

THE HERESY OF SOCIALISM

JAMES SPENCER

Almost every radical movement is anti-religious in tone. Libertarianism is no exception. This is because radicals shed cherished views held from childhood, including religion. But the libertarian movement is weaker for believing that its ideas go against the deeply held beliefs of most of the population and the roots of our society. This is wrong. It is the belief that virtue can be won through coercion that is heretical.

PAST MISTAKES

Christianity has often been a cover for statist ideas. This is due to the Gospel's rejection of materialism and selfishness and its call to a virtuous life. This has been misused as a justification to intervene in the lives of those too weak or unenlightened to follow divine precepts.

Many of the finest socialist experiments were Christian. The early church shared its wealth communally, although rapid growth later made this impossible.¹ The monasteries were also successful in their time, with new orders forming to offset the corruption of older orders. But there was one crucial difference compared to today's socialists: the orders were voluntary. They gained their strength from their voluntary nature, being able to reform at will.²

Christians have not always been as tolerant as the apostles and monks. Saint Augustine first denounced the

forced conversions of the Donatists as shallow and without meaning, only to support them later on the grounds of utility.³ In the Middle Ages, when the monasteries flourished, the church to which they belonged used the power of the state to enforce its claim to supremacy. After the reformation the church was used by the state, with English Catholics being hanged for treason rather than being burned at the stake for heresy.⁴

The nineteenth century saw the birth of the Christian Socialism that is now misleading the church. It was conceived not as a movement towards the future but as a return to the past. The Christian Socialists Charles Kingsley and F. D. Maurice unfavourably compared the bad conditions of the industrial revolution to the atrocious conditions of the middle ages.⁵

The evangelical piety that reached both Britain and America during this time gave Christian Socialism a boost. The belief that man could not create heaven on earth was replaced by a Victorian optimism about human nature. This led to the heretical belief that man could prepare for the millenium by creating a utopia.⁶

The belief that Christian goodness has to be forced upon those who can not manage it has inspired politicians as diverse as Tony Benn, Lord Soper and Tony Blair, as well as America's Hillary Clinton.

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**Libertarian
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FOR LIFE, LIBERTY AND PROPERTY

NON-AGGRESSION

The edifice of Christian Socialism rests upon ignorance of the nature of the state. To promote Christian values through the state means promoting them through violence. As a Christian I see this as a contradiction.

The idea that the state is by its nature violent seems to some to be self-evident, to most to be absurd. But consider the evidence. If you are self-employed, the local gangster asks for two fifths of your earnings. You refuse, saying that you would like to keep your money. But, he reassures you, a good proportion of the money is going to educate and cure your fellow man. Fair enough, you reply, but it is wasted due to inefficiency and lack of competition, and besides there are large areas of the budget of which you do not approve. That is not a problem, he replies. You have the ability minutely to influence him as to how he spends your money, and he hands you an elaborately worded threat. Not being an easily intimidated person you still refuse to part with your money, at which point he coerces the bank to hand over your account to him and imprisons you.

Throughout this, what had you done? You had not been greedy; it was your money. You had not been selfish; your money would have been far more effective in private charities, even if you had given less. It is quite obvious then, taxation is theft. Just as it would be wrong for any Christian to condone stealing or intimidation to fund good works, so it would be wrong for a Christian to accept the case for high taxation merely because a small part of the money goes on to charitable works of which he approves.

The state is a human institution, and it shares the same vices that every human shares. An act of aggression by the state remains an act of aggression. The state exists to defend its citizens from invaders and from each other, but not from themselves.

REAL VIRTUE

The next line of defence of Christian statist is to point to the lack of virtue in the world. Surely it would be better if there was more of it?

I agree with this. I do believe that people, including myself, should be more generous with both their money and time. I also believe that practising homosexuality is a sin before God. And I believe that children should be instilled with Christian morality. But to pay taxes for charitable purposes is not generosity; it is merely avoiding prison. The same applies to a homosexual obeying an anti-sodomy law or parents sending children to a school mandated to teach religion. They are not being virtuous; they can not be virtuous. Virtue involves choice. To do the right thing involves being able to do the wrong thing. Merely to go with the flow of our surroundings is not being virtuous; it is merely being. God can deliver us from temptation; man cannot.

THE THEOLOGY OF FREEDOM

The fact overlooked by Christian authoritarianism is the positive stress that Christian teaching puts upon freedom.

Freedom should not to be avoided; rather should it be embraced.

The belief in freedom results from the individualism inherence in Christianity. Every individual has his own soul and is accountable for his actions.⁶ The belief held by a minority of Christians in predestination of course contradicts this, but with its stress on individual guilt and salvation the idea of predestination also stresses the individual above the social. Salvation is to be sought not through your tribe or through your government, but by the individual who radically rejects his surroundings and perhaps defies the disapproval of his government.

Freedom does not just mean freedom for one set of beliefs; freedom must also apply to those with whom one disagrees. Christianity cannot have any meaning if it is enforced.

CHRISTIANS AND LIBERTY

The vision of a de-Christianised government does not at first sight inspire. But there are some immediate targets for Christians who accept that freedom is the only moral political climate, targets which are both attainable and worthy.

The first should be to provide a framework of social provision independent of the state. The home schooling networks in America are expanding rapidly, and can be used as a model for a similar alternative network in England. Another avenue which could be pursued is that of voluntary help. This would not just demonstrate the lie that only the state can be charitable; it will also provide a vibrant moral alternative to the vacuous education and welfare systems forced upon the population, which have done so much to secularise society.

There will also be a more negative element in this campaign, focusing on the cultural agenda of the elites. The BBC, schools and many government agencies are busy promoting an alternative to Christian morality. This needs to be publicised and protested against. While censorship is always wrong it is also wrong to use money coerced from Christian taxpayers to ridicule their beliefs and way of life. It is imperative that the cult of the elite is disestablished.

Christians must always remember that the overgrown state is their enemy, whether or not it claims their rhetoric. And libertarians must never cease telling Christians this.

NOTES

1. Acts 4: 32-35.
2. A starting point for studying this movement is Maurus Wolter, *The Principles of Monasticism*, translated, edited and annotated by Bernard A. Sause, B. Herder Book Co., Missouri, 1962.
3. Owen Chadwick, *Augustine*, Oxford University Press, 1986, pp. 79-81.
4. Arnold Pritchard, *Catholic Loyalty in Elizabethan England*, Scolar Press, London, 1979, p. 6.
5. Edward R. Norman, *The Victorian Christian Socialists*, Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 9.
6. Murray Rothbard, "Kingdom Come: The Politics of the Millenium", *Liberty*, January 1990.