

Dealing With Political Correctness

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The expression “politically correct” (PC) has, since the 1990s, generally been used among conservatives to playfully denigrate undiscerning conformism to the *Zeitgeist*, out of a mundane fear to displease or offend. Political correctness is perceived as a sign of weakness and lack of character and has pejorative undertones. By contrast, political *incorrectness* would indicate creativity, moral courage and rectitude. The expression “*pensée unique*” in French describes the same phenomenon, though restricted to the domain of “thought”, while “political correctness” applies more broadly to language, attitudes, policies, lifestyles as well as to thought.

Alignment of western majorities with the 1960s ethos

Beyond its ironic or satirical character, political correctness points to a reality that must yet be seriously addressed: the phenomenon of the massive alignment of westerners, of both “left” and “right”, including many Christians, with the worldview of the minority postmodern, post-Judeo-Christian intelligentsia that has successfully led the western cultural revolution. This progressive alignment, since the 1960s, ended up in the 1990s in an alleged new consensus that is in practice treated as *globally normative*. One could therefore argue that in the couple of last decades, political correctness as a western phenomenon turned into the global phenomenon of a new normative ethic. This shift reveals a move towards greater formality and ethical “authoritativeness” of the revolutionary process and raises the question of what the next step in this process might be.

In the 1980s it started becoming apparent that the new ethic had won the

day in the West: both *culture* and *politics* were already siding with its set of values and priorities. Among the core PC values let us name inclusion (of minorities), free choice, equal opportunity, women's rights, environmentalism, "compassion", solidarity, accountability and transparency, bottom-up participation, non-discrimination, minority rights, tolerance, "neutrality", "global" values. Chief among these values are those of *freedom* ("to choose") on the one hand, and *equality* on the other (of groups of people who are considered to be traditionally "discriminated against" such as women, children, blacks, handicapped, indigenous, and minorities such as lesbians, gay, bisexual and transgender people...).

The new ethos deconstructs what is universally human

By contradistinction, concepts such as authority, truth, charity, sin, religious liberty, good and evil, tradition, *the* family, virginity, complementarity, eternity, law of nature, creation, motherhood, fatherhood, the spouse..., started getting a negative connotation. In fact these words are by now purely and simply absent from the western political and cultural discourse. Their usage and the predominance they should have in any contract of society have become "politically incorrect", "against the current". The new enforced orthodoxy associates many of them to fundamentalism, radicalism, obscurantism, intolerance, discrimination – or to stereotypes to deconstruct.

Indeed what the new ethic sidelines is eloquent of what it seeks to deconstruct: openness to transcendence, targeting especially the Judeo-Christian tradition. The new ethic is secularist: exclusively immanent. It reinterprets universal human values and contemporary human aspirations according to secularist parameters. It absolutizes freedom and equality in particular, dissociating them from their natural connection to the law written in all human hearts. Freedom tends in fact to become a process of "liberation" from that law and turns into the right to do what one chooses, even if it is against what one's conscience

would recognize as true and good. Equality becomes a process of deconstruction of differences inscribed in reality. It has become a principle that is in practice primarily applied to minorities who make an abusive interpretation of freedom and claim “equal” rights as those who conform to reality and truth. Radicalization of freedom and equality did not happen overnight. It has been a long historical process dating back to the French revolution.

The values of the postmodern ethic react against the abuses of modernity, such as machismo, authoritarianism, colonialism, hard-heartedness, exclusion, environmental neglect, inequality, but they are marred by a radical agenda. They imposed themselves without encountering resistance and quietly became culturally and politically mainstream.

The new ethic substitutes perennial values

Words that have become “politically incorrect” are substituted by PC notions: the spouse by *partners*, the family by *the family under all its forms*, representation by *participation*, sovereignty by *global governance*, complementarity of the sexes by *gender equality*, creation by “*Mother Earth*” or the *Earth*, for instance. In other words, the new ethic is dynamic and seeks to *occupy the space* legitimately belonging in society to the search for what is universally real, true and good and open to divine revelation.

This *substitution* is due to the actual incompatibility of the two ethical systems. The new ethic considers any reference to *the* family (the traditional family made up of a husband, wife and children) as offensive for homosexual couples or reconstituted families. Drafting socioeconomic and educational policies that would be good for the traditional family would be against the interests of LGBT couples. Publicly addressing the post-abortion syndrome or the abortive character of contraception would abuse women’s alleged “right to choose”. Calling the practice of homosexuality a sin in the name of religious liberty and

the freedom of speech violates people's right to choose their sexual orientation. Evoking the socioeconomic cost of divorce goes against the logic of human rights. Defending parental rights to educate their children contradicts children's rights to their "own opinions".

From western political correctness to a global ethic

The cold war ended when the western cultural revolution had reached a critical maturity point. The globalization of the postmodern ethic then started. The conference process of the United Nations that took place between 1990 and 1996 was instrumental in this globalization. The purpose of the UN was to build a "new global consensus" on the norms, values and priorities of international cooperation for the 21st century. The UN wanted to provide an ethical framework to economic globalization which was gaining unprecedented momentum at the end of the 1980s.

A series of "new paradigms", expressed by means of a new global language were then adopted and integrated into the alleged "consensus". Let us give a few examples¹: good governance, sustainable development, consensus-building, quality of life, reproductive health, peer education, gender equality, reproductive and sexual rights, ownership, internalization, right to choose, universal access to choice, informed choice, children's rights, women's empowerment, participatory democracy, civil society organizations, non-state actors, partnerships, principle of non-discrimination, realization of one's potential, capacity-building, zero growth, celebration of cultural diversity, sexual diversity, "retreat", well-being for all, deconstruction, bodily integrity, best practices, values clarification, global problems, inclusion, public-private partnerships, culturally sensitive approaches²... Ever since their adoption at the UN conferences, global governance has treated these new paradigms as global norms – the norms of the new ethic, of what people must think and act upon, of what is PC.

What we can call the *phenomenon of the new global language* – a global PC language - is a historical fact. Its “construction” by the western postmodern intelligentsia which conducted the West from modernity to postmodernity dates back to the 1960s and took place over the three decades preceding the fall of the Berlin wall. These western or westernized “experts”, stemming from a post-Judeo-Christian secular or even secularist background, had from the onset an internationalist or globalist outlook. Since the 1960s they have forged operational partnerships with the specialized bodies of international organizations. They found themselves at the rudder of global governance in 1990. This is how one can explain the easiness with which their paradigms imposed themselves at the time the new global consensus was being built. Western governments were coming out of the cold war and were still reasoning according to the old mindset; they lacked a vision for the new era that was then beginning. By contrast, the ideologues did have a vision and grabbed their opportunity, filling the leadership vacuum left by governments³. They transformed western political correctness into “political correctness” at the global level. The global norms in turn reinforced the compelling character of the new ethic in the West itself. They have, in a way, substituted the notion of “political correctness”, which in fact already tends to be on the wane.

A horizontal phenomenon

The horizontal imposition of the new PC language took place at thunder light speed – in a few years only, roughly between the end of the conference process in 1996 and the year 2000. Henceforth, this language is no longer that of a minority of experts: it is already that of our children and teenagers, of their school manuals, of teachers and professors at all levels of education, everywhere in the world. The new language is being used in the healthcare centers of the remotest Congolese, Peruvian and Indian villages, on the publicity panels of metropolitan cities, in the annual reports or conduct codes of multinational corpora-

tions, in the media, movies, radio programs, the policies of NGOs.

The new language no longer is that of the western “left” from which it draws its origin: it already belongs, since the end of the 1990s, to the political platforms of all parties, not only in the West, but in the rest of the world as well.

It is no longer the preserve of the UN: local authorities, all governments and their ministries, regional organizations such as the European Union or the African Union “own” it. It is no longer reserved to the political domain: it already penetrated cultures.

It no longer is exclusive to the secular realm: it is already present in the homilies of imams and pastors and in the teachings of rabbis, thereby contributing to secularize them from within. We know it: it no longer is external to the Church. It is undeniable, however, that the new language comes from *elsewhere*: not from the Church, not from divine revelation.

It can therefore be affirmed that the global spread of the new language has been a smashing success: horizontally, the cultural revolution is indeed already accomplished.

A vertical phenomenon

The vertical imposition of the new language is a more complex phenomenon. It implies that the institutions and individuals who already use the language consciously internalize and own the ethic it is supposed to express and commit themselves to implement it. It is only when that ownership process is launched that cultures transform themselves sustainably (if not irreversibly) from within. In the West, the new ethic already imbibes the fabric of societies, because the majority of those who exercise their influence in society and politics adhere to it.

The ownership process is not self-evident. The content of the new ethic is ambivalent. When it displays its radicalism, it may provoke resistance and op-

position on the part of cultures and religions.

Ambivalent, the new global language is however seducing. It hijacks the universal aspirations of humanity, especially in favor of the promotion of women and the enhancement of their living conditions (“gender equality”, “women’s rights”, “autonomy”...), the self-determination of peoples (“ownership”), a greater respect for the environment than under modernity (“sustainable development”), an equal North-South treatment (“partnerships”), a greater respect for non-western cultures (“culturally sensitive approaches”), a greater political participation (“participatory democracy”)... The new ethic seems to respond to these aspirations. However, a subtle but vital line separates it from cultures and traditions, as well as from the social doctrine of the Church.

Driven by a powerful dynamic, the new language tends to draw those who use it in the logic of its ethic, which imperceptibly leads them to progressively abandon their own values. The passive use of the new language, out of cultural conformism or under the pressure of political or cultural constraints that would appear inexorable, also commits. It makes one enter a framework whose objectives are defined by others. Once entered the framework, one is led where one would not want to go.

The process of cultural transformation takes time. Vertically, the global cultural revolution is still on-going.

Stakes of the new language: a few examples

The new language expresses a postmodern ethic succeeding, as the word suggests, that which has governed western modernity for centuries. We live in a world of coexistence of the old and the new, of modernity and postmodernity. The latter destabilizes and deconstructs (two key-verbs of its vocabulary) modernity as well as the Judeo-Christian tradition. But the greatest majority, everywhere in the world, does not discern the stakes of the current coexistence of

government and governance, national democratization and global governance, representation and participation, education and sensitization, universal values and global ethic, for instance.

A laborious discernment work remains to be done for each individual new paradigm. Each one of them presents specific challenges: serious dangers (often not perceived) and also perhaps opportunities for Christians. The main danger of the new ethic, common to all paradigms, is to trap believers in a purely immanent perspective – a perspective closed to transcendence and therefore intolerant and radical.

Let us give a few examples.

1. “Sensitization” or “awareness-raising” are common practices today. Have we reflected on the differences between *education* and *sensitization*? Public opinion today is educated by awareness-raising campaigns led by the media, for instance, about environmental issues or AIDS prevention. Public opinion tends to passively absorb the views of the “experts” of global governance and to align itself on the position of “those who know” and claim to have the technical skills to determine the course policies must take. True education encourages each individual to use his or her liberty, reason and conscience in order to seek what is true and good and to commit oneself according to the criteria of love and truth. Current awareness-raising campaigns bypass this personal discernment process: they oblige people to identify themselves with the *Diktat* of the experts. They incapacitate individual reason and conscience – a subtle form of dictatorship.

2. Non-discrimination is an absolute principle of the new ethic: absolute, because mandatory and in theory applicable to all – but in practice, mainly and as a matter of priority to minorities such as LGBTs or feminist lobbies. The absolutization of non-discrimination stifles the Christian message, which is to love each person, including our enemies – not “not to discriminate”.

3. Sustainable development is not only a political concept but a new ethic positioning itself above religions which, through their insistence on the “there beyond”, would influence too many men and women not to preoccupy themselves with the “here below” and with the degradation of our “Mother-Earth”. Instead of being open to transcendence, it withdraws in, and absolutizes immanence. By allowing ourselves to be seduced by the ethic of sustainability, do we not run the risk of forgetting that we are not made to “sustain ourselves” (a pessimistic, survival perspective) but for eternal life? Besides, sustainable development raises many other issues, among which the priority it gives to “gender equality” and “reproductive health”.

4. Isn't the concept of quality of life for all seducing? To determine, however, that such a standard of living has quality and that such other standard does not have any quality amounts to posit oneself as arbiter of the conditions according to which life is worth living – hence the abortion of sick or handicapped children, the euthanasia of persons at the end of their life, the scorn for old and weak people.

5. “Reproductive health”, the paradigm adopted at the 1994 Cairo conference on population, entails, inter alia, universal access to the whole range of contraceptive methods, access to “safe” abortion and to sterilization, provided it is voluntary, *in vitro* fertilization, “sexual freedom” (multiple partners, absence of commitment). Let us underline that by “universal”, the UN and its partners mean “for all”, whatever one's marital status, state of physical or mental health, “sexual orientation” and, for young people, “without parental knowledge and consent”.

6. Gender equality is inclusive of reproductive health. Transversal priority of international cooperation, gender equality aggressively imposed itself globally in spite of the fact that it rests on the principle that the maternal, nup-

tial and educational vocation of the woman, male and female anthropological complementarity, heterosexuality and even the male and female body are social constructs - stereotypes to deconstruct by way of culture, education and laws so as to “free” the woman from all forms of “discrimination”, make her in everything “equal” to man, promote her “empowerment” and her autonomy and allow each individual to enjoy his or her right to choose one’s social function and “sexual orientation”.

What can we do?

Political correctness is a consequence of the passivity the “majority”, whose non-involvement in directing cultural change at a time when it was historically needed (between the 1960s and the 1990s) left a political vacuum quickly filled by ideological minorities ready to grab power. In fact, the latter’s success in so doing is historically unprecedented: have they not managed, *de facto*, to impose their worldview globally - through international organizations, the new language and its ethic?

The passivity of the majority may be a more challenging obstacle to overcome than the power-grab of ideological minorities. Such minorities would not wield so much power, were majorities alert and proactive. But, one wonders, is it still possible to engage in politics and get involved now that we are facing a “system” that appears one-sided, secularist and is often intolerant? What is the way out of this situation? There is no ready-made answer to the question, no easy fix to the crisis. The issues we are confronted with are complex. Following are a few steps that appear indispensable to take on the way of discernment, back to the exercise of our responsibility.

1. *Overcome ignorance.* Like French aristocrats at the time of the revolution, who were discussing the state of affairs while drinking tea in their castles until they were sentenced to the guillotine, the majority of Christians in the

West have watched the cultural revolution from a distance. Their ignorance of the history, content, strategies and operational mechanisms of the revolution is abyssal. This ignorance must be overcome if they are to identify the root-causes of the West's state of decadence.

2. *Discern.* Not everything is black and white in the new ethic. In its radical aspects, the revolution hijacked the changes that had to happen and that people aspired to, such as greater responsibility towards the environment, greater respect for the equal dignity of women, a more genuine participation of the grass-roots in political decision-making, and, more importantly, the aspiration to love, to a society where love would be reintroduced, to a society that would no longer be governed by the “power-reason coalition” as it had been in the modern age. This discernment is critical if one is to elaborate an appropriate response to the challenges of the new global culture. A reactionary approach, that would throw away the baby with the bath water, would be wrong and counterproductive.

3. *Disentangle Christians from the new ethic.* Many Christians, misinterpreting the invitation of Vatican II to dialogue, allowed themselves to be seduced by the values of the revolution and governed by the logic of a purely secular ethic. They conform to the PC ethos, using the new global language, mistaking the new paradigms for the social doctrine of the Church. Knowingly or not, they work against themselves when they fail to discern. There is work to do from within the Church.

4. *Identify the cracks in the system.* Social engineers built the Babel Tower on sand. There are already cracks in the edifice. The flagrant contradictions of the current enforced orthodoxy appear ever more clearly when looked at against the light of reality and truth. How long will people be able to keep their eyes closed to the reality of the bitter anthropological, cultural, political and economic consequences of the revolution – to silence, for instance, the suffering of the post-abortion syndrome, the social cost of divorce, the drastic

socioeconomic consequences of Europe's demographic winter?

5. *Be not afraid.* Even if marred by its inner contradictions, incoherent and therefore unsustainable, the cultural revolution, political correctness, the new ethic do have a hard, intransigent character. They have teeth. To go against the tide, to take the narrow path, to stand for what is true and good, to love, courage is needed.

(This article draws from previous publications by the author. Please consult our website www.dialoguedynamics.com for more analytical information about the topics addressed in this paper.)

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- 1 In fact, there exist hundreds of expressions belonging to the new language. See our website www.dialoguedynamics.com.
 - 2 We note that the Holy Father, in his social encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, does not use the new, UN language. He speaks for instance of *integral human development* in the stead of *sustainable development*.
 - 3 The vision of a minority of western postmodern and secular experts became the object of an alleged "global consensus". If democracy is government by the people for the people, the new consensus is not the product of a democratic process, but rather of what used to be called in 18th century France "enlightened despotism": government by those who are "enlightened" by the "light" of a secular reason. Such a form of government entails many dangers. It is geared towards gnosis, transforms the majority of citizens into zombies that are manipulated by "those who have the knowledge".