

Thought for the Day 23rd September - John Reed

Read Ephesians 4:17-32

I was deeply saddened and concerned when I read reports this morning that China is pushing hundreds of thousands of Tibetans into forced labour camps, or “vocational training” programs, mirroring previously reported mass detentions of Uighurs in China’s remote Xinjian province. These (alleged?) labour camps are reportedly used for “enforced indoctrination,” using “military-style” vocational training, which aims to reform “backward thinking” and includes training in “work discipline”, law and the Chinese language.¹

If true, this echoes a model previously employed by others such as the Soviets in the Gulag Archipelago and the Khmer Rouge government in Cambodia under Pol Pot. It is an attempt to bring a non-compliant, dangerously independent and free-thinking, populace under control by “re-educating” them and persuading them to think in line with the party and the government.

Now, of course none of us is completely spared from attempts to reshape our thinking. We are always under pressure to change our minds about all sorts of things. That’s what advertising is all about - trying to persuade us to choose this product over another, to change our preferences. And in election years in particular, we are bombarded with political advertising aimed at getting us to vote for one side or the other.

I think, however, there is a difference between an appeal to change your mind and an attempt to have your mind changed for you, against your will. That’s where, to me (as an amateur in this field), a boundary is crossed, and human and civil rights are broken and abused.

Paul, in this passage, appeals to us to change our minds. In very similar language to that which he uses in Romans 12:1 (“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind”), he urges us to “be renewed in the spirit of your minds” (v. 23) and to put on a new self “created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (v. 24).

The argument is that you are no longer the person you once were. You were once a “gentile,” “alienated from the life of God” (verses 17-18). But now you have come to Christ and belong to him (vv. 21-22), you need to put off the old self and put on the new self. However, unlike being put in a re-education camp against your will, this is a voluntary process. We are urged to do this, to renew our minds and change our lives, in order to please God and to be consistent with who are as his children.

This transformation is not just a change of thinking, but will be reflected in very practical ways, as verses 25-32 point out – ending with the exhortation: “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

¹ <https://www.smh.com.au/world/asia/china-forces-500-000-tibetans-into-labour-camps-20200922-p55xyk.html>