

COVID-19 AND THE MYSTERY OF LAWLESSNESS – THE VIRUS IN OUR MINDS

People have short memories, not least in government, but we all remember the prediction that led to the March lockdown. According to Neil Ferguson, professor of mathematical biology at Imperial College, 510,000 people were due to die if no action was taken. But cast your mind further back. In 2001, at the outbreak of foot-and-mouth, Ferguson was on the team of modellers led by Prof. Roy Anderson who warned that up to 150,000 people might die if no action was taken. Of course, action always is taken. So the countryside was closed off, 6.5 million sheep and cattle were slaughtered, and fewer than 200 people died. Looking back, Kitching et al. (2006) concluded that the cull was grossly excessive, ‘a salutary warning of how models can be abused in the interest of scientific opportunism.’

In 2002 Imperial estimated that 50 to 150,000 people in the UK could die from exposure to BSE (mad cow disease); the actual death toll was 177. In 2005 there were fears about bird flu. “Around 40 million people died in the 1918 Spanish flu outbreak,” said Prof. Ferguson. “There are six times more people on the planet now so you could scale it up to around 200 million people probably.” Fewer than 300 in the UK died. In 2009, according to a ‘reasonable worst-case scenario’, swine flu was set to cause 65,000 UK deaths. Already in May, Anderson, SAGE member and well-paid non-executive director of GlaxoSmithKline, was calling the outbreak a pandemic, the first in 41 years. More than half the experts who subsequently urged the World Health Organisation to declare it a pandemic were linked to the pharma industry. The first wave hit the UK in July, with the Government planning on the basis that up to 30% of the population would be infected and up to 380,000 hospitalised. A second wave hit in September-October. In the end, the ‘pandemic’ killed 457. Although forecasts were repeatedly revised downwards, the newspapers were not interested. The same kind of things were going on in other parts of the world.

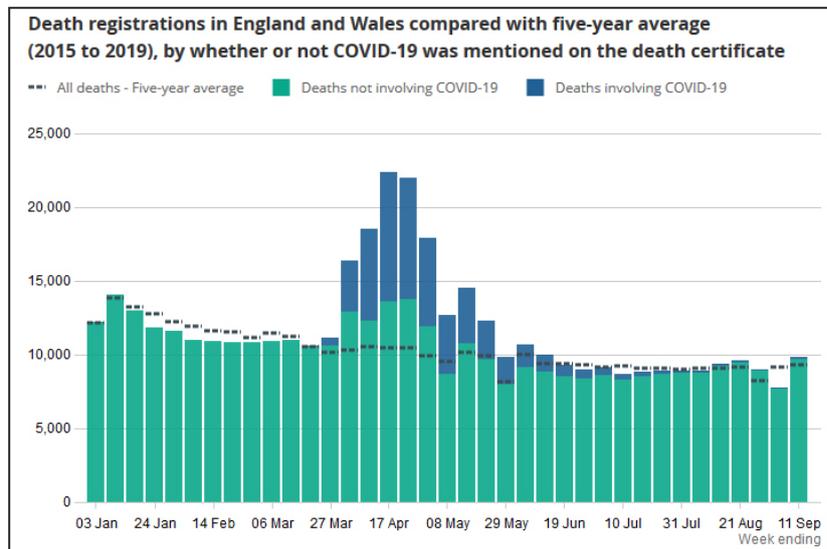
If nothing else, what can be predicted is a tendency for scientists, chiefly modellers, to over-estimate the danger, for governments to over-react on the basis of worst-case projections, for the press, TV and now internet media to sensationalise and magnify the threat, and for the general public to want to believe the worst. Hope that the worst will not happen is mixed with morbid fascination, a thrill at the prospect that it might, as if we were watching life from a cinema seat.

These tendencies have only increased over the years, as people have conceived increasingly unrealistic expectations of the power of science to overcome disease and death, and as they have become ever more ready to blame politicians if they get things wrong, ever more anxious to eliminate risk from their lives and ever more willing to give up personal freedom and responsibility in return for being looked after by the State. Some call the process infantilising, perhaps not a bad term considering how the State has become an ersatz parent. The State, like many a parent, ends up in thrall to the child's demands.

Covid-19 is clearly more lethal than bird flu and swine flu, and more lethal than the previous coronaviruses, SARS in 2003 and MERS in 2012. But it is nowhere near as deadly as Spanish flu. How many lives were 'saved' (prolonged) as a result of the lockdown? We cannot know for certain, partly because we did not divide the country into two and impose lockdown on one half and not the other, and partly because the all-encompassing best- and worst-case scenarios are so framed that they allow forecasters and decision-makers to claim they were right whatever the outcome. 'Reasonable worst-case scenarios' are unfalsifiable because they do not happen, either because they are prevented from happening or because they are not reasonable.

The effects of the first lockdown

In the event, a [graph](#) based on official statistics shows a clear spike from the end of March to late May amounting to 43,000 deaths 'involving' covid. It also shows the 5-year average. Before and after the spike, which peaked in April, not June as SAGE predicted, deaths trended with remarkable consistency slightly below the average. During the spike itself, non-covid deaths exceeded the average by some 12,000.



12,000 therefore appears to represent the immediate number of deaths attributable to the collateral effects of lockdown (many effects are not immediate). Ferguson would argue that the number of deaths prevented by the China-style lockdown was 510,000 minus 43,000. Others would argue that the effect was marginal, the spike reflecting the typical pattern of a respiratory disease outbreak – numbers shot up, then declined as higher temperatures, greater sunlight,

medical treatment and increasing immunity in the population bore down on the disease. Although we did not divide the UK into two, we do have Sweden as a comparative. That country registered a similar spike, which petered out of its own accord, without a lockdown. As of now, the UK has suffered 78 deaths per 100,000 (a mortality rate of 0.08%), Sweden 60 (0.06%).

Some have disputed the comparability of the Swedish case. On the other hand, academics at Uppsala University were convinced that Sweden would fare as badly as Ferguson suggested the UK would if no action was taken. Using very similar modelling, they warned that deaths would pass 40,000 in early May and reach 52,000 to 183,000 by the end of June. The actual end-of-June total was 5482. As in the UK, Sweden's care homes were badly neglected, but its hospitals did not collapse. The country held its nerve and believed that in the long run it would be better to bank on the build-up of natural immunity than on massive State intervention. Measured in terms of lives prolonged, there was an initial cost compared to neighbouring countries that imposed lockdown (Norway, Denmark) but an expectation that the balance sheet would improve. At the moment, cases are rising. Deaths, at 1/5th the April peak (UK: 2/5ths), are rising slightly. Masks, by the way, are not compulsory in the Nordic countries and worn only by a minority.

We might also recall the time, not so long ago, when Government experts were warning that Iraq was developing weapons of mass destruction. They convinced the strongman in charge, Tony Blair, and he then convinced parliament. However, the mass destruction that ensued was perpetrated not by, but on, Iraq. The so-called 'war on terror' cost trillions of dollars (estimates vary from 1 to 6 trillion), mostly borne by the United States economy, and 800,000 lives, mostly the lives of innocent people in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

In terms of psychology the story today is much the same. The source of terror – the agent of mass destruction – is a virus, only this time the threat is posed not just by fanatics but by all human beings, for we're all potential virus-carriers. The world's 'wise men' instil fear in the government, and the terrified government then terrorises the people. On a radio program recently a cabinet minister was asked four times whether the Government had performed a cost/benefit analysis of lockdown. He said it was an 'inappropriate question': the Government had received warnings that the NHS would be overwhelmed and consequently the financial cost was not a consideration. As it turns out, in terms of both dollars and lives the cost of lockdown has been catastrophic, not least in the Third World which – also foregoing impact assessments – simply copied the West's reaction, even though it was less susceptible (contrary to the West's own opinion). Modelling of a 5% contraction in income predicts 85 million people falling into extreme poverty. At one point South Africa's economy shrank by 51%. The increased poverty will cause more deaths than covid, many of them among children and infants, not just those near the end of their lives.

The UK Government has spent £500,000,000,000 on countering the effects of its own policy – money that it borrowed, since it has no money. This is 'Alice in Wonderland' territory. The national debt went up by almost a third in the course of a few months, the cost imposed on future generations, including the schoolchildren, students and young adults who are already bearing a

heavy burden. Notwithstanding the £0.5 trillion (and £26 billion lost to fraud), entire sectors of the economy have been crippled if not driven to insolvency – hotels, pubs, restaurants, cinemas, theatres, museums, sport, the aviation industry, aircraft manufacture, train and coach companies, retail shops generally. To say nothing of the judicial system, and the health service itself, now weighed down by a huge backlog of cases and needed operations.

The health service has been protected by stopping people from using it. Hundreds of thousands of elective surgeries have been cancelled. Cancer screening has been suspended. Either not wishing to trouble the NHS or fearful of contracting the virus if they entered hospital, fewer people now die in hospital and more die at home. More than a third of covid deaths take place in care homes, where the old are imprisoned in a sort of living death, cut off from the relatives whose visits and loving touch meant so much to them. The relatives are hardly less distressed. MPs receiving letters describing the anguish are moved, yet unmoved.

Others have felt hardly any pain. So as to shield the public from the financial reality of appeasing the virus, the State underwrote the wages of millions. NHS staff at particular risk – e.g. the overweight – were sent home on full pay. In Yorkshire and the North East 37% of staff were sent home because they tested positive (illustrating how hopelessly inaccurate the PCR test is). Civil servants and employees of local government, with no fear of losing their jobs, experienced the first lockdown as an extended summer holiday. Despite the national debt, pensioners were assured that their pensions would continue to be triple-protected. Teachers – or their unions at least – liked furlough so much, they didn't want to go back. Nor did lecturers.

Covid in perspective

Compared to other causes of death the virus in September ranked 11th, after dementia, heart disease, lung cancer, strokes, other respiratory diseases, colon cancer, flu & pneumonia, ill-defined conditions, blood cancer and prostate cancer. We may have known someone who recently died from covid; but we may also have known someone who recently died from cancer, a death just as horrible. We don't track the cumulative number of cancer fatalities (which will now go up) or speak of a 'pandemic' of cancer, though the disease is far more lethal and widespread, because it is not infectious. Consequently cancer screenings can wait while billions of pounds are wasted on an exorbitant covid screening system that, at best, identifies covid-carriers whether infectious or not, and more billions on an equally ineffectual 'track and trace' system.

Flu infects an estimated one billion people every year and results in 290,000-650,000 deaths globally. In the UK, deaths have varied in recent years from 4,000 to 30,000. For some reason Public Health England keeps on revising the figures (which would of course be higher in the absence of vaccination):

	2017/18 report	2018/19 report	2019/20 report
2013/14	3,107		
2014/15	34,300	28,330	

2015/16	14,357	11,875	7,371
2016/17	17,592	18,009	15,047
2017/18		26,408	22,087
2018/19			3,966

If the objective is zero tolerance of covid, the same logic must apply to flu. Not only is mask-wearing going to be compulsory forever, or at least until flu is eradicated, but if early monitoring indicates that flu deaths may reach five figures, we'll be locking the country down again – and again. Something in the public mood has changed since 2014/15.

In the USA, 72 deaths per 100,000 have been attributed to covid, marginally lower than in the UK. Again, to put things in perspective, 'deaths of despair' – encompassing suicides, alcohol poisoning, unintentional drug overdoses – among working-class Americans aged 45-54 currently stand at 125 per 100,000. The figure has been rising since the 1990s, and ever more steeply. So despair claims twice as many lives as covid, and has been claiming more than covid since 2005, year after year. Unsurprisingly, anxiety about covid now exacerbates the problem.

Sooner or later we all die. The average age of those dying from/with covid in England and Wales is currently 80.4 – a little up from the March average of 79.5, probably reflecting improved treatment. Italy in March reported a similar figure; so did Germany, Spain, the Netherlands, etc. The figure is indistinguishable from average life expectancy (80.7, weighted 65:35 M:F). It was known *from the outset* that the virus posed no serious threat to the working population, unlike Spanish flu in 1918-19. The increase in susceptibility with age supports the view that in most instances the immune system overcomes the infection. The immune system becomes less effective as we age and as 'co-morbidities' weaken immunity. The hope of an effective vaccine depends on the immune system.

The case for a second lockdown

The thesis behind the re-imposition of lockdown (again no cost/benefit analysis was performed) was that (1) lockdown saves hundreds of thousands of lives, and (2) natural immunity remains negligible, with SAGE estimating that over 90% of the population remains susceptible to the virus (SAGE minutes 21/09/20). The first point has been discussed. The second is critiqued by, among others, Mike Yeadon, formerly chief scientist at Pfizer. As summarised in an email by Trisha Longworth, with my interpolations,

Coronaviruses are not new: we have had SARS and MERS and at least four strains of coronavirus are in the cocktail known as the common cold. So, many individuals who have been infected with these coronaviruses will already have immunity to the closely-related Covid 19. Research has shown that 30% of the population was immune even before Covid 19. If we assume [pessimistically] a mortality rate of 0.2 % and a current death toll of approximately 45,000, that would imply that 22.5 million people have already been infected [45,000 divided by 0.002], which is 33.5% of our

population. Of all the people who have been infected by Covid to date, almost none have been re-infected.

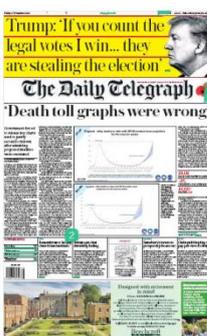
So we have a third of the population who were already immune, another third who have been infected this year and are now immune, and one tenth of the population who are aged ten or under and rarely susceptible to being infected. That leaves us just 26.5% vulnerable to infection [or a little higher if the already immune 30% included children].

So SAGE believes that natural immunity – pre-existing and as developed in the course of the outbreak – played almost no role in limiting the spring death toll to 45,000. Yeadon believes that the death toll second time round will be much lower.

Consequently, even ignoring Sweden’s example, we will now be in a position to evaluate the whole theory. Will mortality be the same in the second lockdown? The second being considerably less stringent than the first, one might expect even higher mortality. Also, the first wave of infection hit us in March, towards the end of the flu/coronavirus season. The second will be doing its worst all the way to next April.

At the time of writing (mid November), and despite what the Health Secretary is saying, overall mortality is just above normal for the time of year, which suggests that the rise in covid deaths is counterbalanced by fewer flu deaths. Average age at death is normal. Hospital bed occupancy is normal. Covid patients are taking up 10% of the beds, and only 82% of beds are occupied, fewer than last winter, not counting the empty Nightingale hospitals. These are the circumstances in which Government is again inflicting untold damage on the economy.

SAGE’s claim that covid deaths were set to reach 4000 a day was based on a ‘worst case’ interpretation of figures three weeks out of date, despite up-to-date figures being available. A graph showing deaths surging to the same peak as in April supported the thesis that the population was just as vulnerable second time round. The claim was subsequently withdrawn (under pressure).



Government forced to reissue key charts used to justify second lockdown after admitting projected fatalities were overstated

By Laura Donnelly HEALTH EDITOR and Harry Yorke

OFFICIAL projections that pushed the country into a second lockdown have been quietly revised to no longer suggest deaths could soon overtake those at the peak of the first wave, *The Daily Telegraph* has learnt.

Graphs shown at a Downing Street press conference on television last Saturday indicated England would see up to 1,500 deaths a day by early December, far beyond numbers seen in the first wave. But documents released by the Government show that the figures were in fact too high and have now been "amended, after an error was found". The revised forecast reduces the upper limit to 1,000 deaths a day by Dec 8 – on a par with April's peak.

Presenting the graphs, Sir Patrick Vallance, the Chief Scientific Adviser, said figures over a six-week period presented "a very grim picture" with "greater certainty" than long-term modelling could provide. But the Government Office for Science has altered two slides, reducing the range for deaths and hospital admissions.

While the presentation suggested daily hospital admissions could reach 9,000, the upper end has since been cut to 6,000 on the updated slides.

It comes days after it emerged that separate modelling, showing a worst-case scenario of 4,000 deaths a day by the end of December, was based on outdated figures. These have also been

amended. They prompted Theresa May to question the Government's use of statistics and ask if "figures are chosen to support the policy rather than the policy being based on the figures".

Prof Carl Heneghan, from Oxford University, said last night the graphs presented at the weekend were "riddled with errors", raising concern that a desire for lockdown had seen forecasts "systematically" exaggerated.

Greg Clark, the chairman of the Commons science and technology committee, said the belated admission of errors was "of great concern", especially as one had been used as "the key projection" in the case for lockdown to prevent the NHS being overwhelmed.

Steve Baker MP, given advance sight of the projections ahead of the briefing last weekend, warned: "Government must accept public confidence rests on not over-egging the pudding."

Yesterday, the UK statistics watchdog criticised the Government for a lack of transparency about the data driving its lockdown policies.

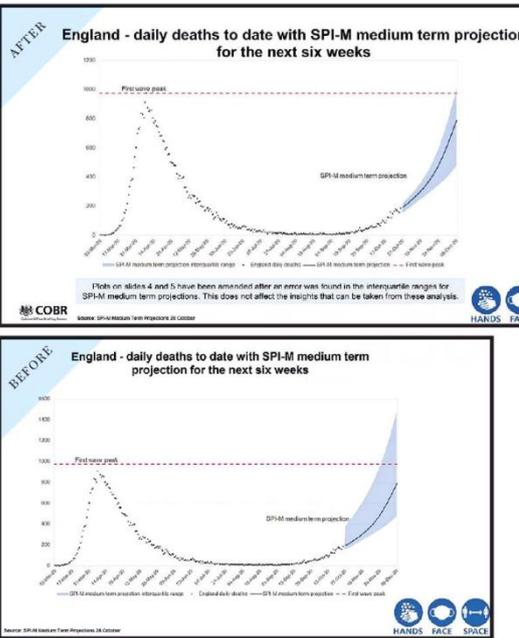
Last Saturday, when Boris Johnson announced lockdown, Sir Patrick presented a series of slides on the outlook for the pandemic, including the now disputed 4,000 deaths graph.

On Tuesday, Sir Patrick and Prof Chris Whitty, the Chief Medical Officer, were grilled by the Commons science and technology committee about the use of the modelling scenarios.

Sir Patrick said he "regretted" it if he did not make clear the scenarios were models rather than projections and were "not as reliable" as the six-week forecasts he had presented. He told MPs: "The right graphs to focus on are the six-week medium-term forward projections", and described the two slides on hospital admissions and deaths as "the ones that are important".

Amid angry exchanges, Prof Whitty said he had "never used anything beyond six weeks in anything I have ever said to any minister on this issue".

Prof Heneghan claimed the data had been used "systematically" to drive the country into lockdown. He said: "It worries me that on matters this impor-



AFTER
England - daily deaths to date with SPI-M medium term projection for the next six weeks

BEFORE
England - daily deaths to date with SPI-M medium term projection for the next six weeks

The graphs show daily deaths (dotted line) and SPI-M medium term projections (solid line with shaded area). The 'AFTER' graph shows a lower peak and a more gradual decline compared to the 'BEFORE' graph, which shows a higher peak and a steeper decline. Both graphs include a legend for 'First wave peak', 'SPI-M medium term projection', and 'End of wave peak'.

Whitty and Vallance, intelligent scientists as they are, must have known they were being misleading. The average daily total is currently running around 400 and rising, as one would expect, but compared to March the rate of rise is much lower. Rather horribly, while doubters hope for lower numbers, the Government and its advisers – who repeatedly talk up the crisis – must be hoping they will soon be in the thousands.

Like his projection of 4000 deaths a day, Vallance's projection of 'cases' reaching 50,000 a day by mid October was scaremongering. The 7-day average is currently stabilising around 23,000 (you can track it here and here). There are vastly more cases now than in April because testing has increased. 'Case' certainly does not mean death, nor even live infection. Indeed, the higher the number of cases (including an unknown but probably high proportion of false positives), the lower the case fatality rate. It is the number of deaths that matters. But even here the statistics are not necessarily reliable. A nurse recently complained that flu and covid were being treated as the same thing on death certificates. Since the NHS forbade her from speaking out (another instance of 'protecting the NHS'), she had to resign to voice her concerns.

Science – 'the' science – and the irresponsible use of statistics have come to mean the same thing. Frightened that hospitals even second time round might be overwhelmed, the Government sacrifices the whole economy to the NHS, and the whole of society (what has not already been destroyed). The electorate demands that it should be so, so the Government feels that it cannot lose. Electorally, the 'protect the NHS' mantra is a winner and £0.5 trillion deemed a price worth paying. Society does not realise that it is committing collective suicide. As a body, it does not care that covid lives are just being saved at the expense of other lives.

Authority and authoritarianism

Truth is the first casualty of war. It might have been some comfort to say that the war did not begin until March 2020, and was simply a war against a physical virus. In fact the response has been part of a less publicised, more insidious assault on society's Christian foundations (including freedom of conscience and freedom of speech) and on Christianity itself. This has been going on for decades. The Bible calls it the 'mystery of lawlessness', referring to the eventual rejection of God's moral law. Human law multiplies to deal with the consequences of rejecting that law. As God's righteousness is abandoned, man's substitution of his own righteousness only increases. Righteousness is externalised, and becomes a matter of the letter, not the spirit.

Twitter and YouTube (owned by Google) regularly take down material questioning whether covid is an existential threat. Increasingly these giant corporations practise the same 'cancel culture' as some of their users do. In March, guidance from Ofcom told broadcasters to exercise extreme caution when airing the views of people critical of the official response; partly for this reason the BBC rarely airs anything critical of the Government's policy and its claim to be governed by 'the science'. Small peaceful demonstrations in the streets – peaceful until the police wield their batons – are forcibly suppressed. Under lockdown rules, indeed, demonstrations are outlawed.

Nonetheless, scientifically informed challenges to the Government's version of the truth are out there. The website lockdownsceptics.org consists of daily updates, full-length articles and links to articles elsewhere, and is a lifeline. Of course, even the truth of these last few sentences will not be apparent unless you are willing to consider other points of view. Most people absolve themselves from moral responsibility, believing that their duty is not to question but to trust and obey. But that way totalitarianism lies, and before God we cannot absolve ourselves. By not exercising judgement and testing everything (I Thes 5:21), we become complicit in the deception, the corruption of reason and dialogue, the wrecking of people's lives, the silencing of the appeal to be reconciled to God. Romans 13 is not a charter for despots. Nor is it a get-out for those who might hope to argue they were 'just obeying orders'. Daniel could have bowed down before the statue of the king and he could have agreed not to pray for a month, on grounds that he was just obeying the law. On both occasions he refused. God vindicated his breaking of the law.

Ideally, democracies are characterised by a relationship of mutual respect between government and governed, founded on truth, trust, consent and respect for fundamental freedoms. Truth, trust, consent and respect are marks of a society leavened by a Christian understanding of how to live, and that understanding extends to the structures that make for social order and well-being. Until he comes in person, God delegates his authority to governments, whose responsibility is to be a terror to bad conduct and a stimulus to good, in accordance with his law (Rom 13). In a way, the relationship between democratically elected governments and the people is rather like that between husband and wife in a Christian marriage. The woman voluntarily accepts the man's authority because she respects him and knows that he loves her (Eph 5:23f). If he becomes unbalanced and starts to dominate her psychologically, if he forbids her to leave the house without his permission and beats her when she disobeys, we know that the relationship has gone badly wrong.

I hope I will not be misunderstood. My point is that in putting the people under house arrest, the government is abusing its power just as in an abusive marriage relationship. From there the abuse translates itself into relationships at large. Alcoholism soars, mental health problems soar, especially among the old and the young, more people commit or attempt to commit suicide. It surprised me to learn that increasing numbers of dentists have gone bankrupt and killed themselves – a profession already prone to suicide.

Just how badly the relationship has deteriorated was set out by Jonathan Sumption, a constitutional expert and a Supreme Court Justice in 2012-18. To quote the opening of his Fairfields lecture last month,

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the British state has exercised coercive powers over its citizens on a scale never previously attempted. It has taken effective legal control, enforced by the police, over the personal lives of the entire population: where they could go, whom they could meet, what they could do even within their own homes. For three months it placed everybody under a form of house arrest, qualified only by their right to do a limited number of things approved by ministers. All of this has

been authorised by ministerial decree with minimal Parliamentary involvement. It has been the most significant interference with personal freedom in the history of our country. We have never sought to do such a thing before, even in wartime and even when faced with health crises far more serious than this one.

The whole lecture should be required reading for anyone disposed to believe that things will soon return to normal and are not that bad. Where people don't care about freedom and don't vigilantly defend it, they lose it.

Scripture does not deny government a role of protecting and caring for the governed, to which the payment of taxes might contribute. But beyond a certain point, the expectation that the Government should care for and protect us reflects a socialist/Communist vision. The State progressively takes over the role of parents, even of God himself. 'Cast all your anxieties on the State, for it cares about you', as Peter might have said but didn't (I Pet 5:7). Following huge moral pressure, the State has just agreed to borrow another £400 million to provide free meals for poor children and their families during the winter. It seems so right. Or perhaps you see why it might be better, not least for the dignity of the parents to whom the 'poor children' belong, that the nurturing role remain with the parents. The transfer of moral responsibility from individuals to institutions is the abolition of moral responsibility. Although in various contexts we talk about the 'community', community is precisely what breaks down as society atomises and anonymises.

As I said, this has been going on for decades. The few Christians who have warned about the social revolution refer to the strategy as 'cultural Marxism'. (Wikipedia, confounding use of the term with the thing itself, labels cultural Marxism a 'far-right and antisemitic conspiracy theory', but its writers are not bystanders in the culture wars.) It is a kind of sublimation of the civil wars that racked Russia and China from 1917 to 1949 and of China's Cultural Revolution in 1966-76. The UK's universities were being infiltrated already in the 1970s. Then it was a new thing, and the followers of Marcuse and others (I witnessed it myself) were openly 'Marxist'. Today the term is of limited value, if only because the movement, as it has spread into media and politics, has detached itself from its philosophical roots and people are encouraged to define themselves in relation to their racial and sexual identity, rather than to study Marx. My own college, founded by a bishop, reports in its annual review how students ran a 'Galentines Day, a way of spreading positivity and deconstructing hetero-normative traditions'. In a way, those words sum up the movement. The popular term is 'woke'.

Along with the ideological revolution comes a different understanding of morality. Throughout lockdown Prof. Ferguson, a respected academic, carried on a relationship with a 'far left' activist who lived with her husband in an 'open marriage'. Black Lives Matter started as a pro-LGBT, anti-nuclear-family, pro-abortion ('reproductive justice') movement, two of the three founders being themselves lesbian; as it has spread, its radicalism has become less overt. The perception of injustice in society awakens an overpowering zeal, for how much easier is it to point the finger outwards than to deal with the unrighteousness within. Minorities are encouraged to think of

themselves as victims; half the human race is. Family, marriage and social harmony are relentlessly undermined, and the Government – whether or not nominally ‘Conservative’ – bends with the wind and picks up the pieces. This is the spiritual environment in which decisions are taken. I need hardly speak about the Prime Minister’s own private life.

The victories are solidified in legislation. Even counter-revolutionary speech is criminalised. Under the Equalities Act, voicing the belief that a child is better off with two parents, a mother and a father, is grounds for losing your job. The Law Commission has just published a report which recommends extending the laws against ‘hate speech’ to ‘inflammatory cartoons’ (remember Charlie Hebdo, Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*?) and utterances in the home. Scotland leads the way. It is currently debating a bill that will criminalise criticism of Islam, including if expressed at home, on pain of 7 years in jail. Islam venerates Mohammad as the true prophet in opposition to Christ, and, where it has power, suppresses free speech. If the bill is passed, visiting friends will be able to inform on their hosts and have them locked up; possibly children will be able to report their own parents for the crime (cf. Matt 10:35). In place of the old blasphemy laws a Muslim version is being introduced, just as Martin Parsons warned. Islam does not separate religion from the State, and neither, increasingly, does atheistic thinking.

That’s the significance of what it is going on at the moment: the State, atheistic but pro-Islam, is arrogating to itself more and more authority, to the point where it claims power even in the home, over what one says, and over one’s body. Even the right to buy food is made conditional on wearing a mask. Laws claiming authority over the body say “I own you”, which is the definition of slavery. Mask-wearing, ‘stay indoors’ orders, the future (compulsory?) vaccination program prepare the ground for the day when people will all be stamped like cattle (Rev 13:16).

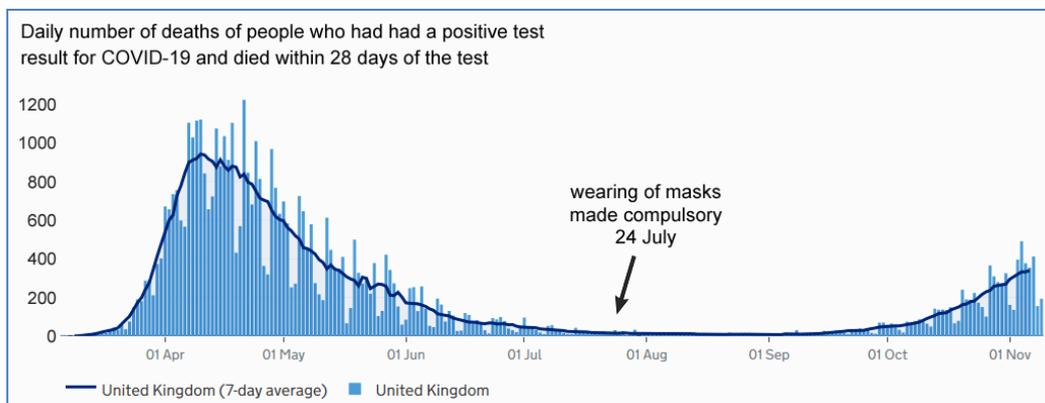
In China, control of the population is almost total. Christians in the uncontrolled churches run the risk of being arrested, fined and imprisoned. State-approved churches, if they have not been permanently closed, have their sermons vetted, their walls adorned with posters of Xi Jinping. Here in the West we too are learning to worship the State. In a nominally democratic country the veneration does not have to be focused on the man at the top. The clapping of hands and clanging of pots and pans in honour of the NHS every Thursday was little short of an act of worship: thanksgiving for the institution that ‘saves lives’ rather than the God who saves lives. Eventually submission to the State does culminate in the worship of one man (Dan 3:4-7, Rev 13:13f), a man personifying Satan himself.

“You shall worship the Lord your God and him alone”

Finally, while some wise men persuade us in the name of ‘science’ to be terrified of Covid-19, others tell us there is no Creator: ‘Nature’ is our Creator, the true God. We think this the height of rationality, oblivious of how the stunningly complex human immune system testifies of God’s care and protection and creative power. We believe what the wise men say. As the bishop of Reading says, “Evolution is not only *of* God, but it is God incarnate.” We recite orthodox-seeming liturgies, but in our hearts and minds we worship something else.

It is uncanny how closely the Christian milieu now resembles the world of the Pharisees. ... The ritual washing of hands and cups and everything touched by other people (Mark 7:4, Col 2:20). The distancing from anyone considered unclean. The disapproval of those who do not conform. The belief that right behaviour should be made compulsory (Matt 23:4, 13). The reduction of prayer to requests that the unfortunate be warmed and filled (Jas 2:16). The banning of communal singing (Luke 19:39-40) and, if a lone renegade does sing as the recorded music plays (hymns exhorting people to sing, ironically), the threat of ejection.

There is no singing in synagogues. Nor in mosques. There is no sharing of the cup in synagogues and mosques, and now churches. As was said of the Pharisees, we obey the commandments of men and make void the word of God. That way wrath lies (Matt 3:7, 23:29ff, Josephus), not to mention being thrown out and trampled underfoot (Matt 5:13). As one writer put it, "We're all niqabis now." To wear a mask is a sign of submission. Do that before God and, as Paul warns (II Cor 3, Gal 5), you lose your spiritual freedom.



Imposed when deaths from covid were just a trickle, masks were designed to perpetuate the sense of an existential threat. They have had no material effect other than to add to the litter on streets and beaches, or we would not be in another lockdown. The Church's efforts to appease the beast came to nothing.

On the eve of the March lockdown, I contacted Christian Concern, which does what it can to resist the new leaven, to suggest that the suspension of corporate worship across the world was an event of cosmic significance: would they exercise whatever influence they had to argue against lockdown? I got no reply, but it became clear that even they favoured the measure. Ultimately this is why God will say, "Enough." At the Exodus (a real, historical event) God required only his own people to worship/serve him, for he had not even revealed himself to Israel. Now, having revealed himself in Christ, he requires all to bow the knee before him. He is about to destroy the civilisation that is so rotten it is willing to destroy itself. But before that his prophets will make one last appeal to the world. "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgement has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth" (Rev 14:7). I say more on this in my commentary on Revelation. In just a few years (Matt 24:34) the first trumpet will sound. The Sun's corona will flare up and strike the planet. If the world is mad now, the madness is as nothing compared to the consternation and persecution that will follow then.

Why was the shutting down of the world-wide Church of cosmic significance? Because the Church's function is to declare to an unbelieving world that God is, and was, and is to come, and gladly submit to him in worship. As the psalm says, 'Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you.' Not even Nazi Germany got to close down its churches (which, to be sure, posed no challenge). Yet in Britain and other countries Christians were tacitly agreeing that Caesar had absolute authority, even in the house of God. But as a matter of UK law and scriptural theology, the State has no such authority. In an effort to demonstrate what it meant to be a good Christian, the Anglican archbishops, *ultra vires*, forbade even clergy to enter church buildings. It was, as Martin Parsons observed, just what the UK had recently been urging countries like Algeria not to do. 'Just imagine the British diplomat urging his Algerian counterpart to stop closing churches – only to be told "but you closed all the churches in your country!" ' Archbishops, and all churchmen, rationalised the decision not to follow the example of the apostles (Acts 5:29, Jas 4:4) on the grounds that they had to 'show our communities how we must behave'. They no longer saw it as their mission to teach about repentance and forgiveness of sins. A few churches took a stand – in Illinois and California, for example.

We have not even protested on the grounds that lockdown was an abuse of life pure and simple. As Thomas Woods puts it,

What is the point of indefinitely depriving ourselves of everything that makes life worth living, so that we can live in an antisocial dystopia? Why are we staying alive? So that we can sit at home and stare at the wall? Meanwhile kids are growing up to think it's normal to view other people with suspicion and avoid gestures of affection. Even the old people we're trying to protect are dying from social isolation. All the things that we have been told to give up – affection and friendship from less than 6 feet away, large gatherings and family celebrations and companionship – all these things are not, as Lord Sumption says, optional extras, they are life itself. Life comes with risks, some of them moderate, some of them severe. At one point or another you have to assess your own level of risk and live the one life you get.

That's the simple wisdom of Ecclesiastes, and of humanity down the ages. How can churches speak with authority about joy and eternal life if they so readily assent to the destruction of what makes life precious now? How can it be good to fight evil with evil?

One of the two main writers on lockdownsceptics.org is a Christian; so is the leader of the few MPs (including the previous Prime Minister) who have spoken against lockdown, Steve Baker. Just as in Elijah's day, there are a few thousand who have not 'taken the knee' and bowed to Baal, the 'deceiver of the whole world', 'the ruler of the authority of the air' (Eph 2:2). Having never been trained in churches to question the wisdom broadcast through the air, the rest, alas, swim with the tide.

Steven Robinson 17/11/20