so acceptable? Taylor and I think a little history helps, but we disagree about *which* history. I personally believe that most of our problems arose from Christian misbehaviour and we need to acknowledge this. Taylor starts with Rousseau and argues it was the call for recognition that started the process.

The pre-eminent misbehaviour of Christians, which concerns me, and which characterised the Thirty Years' War, was religious intolerance between Catholics and Protestants. At various times, each used violence to impose their beliefs. (The biography of Kepler<sup>2</sup> provides vivid and tragic illustrations of how much this religious intolerance disturbed the lives of ordinary folk. He was pushed from place to place because of these upheavals, yet he still managed to do his great science and to write prayers in his lab book.) The Thirty Years' War was probably one of the most brutal wars fought in Europe. At its end, there was one clear benefit: religious tolerance was increased through

the wisdom of humanists who persuaded crusading Christians that if they could not agree about religion then religion must be removed from politics. In practice, this meant divisive, humanly constructed doctrines were to be removed from politics to allow the development of peace. The doctrinal wars continued, but were fought with words rather than swords. Despite the secularisation of politics there was no way that Christian virtues and Christian modes of thought about moral behaviour could be taken out of politics. Without them, the distinctively Western political tradition would neither have evolved nor been able to continue. This fact was unacknowledged then and is denied now.

The solution to the problem of sectarian warfare was the imposition of religious tolerance, which eventually led to the doctrine of the separation of Church and State. Initially, the intent was to keep the State out of the Church because although the Church had no formal political power it had political influence which the State wished to suppress or subvert. In the United States and tacitly in Canada, the doctrine has come to mean that the Church has no right to say anything in the public square. That, of course, was not the intention of the American Founders. It is nonsense and we must say so. The Church's job is to hold the State accountable and to interfere with the State. Ironically, the Church was the first institution to develop the distinction between the secular and the sacred, a distinction, which Islam does not accept.

Out of this evolutionary process developed a new understanding of the necessity of tolerance for opposing positions - a form of civility for which we should be thankful. We are still learning how to do this without compromising the practice of vigorous, truthful debate which political correctness tends to suppress. There is still a need to learn that religious dialogue is better than religious war. At the moment, it is probably the Muslims who need to learn this more than anyone else. However, given that Islam assumes a theocratic State and has a long history of forcible imposition of Islamic government, this lesson is likely to take a very long time to grow in Islamic culture if, indeed, it ever will. The good news is that Christian populations have, by and large, forsworn violent means of evangelisation.

Rousseau's role in the development of multiculturalism evolved from his objection to hierarchies and the consequent social dependence in society. His solution was to propose an order of freedom independent of domination requiring the abolition of socially differentiated roles, and a strong allegiance to the general will. Unfortunately, this allegiance could only be achieved by force and thus the modern totalitarian States were born. The alternative Christian view of how to develop social cohesion was rooted in the idea of the Imago Dei and the possibility of the recognition of intrinsic human dignity which flows from it. (It is interesting to note that because of these ideas, slavery disappeared in Europe during the so-called Dark Ages.) The centrality of human dignity, based on the Imago Dei, is also a recurrent theme of John Paul II.

Taylor credits Frantz Fanon with advancing the idea that Christians have a duty to recognize the worth of others. Fanon was a black Algerian physician who said he did not understand the problem of racism until he came to France to study medicine and encountered racism by learning that he was black. He argued that colonizers imposed

their image on the colonized and that to be free, colonized nations must purge themselves of these depreciating self-images, by violence if necessary. Feminists and others have used this concept of cultural imposition to demand that education programs include literature from all marginalized groups to reduce the dominance of the Christian heritage. Their argument is that the marginalized are demeaned by their exclusion from the literary canon. Taylor recognizes the problems involved in this process, particularly the implicit denial of objective measures of artistic worth. He says that it seems a reasonable presupposition that "all cultures that have animated whole societies over some considerable stretch of time have something important to say to all human beings." The argument has gone far beyond this, however, with numerous groups demanding equal recognition even for subjects like alternative medicine and what used to be called sexual deviancy. The right to recognition is problematical.

### **Rights Talk**

The invocation of rights by an individual or social subgroup when particular desires are not met or particular sensitivities are offended has become a common phenomenon. There are those who would demand that all gynaecologists do abortions, that all family practitioners refer for abortion and always prescribe contraceptives on demand and soon, no doubt, that all physicians assist the suicidal to their desired end.

The story of the legalization of physician assisted suicide in Oregon illustrates how such arguments are used. When the state government refused to implement the democratic decision of the populace, the case proceeded through the courts ending at the Supreme Court. The challenge to the Court was framed in impeccable logic and founded on rights. The argument was that if a woman has a right to abortion, which she does in law, then she must also have a right to end her own life and to be assisted if she cannot do it herself. It seemed that the Court was on the horns of a dilemma: if it wished to have coherent law and keep the right to abortion, it must allow physician assisted suicide (PAS). Amazingly, it chose incoherence - it kept the right to abortion but denied the right to PAS! The Court was intuitively responding to deeply inculturated moral beliefs. It even acknowledged that the abortion law may have been a wrong decision but it must be accepted because the court said so! Previously, for hundreds of years, the court sought to discover the law because it was rooted in a revealed Judeo-Christian tradition. This is no longer acceptable to a small ruling elite and their work in remaking the law is destroying the Western moral consensus.

When a society starts to lose its moral consensus, when everyone no longer sees certain actions as intrinsically right or wrong, that society is in trouble. We are at this stage. A recent survey of American high school students found that 71% had cheated on an exam in the previous year, 92% had lied to their parents, and 78% to their teachers.<sup>3</sup> Moral decay leading to moral uncertainty provides fertile ground for the growth of moral relativity and multiculturalism. When we are uncertain about issues presenting a moral dilemma, we readily grant the moral relativity-based starting premises of tolerance and cultural equality on which multiculturalism is based. When the trumpet plays an uncertain note how will anyone be convinced? (1 Corinthians 14:8) If we are to be salt in

our society, speaking clearly on moral and public policy issues, we have a lot of work to do in educating ourselves before we are fit to educate others.

### **The Hierarchy of Virtues**

Therefore, in the context of moral uncertainty, tolerance became the primary, if not the only, virtue of the modern University and a new culture has been born. The difference between the new and the old cultures is very much related to the understanding of the hierarchy of goods or virtues. What is most important in one culture is not most important in another. Though the main virtues – respect for life, for family, for property – occur in all cultures, the relative weight that is attached to each varies. A good example of this hierarchy can be found in Thessiger's<sup>4</sup> marvellous account of the sociology of the nomads in the Horn of Africa early in the last century. As Thessiger describes, the tribesmen considered the property of water so important that they killed those caught stealing from their wells without compunction or guilt. Property trumped the sanctity of life, as it has many times and in many places before and since.

When the Somalis arrived in North America in the 1990s they brought vestiges of tribal virtues which were far from totally compatible with our society. Tribal societies tend to put loyalty to family, clan and tribe above truth and above the sanctity of life. This was also part of the problem in Rwanda. Although most Rwandans would call themselves Christians they did not automatically inhabit a Christian "story" and their virtues were still pagan, dominated by tribal loyalty. This was made terribly apparent by the fact that people who had gone to church together ended up killing one another when that horrendous civil war broke out.

Another example, to make this point clear, comes from our first trip to Africa. The missionaries with whom we stayed complained that the Christian pharmacists stole from the pharmacy. Elaborate systems of checks were established but all this procedure showed was that the drugs were disappearing. The staff denied having stolen the drugs. From a Western point of view, that could not be true. The truth was simply that, although these pharmacists were Christian, they still inhabited a pagan story. When their "brothers" came to the pharmacy with a prescription but insufficient money, it was clearly, the pharmacist's primary responsibility to distribute the necessary medication, regardless of the lack of money. This accounted for the disappearance of most of the missing drugs. The major problem was a different understanding of the primary responsibilities of a human being in a community. One of the reasons we can speak meaningfully about Christian, Jewish, Muslim and Hindu societies is that, although there is much ethical commonality between all of them, the means of expressing the great ideas differs. Because of this, the idea of a cultural story or world-view is helpful. I prefer the term 'cultural story' to 'world-view' because it implies that behaviours are not so much acquired by cognition but by growing up with particular people who tell particular stories which powerfully form the life of the community. Jesus did this. His stories have changed the world and are endlessly richer than doctrinal tomes.

## Cultural Stories

Stanley Hauerwas<sup>5</sup> describes the idea of the cultural story in a beautiful essay based on the novel *Watership Down* by Richard Adams<sup>6</sup>. In the novel, a group of rabbits seeking a new home experience authoritarian, existentialist, and Marxist warrens before founding their own 'human' warren. The whole journey is also a tale of political and philosophical journeying, making us think more clearly about what makes Canada our home. In other words, one can say that all societies have a great narrative that provides meaning for life, reasons for bearing sorrows and performing duties, but also speaks to us of our potentialities and logical limitations. The Western world was shaped by the Bible, the Muslim world by the Koran, Soviet Russia by *Das Kapital* and the pagan world by the book of Nature. We know what kind of society these stories produce; the cumulative effects have been played out many times. It will not be different in the future. We are also beginning to realise that the tacit atheism of global economy theories may be as dehumanising as the explicit atheism of Marxism.

A major objection to multiculturalism is its denial of the centrality of these narrative books. It is not inappropriate stereotyping to refer to a Muslim, Christian, Buddhist or Jewish society. Each has its strengths and weaknesses. For example, no pagan society could discover science because the fundamental cultural construct of paganism is magical and the underlying premises of predictability in science are thereby made unthinkable. All these societies have virtues like honour in common but the particular expression of honour varies. (This is why anthropologists say all morals are relative when what they should say is that all cultural expressions of morality are relative.) Fifty years ago, bankruptcy in the Western World required liquidation of all assets and the payment of as many debtors as possible. Now we hire a lawyer and pay as few debtors as possible. In Japan, suicide was considered the honourable course of action in the face of bankruptcy. Honour obviously exists in all three societies but its expression varies; anthropologists tend to see only the expression.

When these differing cultural stories meet, tensions are inevitable. The multicultural solution requires that all stories be treated as equally true or equally false. The stories are therefore privatised and the public square allegedly left devoid of an informative story. Of course the public square is not without its story. We simply have a debased and truncated story instead of the rich informative story of our heritage. The story's virtues that formerly required rich allegories, myths, parables and fairy tales for their propagation are almost all gone. What is left? Tolerance which evolves into indifference, meaningless alienation and boredom.

The modern espousal of tolerance, as a central requirement for membership of a pluralistic society, reflects an inchoate fear that too strong a commitment to a particular cultural story will lead to societal breakdown. This has raised some serious problems, not the least of which is the alienation of modern, root-less, story-less youth. Tolerance is never without controlling factors; it is not autonomous, it is not independent, and it is contingent upon the environment and cultural story in which it is to be expressed. As the cultural story grows thinner and people forget their heritage, they begin to demand pagan

norms of loyalty, and tolerance, which easily degenerates into tyranny. Ex-communists and feminists have both described this phenomenon, as in Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*.<sup>7</sup> One needs to make this point very forcibly because in our society today there are those who are demanding that behaviours, which Christianity calls evil, be accepted as good, as though they were good for society as a whole. This agenda is usually promoted on the grounds that it is "intolerant" not to accept the behaviour that is at issue. Moreover, dissident opinions are labelled "hate mongering".

When children grew up within the Biblical narrative, such ideas were unthinkable because the ten commandments and the bible stories illustrating them formed a culture where murder, adultery, lying, covetousness, stealing, disrespect and foul language were all intolerable. The removal of the Bible from schools was therefore a key requirement in the multiculturalist agenda. But without a book like the Bible as an authoritative source, law ultimately becomes the expression of power rather than justice, and it is the expression of the views of the ruling elite which guide that power

### **Procedural liberalism**

In order to avoid the tyranny of power, procedural liberalism became necessary. By arguing that the law is a means to ensure fair and equal treatment and not a means of translating metaphysics derived from transcendent truth into practical applications, the legal theorists tried to evade the problem of authority. I believe they have failed, but have not yet acknowledged the failure, and, in the interval, they proceed as though they are dispensing justice. The pursuit of multiculturalism has removed transcendence from public discussion and moved policy making to discussions of equality and rights which necessarily provoke marginalized groups to demand recognition defined as equality. If there is no real objective moral truth then one person's desires have as much right to be gratified as another's. The demand for acceptance of various disparate lifestyles is a consequence of procedural liberalism, which presumes that the only function of law is to dispense morally neutral, equal treatment, whilst avoiding debate about the ultimate nature of good and evil, and even justice. The assumption is that the law can continue to function without theological or religious underpinnings. It can't, but there is not space to discuss the issue here beyond reference to Leff's<sup>8</sup> classic paper. As he points out, without a lawgiver, who is truly above us, we are always tempted to ask "Why should I treat everyone equally?" and "Who says I ought to?"

Nevertheless, this way of looking at justice as procedural fairness (without discussion of where our ideas of fairness arose), now dominates our society and even most evangelical Christians, who are also deeply committed to the primacy of their individual liberty despite the biblical statement; "You shall not at all do as we are doing here today, everyman doing what is right in his own eyes" (Deuteronomy 12:8 NKJV). The problem with the modern views of liberty is that they are founded on deeply atheistic assumptions, directly opposed to the biblical idea that true freedom requires a framework of God-given law. The post enlightenment ideas of individual freedom without constraint have colonized the church like a Trojan horse and it is very difficult to fight an enemy who has outposts in your own head! Many of the ethical problems - of which abortion is only one

- arose because Christians in public policy positions thought in post-enlightenment procedural and utilitarian terms rather than starting from substantive principles. This was wonderfully illustrated by a comment of Charles Malik, one of the framers of the UN Human Rights Declaration. When asked how he persuaded so many philosophically opposed groups to sign a common declaration he said, "As long as you don't ask why we agree; it is alright." But the absence of agreed philosophical principles does matter as the subsequent history of the UN shows. Communist countries, for example, signed the Declaration knowing that they had no intention of following through on their promises. The history of the UN is a history of applied cynicism, illustrated further by the rights of the child where such rights have actually become the rights of the state to over-ride the parents of the child.

How do we deal with this? In the end, the logical outcome of unprincipled government will be corruption, increasingly described as being a "good" MP and looking after your own constituency. We have to learn to confront these issues, to make our colleagues face the fact that they do actually believe in real moral truth. My way of opening up the debate is always to ask questions rather than make statements; to propose thought experiments in which one's own position is not actually revealed but is, in fact, expressed.

An example will make it clear. Most people do not know what NAMBLA means. It is the acronym for the North American Man Boy Love Association – an association that exists for the purpose of legalising sodomy between adult men and young boys. Its slogan used to be "Eight is Too Late." (All these statements can be found in the association's materials and so are not politically incorrect.) The thought experiment I propose is as follows. I ask the students to imagine that they are parents of an eight-year-old boy and have a militant member of this association as a houseguest for three or four weeks. He turns out to be a charming young man who is creative, reads, and plays with the kids and even cooks. He is one of the best houseguests you have had except for your doubts about his statistically unusual view of normal sexuality. I ask them whether they are going to allow this charming and sophisticated thirty-year-old to persuade their eight-year-old that he is missing out on some of the rights of all eight-year-olds? No-one has ever said yes. I then point out to them that they have joined the ranks of the intolerant because I have found something, which they will not tolerate. Then we get to the really important issue: is that intolerance justified? I put it to them that it is justified on the grounds of love. I emphasize that we have no reason to be in any way intimidated about our understanding of what would be loving for that boy because it is rooted in eight years of sacrificial service whereas his desire to "love" is merely the result of three weeks' contact with the child. In fact we can go a step further, whenever there is an attack on a primary good or virtue like love or truth or honour, it is actually our duty to be intolerant of that attack. To be silent is to be foolish. It is also, if I understand Dorothy Sayers correctly, a failure to really appreciate what the radical elevation of tolerance to first place would do. Her description of tolerance is quite challenging.

The church names the sixth deadly sin Acedia or sloth. In the world it calls itself tolerance, but in hell it is called despair. It is the accomplice of the other sins and their worst punishment. It is the sin which believes in nothing, interferes with

nothing, enjoys nothing, loves nothing, hates nothing, finds purpose in nothing and only remains alive because there is nothing it would die for.<sup>9</sup>

This rhetorically overstates the case but is a necessary corrective for today's failure to properly understand the nature of appropriate intolerance. Perhaps we should rename the Ten Commandments the Ten Intolerances.

### **The Necessity of Judgement**

And so, if tolerance is inadequate as a basis for civil society, and if its history explains how it came to be so dominant, what must we do now to see it reduced to its proper usage? I think we must say that tolerance is very important wherever there are uncertainties in our knowledge. The Protestant emphasis on our human fallen-ness is an easier starting point for this habit than the Roman Catholic emphasis on infallibility. We need to be much more careful that we do not take our own cultural background as being somehow truer than another without actually going through the effort of working out whether it is, as in the case of the septic knee. I hope that you have been persuaded that moral neutrality will not work<sup>10</sup>. To assert moral neutrality is in fact to make judgements in that very process: to judge that we should not judge. We cannot avoid judgement; it is a part of life. As Wittgenstein said, "Ethics is a condition of man." We have to make choices every day. The question is on what basis do we judge, what model do we use? That there are different stories out there is clear. Our job is to understand those stories and then apply them to the situation in which we find ourselves to show which one works best.

I think we are currently – in the political arena – at a point where a Christian understanding of good and evil is beginning to assert itself in a more articulate way. We have no reason to be ashamed of our position. Not only can we say that all injunctions about how we ought to behave are ultimately based on faith but also, as Professor George<sup>11</sup> has eloquently outlined, we can say that, on purely rational grounds, Christian understandings of the sanctity of life, marriage and sexuality produce better outcomes for parents, children and society. In relation to medicine Professor Matthews has extensively discussed the positive role of faith in the health of patients and their families in *The Faith Factor*.<sup>12</sup>

During the past hundred years, evangelical Christians retreated into Pietism, Pentecostalism and Dispensationalism, which are in various ways incomprehensible to the university elites. The result has been the exclusion of evangelicals from meaningful discussion with the intellectual and political elites who rule our world. Fortunately, this phase is passing. Evangelicals are again contributing to the intellectual and cultural war, which is now under way. Furthermore, the multiculturalism adopted by the universities and government, which attempts to correct perceived inequities by various forms of affirmative action and enforcement of politically correct speech codes, is becoming incoherent and blatantly unjust. The insistence on multiculturalism has excluded Christians who believe the Bible to be true from any significant role in policy formation. Fortunately even our elites have a limit to the incoherence they can tolerate! They are

always saying that everyone has a right to tell his story and that must include Christians, especially in a democracy.

What is to be done? Just as deconstructionists can always be deconstructed, so multiculturalists can always be caught in their own trap. No Christian who believes that Jesus is the Son of God, and that his death is the means of our reconciliation with God, can subscribe to the notion that all cultures are ultimately equal. Cultures must be treated with respect in order that a just judgement of value may be made. Until now, the Christian position has been dismissed as a personal faith, but, as discussion continues, it is increasingly clear that to rule as though God, if He exists, is irrelevant to the process of government, is no longer a tenable position for any government which strives to be representative of the people because that imposes a tacitly atheistic belief system. The loss of moral consensus in the Western world has gathered momentum over the last two centuries (Our grandparents could not imagine the legalization of abortion, let alone partial birth abortion, to take only one example).

The key text is MacIntyre's,<sup>13</sup> *After Virtue*, in which he reviews western cultural history and concludes by arguing the we have now entered upon a second Dark Ages. As such, we will, at some point, have to cease the attempt to shore up increasingly corrupt government and put our efforts into the formation of communities within which we can keep the virtues and civilities alive. It is these virtues which are the heritage of Christendom and have been the foundation stones for Western democracy. As a community we are already withdrawing our support from an educational system which is being subverted. The results of our alternative educational systems are increasingly impressive. An alternative system of medicine will be next, probably starting with parish nurses, followed by different insurance systems and various forms of law and justice.

The fundamental problem is that the real moral truths that are under attack are so deeply buried that we do not meditate on them; we simply live by them intuitively. All that we are aware of is a vague disquiet in our souls when they are attacked. That the attack is subtle and claims to be motivated by concern for the oppressed merely makes it that much harder to repulse. We have a lot of work to do.

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#### References

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<sup>2</sup> Hummel, C. in *The Gallileo Connection*; Inter Varsity Press, 1986.

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