

POLITICALLY CORRECT : FRIEND or FOE?

PART I – THE FACTS

1. Simply loony?

Christians naturally go on the alert when those who promote Politically Correct usage consider banning words like 'right' and 'righteous' because they are 'sinitromanualistic', i.e. they stigmatise, are offensive to and/or discriminate against those who are *left handed*! If the movement were only loony we could ignore it, but it permeates peoples' thinking even when it does not alter their language. Like many things it is both good and bad.

2. How it arose

The Politically Correct [P.C.] movement arose for two reasons,

- seeing the **evil behaviour** of people, and
- believing that **male-female differences** are only superficial. Differences of attitudes and behaviour, it was believed at the time, are merely acquired after birth, i.e. arise from 'nurture' not 'nature'.

3. Christian response to the causes of the P.C.

- **Evil behaviour**

Christians will readily share their distress at all evil behaviour, since they hold the 'sacred' view that men and women are made **in God's image**ⁱ, and so deserve respect whatever their status, ability or creed. Indeed Christians should be the first to acknowledge the human bias towards doing evil, because evil forms an important part of the Christian's interpretation of life. Unless we first acknowledge the reality of evil, (the 'Fall'), there is no Good News in God's offer of salvation from it. If changing human language could change human behaviour for the better, then Christians would eagerly support any sensible application of the idea.

The wrong assumption of the 'politically correct' movement is that because words are (in Christian terminology) invariably tainted by human sin, the only option is to ditch them and start again. That would certainly help if you could ditch the people as well and start again - but you can't! Word-swapping can never help very much, because the same sort of sinful people will be using the replacements as mis-used the original words! If they used words as weapons before, they will not hesitate to use them again.

- **Male-female difference**

Things have greatly changed since the uprising of the move to police our language. Since 1980 the massive research in brain patterns and behaviourⁱⁱ has demonstrated conclusively that the differences between male and female are, after all, overwhelmingly given by Nature. All that later influences can do is to add little bits onto an already-existing pre-birth programme.

Science can now demonstrate how and why men and women *are* radically different. To give just one example, it is now proven that the typically male brain is geared to cope with spatial problems, while a typical woman's brain is not. The reason that 99 per cent of airline pilots are male will be mainly due to the fact that the majority of women, very sensibly, opt for jobs at which the majority of women naturally do very well.

4. P.C. won't go away.

The Politically Correct Movement is still with us, and many of its manifestations and influences (both good and bad) remain.

- **Some good results**

The Bible translation that I have chosen in all my articles is the New Revised Standard Version. Because of issues highlighted by the Politically Correct movement, it was deliberately made 'sensitive to linguistic sexism'. For example, in the 'Authorised' Version (a.d.1611) Jesus said:

no man cometh unto the Father but by me. [John 14:6]

If, nowadays, this use of '*man*' would lead any to believe that Jesus offered *no access* to the Father for women, boys and girls, then, to ensure that our Gospel-proclamation is not *unnecessarily* misleading or restrictive we must needs update the translation.

If the P.C. movement has resulted in less discrimination and hatred, if it has created more right tolerance, then we must be grateful.

- **Some bad results**

Now, 94% of women regard Political Correctness (which was designed to liberate) as an *oppressive concept* that stifles their freedom to say what they feel without censure.ⁱⁱⁱ

The movement has certainly created very widespread fear of saying the wrong thing.

This has permeated into the home and even the bedroom. Many husbands and wives are wary of saying what they feel and believe to one another for fear of not being Politically Correct. Research has also shown that many organisations are petrified of appearing politically incorrect, so they have an 'official' view which bears little resemblance to the views of their members who, in turn, will only speak off-the-record!

Some treat the 'politically correct' language-alteration merely as a joke. Certainly it is sometimes very funny, but it is serious and will remain powerful for a long time. P.C.'s leaders make worrying claims, e.g. "*If we change language we can change everything*"^{iv}

PART II – THE FAULTS

Political Correctness is still sufficiently in vogue for Christians to need some discernment in their attitude both to it and its spin-offs. In this part I disclose four aspects of political correctness, beginning with their use of language and words.

5. LANGUAGE: P.C. promoters do not understand it!

They have never learnt (or now ignore) the fact that we naturally prefer **brevity** whenever possible. *Marks & Sparks*, and *Co-op* are easy and natural, as are *Queen Mum*, *Di*, *the P.M.* and the *QE2*. Nicknames are usually shorter not longer: *Sue*, *Jo*, *Bill*.

Any attempt to substitute 'politically correct' complex longer phrases for short words goes against the stream of our natural speaking and is doomed to ultimate failure.

- **P.C. language is inefficient**

Our natural use of words is to be efficient. A **short** word saves breath and time, and requires little thought or memory. A long phrase wastes breath, wastes time and requires memory and thought.

Example 1.

I go regularly to my local *tip* – where I am allowed to 'tip' things I don't want.

My local council would like me to think of it as the *Waste Recycling and Transfer Station*. My one, simple, accurate, and efficient single-syllable will never be replaced by a nine-syllable phrase! Which even if I felt it right to use I would not be able to remember!

Example 2

The P.C. replacement of the word *prostitute* is the 22-syllable *person presenting themselves as commodity allotment within a business doctrine*. [Wives, beware if your gardening husband says he is off to his *allotment*!]

Popular usage moves, of course, in the opposite direction towards greater efficiency and replaces *prostitute* by shorter words like *hooker*, *tart*, *whore*, *moll*, *pro*!

- **P.C. language is imprecise.**

By chance, after I had read that a P.C. alternative to the disliked word *woman* was a *person of gender*, I found myself in front of the mirror trimming my beard! My image seemed obviously to be a *person of gender* – all very confusing!

P.C. speakers object to the word *fat* and replace it with *horizontally challenged*. But by *challenged* they mean *lacking*, as in the blind being *optically challenged*, the deaf being *orally challenged*. But people who are *fat* are not lacking horizontally, surely?

6. WORDS: P.C. promoters do not understand them!

The first flaw in P.C. thinking is the failure to understand language. The situation gets no better when we come to **words**, although they set themselves up to police *our* use of words. It seems that they are so motivated by their political agenda that they promote words with little or no thought as to their meaning!

- **In the P.C. world 'Not' doesn't exist!**

The following we all know are opposites:

boring and *interesting*,
clumsy and *co-ordinated*,
evil and *moral*.

In the world in which P.C. reigns, they are not opposites at all, but variations of the same thing! *Boring*, *clumsy* and *evil* are, to them, just different ways of being *interesting*, *co-ordinated* and *moral*. From their fear of saying the word '**not**' comes the following absurd definitions –

boring = 'differently interesting'
clumsy = 'differently co-ordinated'
evil = 'morally different' v

But, *boring* is not one way of being *interesting*, it is **not** interesting

Clumsy is not one way of being *co-ordinated*, it is **not** co-ordinated

Evil is not one way of being *moral*, it is being **not** moral.

The refusal to acknowledge opposites (based on some alleged 'discrimination' no doubt) must worry not only Christians. If evil and good are just varieties of the same thing, it removes the basis for discrimination between the two. The implications are fearful.

The P.C. objection to the use of **not** spreads also to words like **anti**. Some readers might be surprised to learn that it was this same tendency that replaced the term *anti-abortion* with *pro-life*. Of course, you cannot be more positive than being *anti-abortion*, but the dropping of the term got rid of the embarrassing word *abortion* with its negative reference to killing babies, and the dropping of the word *anti* freed those concerned for being thought to be against anything.

(It is one of the many paradoxes of the P.C. world that their replacement language deletes all references to being against things, but the P.C. lobby is so against normal speech that, without any authority behind them, they insist on our changing it!)

- **I challenge 'challenge'**

I have already mentioned that in P.C. circles the *fat* are the *horizontally challenged*, the short are the *vertically challenged*, and the blind are the *optically challenged*. The list is endless.

But why '*challenged*'?

Every meaning and association of the word relates to fighting, contest, and intolerance of the other. What a word to choose to describe the minority groups whom, they claim, they want to have accepted and reconciled!

7. PEOPLE: P.C. promoters do not understand them.

- **People's wickedness**

If the word *black* is forbidden because many have misused it racially, it will not thereby improve behaviour unless accompanied by a change of heart. A change of vocabulary cannot accomplish the necessary transformation. If it did, we would abolish the words *murder*, *rape*, *theft*, *violence* etc.

Various handicapped folk have had their weaknesses/disability/illnesses renamed, e.g. the once-normal term *mongol* is now, according to standard dictionaries, a 'highly offensive term'. It became *Down's syndrome* which is now being used abusively. Such verbal changes do not stop ridicule or abuse. Within a few years the replacement word becomes the replacement abuse.

Interestingly within a decade, the term 'Politically Correct' had become a term of abuse by those who were critical of it, and itself became no longer 'politically correct'!

Sadly, the wickedness within human nature is too strong to be overcome or held in check by policing what people say and write.

- **People's diversity**

People differ, thank God. Any policy based on a theory that they do not is doomed to failure. It is impossible to promote one single correct use of any word and impose it on people.

The word *Christian* is a good example. In the New Testament period Christians do not use it of themselves, some hold that it originated as a term of scorn or abuse^{vi}

Nowadays it is used in three main ways:

It is a **positive** but wide-ranging word among Christians

It is a **vague** but wide-ranging word in society

It is a **negative**, even abusive word, to some of other religions.

People are too diverse in every way - socially, economically, racially, educationally, psychologically, culturally, and religiously – to restrict one word to one meaning and impose it.

8. CONTEXT: P.C.promoters do not understand it

In the world of political correctness, context does not matter; the use of a word is simply right or wrong. I question this.

It seems obvious that language and words take different meanings in different contexts. I have already illustrated this (in section 7) by the word *Christian*.

I can show the importance of context by two examples from my own experience.

- The Women's World Day of Prayer have chosen one of my hymns for 2002 [see on this website under **HYMNS: HEALING GOD**] As it will be used world-wide they raised the difficulty to some of my phrase *reconciling man to man*.

In that very wide context I agreed that ideally the phrase was better avoided. I therefore revised the hymn permanently by rewriting the verse for them.

- Some years earlier, after having had a number of my hymns published, a different hymn was rejected by a publisher because it contained the word 'cripple'. He said it was a word 'unacceptable today'.

Unacceptable to whom? That is the **very important question**.

I believe, it would be **unacceptable to people who would be highly unlikely either to see the hymn, read the hymn, or sing the hymn!**

My experience tells me that Christians will rejoice to sing of Jesus' power to save, rescue and deliver us. In the words of Wesley's fine hymn -

*Hear Him, ye deaf; His praise, ye dumb, | Your loosened tongues employ;
Ye blind, behold your Saviour come, | And leap, ye lame, for joy.*

I have never encountered a Christian group who rejected it or who would feel it necessary to replace with –

*Hear Him, ye aurally-challenged;
Ye orally-challenged, your loosened tongues employ;
Ye optically-challenged, behold your Saviour come,
And leap ye mobility-impaired for joy!*

- To Christians steeped as they are in the New Testament and Christian hymnody, I simply do not believe that the word *cripple* is a term of abuse, nor the state it describes one that evokes anything but love and compassion - especially within verses sung in worship describing the healing work of their Lord.

I didn't write my hymn for a trash newspaper, but for a particular group of like-minded people - Christians, and for when they were engaged in just one particular activity - worship.

I chose my words carefully for a particular **context** in the belief that the situations in which words are used, and the attitudes of the people involved influences their meaning. Good words can be made bad in a bad context and bad words can be made good in a good one.

I feel I can speak with some authority about the word **cripple** having lived my first 20 years with my mother a cripple until she was instantly healed when anointed with oil in the name of Jesus Christ. ^{vii}

In testifying to her healing in writing and in speaking over the last forty years, neither she nor I have ever seen any advantage in describing her previous condition as *mobility challenged*, nor have we been aware that our use of that term to describe her past has caused any embarrassment or difficulty to others.

By whose authority?

By whose authority do the P.C. promoters dictate to us? I acknowledge the authority of Scripture and the Church. If, therefore, **Christian leaders** guided Christians against using words like *cripple* in worship I should take very seriously their advice.

I feel to stop using it in hymns because of political/social pressures on me would be a case of the secular tail wagging the sacred dog!

Is it not better for me to continue to set an example of the right use of the word *cripple* by demonstrating my genuine Christian love, concern, respect – and frequently admiration – for those who cannot walk as I am able?

If I appear slow in reacting, it is because I fear lest evil will end up dictating to good.

It is a dangerous formula to stop using a word because it is misused. Should we stop using *cripple* or *Christian*?

- A huge number of people in England misuse as oaths and swearing the words *God*, *Jesus* and *Christ*.
- If the P.C. formula were right, we should have to stop using them.

PART III – A WAY FORWARD

9. The Word

Those who wish to despise, dominate, bully or ridicule others can use almost any word in a derogative way.

The answer is not for self-appointed linguists to police our use of words to conform to their suggestions, particularly if they demonstrate such failures to understand language, words and human nature.

God's Word

Sometimes it *is* right that words be replaced, as I replaced *man to man* in my hymn.

Sometimes this should be resisted either because it is plain nonsense, or the setting does not warrant making the change, or the change is contrary to Christian teaching.

- Words for Christians are very special.
- God’s written Word reveals to us God’s living Word, the Lord Jesus himself.
- Our God is a God who *speaks*.
- For Christians, words are often used 'sacramentally' – outward and audible 'signs of inner spiritual grace'.
- We testify to the divine use of words and their power as vehicles of divine revelation, divine judgement, divine mercy and divine love.

We should view word-replacement with extreme caution. What is needed is ...

10. The transfiguration of words

We are called to *redeem* words and renew them.

Human language is heavily tainted by human sin, but we should not be policed to conform to the world and its well-meaning, sad, and sometimes funny efforts at replacement.

Rather should we display to the world our language ‘Spirit-wrapped’ in love, joy, peace, patience, meekness, gentleness; we should use words naturally while reflecting in them the grace of our Lord Jesus, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

In worship Christians experience a foretaste of God's purpose for society: reconciled, united, accepting, healed, and at peace. In worship we are enriched by our enormous diversity but find ourselves all equal in our adoption by God and in our receiving his love.

- In worship all present experience their worth – for that is what *wor(th)ship* means. What individuals and society can never accomplish takes place in every Christian weekly gathering!

Christians are called to show forth this amazing transforming experienced in worship, and to carry it out into society, for its healing and transformation.

If this were happening more, I believe that instead of society dictating its restricted language to the Church and bringing Christians into its bondage, then the Church would, instead, be transforming and freeing the society to enjoy its language and the rich blessing of words without fear.

11. Freedom of Speech

Freedom of speech is a right of all.

There are a great many people, especially in the media, whose use of words offends me greatly. But I place almost beyond value the freedom of speech that I enjoy and the freedom to write about my Lord.

I could never for a moment consider depriving others of so great a freedom merely because they choose to use it in ways that so offend me.

It would not be a freedom at all if there was only one style in which they and I were allowed to exercise it.

For me to 'police' their words would remove their freedom, just as any unauthorized policing of our words removes ours.

12. The Future

In true penitence for our wrong discriminations in the past, let's vow to be instruments of God's peace and agents of his reconciliation, and to use our language sensitively but fearlessly as a sacred vehicle of his love.

Further Reading:

Beard & Cerf, *The Official Politically Correct Dictionary and Handbook*, Grafton, '92.
Pease, A & B, *Why Men Don't Listen, Women Can't Read Maps*, Orion, 2001.

- i The language of Genesis is important. Male plus female reflects God's image (1:27) : . . . *in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them.*
- ii Advanced computer brain-scanning equipment has allowed researchers to see the brain operating 'live', see. Pease, *Why Men Don't Listen, Women Can't Read Maps*, Orion, 2001.
- iii 98% of men, see Pease, *Why Men Don't Listen,,,etc.* p. 282.
- iv From page xiii of Beard and Cerf's *The Officially Politically Correct Dictionary & Handbook*, Grafton, '92. Quote by Betsy Warland.
- v These examples and all other PC data from Beard and Cerf's book listed under Further Reading
- vi Acts 11:26, (the people of Antioch), Acts 26:28 (King Agrippa), I Peter 4:16 (*suffer as a Christian*). Some think Christians chose it, seeing themselves as *slaves* of Christ.
- vii See James 5:13-16, and also the article **Anointing with Oil – In the Bible and Today.**