

BIBLICAL CHRISTIANITY AND ECONOMIC STRUCTURE

I. SUMMARY OF ECONOMIC SYSTEMS

A. CAPITALISM

1. Definition: Capitalism is an economic system in which the means of production are privately owned and distribution is determined by free market
2. Features:
 - a. The private ownership of property and the means of production.
 - b. Distribution of goods, services, and income is determined by free market system of voluntary trade
 - c. The incentive for all exchange is self-interest, known as the “profit motive.”
3. Forms:
 - a. “Laissez-faire” capitalism - “let allow” - no state interference
 - b. “Democratic” capitalism
 - i. This is free enterprise that is regulated in order to protect the public interest
 - ii. It involves three converging systems: a free market economy, a democratic political structure, and a moral-cultural ethic of “liberty and justice for all.”
4. The goals are liberty and prosperity

B. SOCIALISM

1. Definition: Socialism is an economic system in which the means of production are planned and distribution is determined by state bureaucrats
2. Features:
 - a. Public or state ownership of all property and the mean of production
 - b. Distribution is planned and controlled
 - c. Motivation is altruistic rather than persona.
 - d. There is always danger of totalitarianism even when it is not present
3. Forms:
 - a. “centralized” or “authoritarian” socialism - China / Soviet Union (Communism)
 - b. “Socialist anarchism” -
 - c. “participatory” socialism - Yugoslavia - owned collectively by all the workers
 - d. “European Social Democracy” - Western Europe, a mixture of both above
 - e. “Utopian” socialism - An idyllic Christian socialism - (can’t with sinners present)
4. The goals are security and equality

C. COMMUNISM

1. Definition: Communism is an socio-economic system in which all means of production are owned, and all goods are distributed, the state
2. Features:
 - a. This is an economic system which does not in fact exist

- b. It shares certain features with socialism
- c. Distribution follows the credo: “from each according to his ability; to each according to his need
- d. History is seen in terms of evolution
- e. Violent revolution is seen as necessary in order to overthrow the present unjust system
- f. Actual results have been political totalitarianism and social conformity

3. Forms

- a. “Pure” or “final” communism - a utopian ideal
- b. “Revolutionary” communism
- c. “Euro-communism”
- d. “Liberation theology”
 - i. This is a third-world political theology which is Marxist in its method of analysis
 - ii. Salvation is seen in materialistic terms and is identified with social justice
 - iii. This basically is Marxism using a Christian covering
 - iv. The goal of a communistic idealized classless society

D. FASCISM

1. Definition: Fascism is a political-economic system in which all power is concentrated in a one party state which allows private enterprise but rigidly controls it
2. Features:
 - a. Capitalism, private ownership & market economy are all allowed
 - b. The State rigidly controls the means of production and the distribution of goods .
 - c. The economy is subdivided into state-controlled monopolistic associations of business and labor.
3. Forms :
 - a. historically -Nazi Germany, Japan, Italy
 - b. presently -none

II. BIBLICAL EVALUATION

A. CAPITALISM

- 1 . Private property is affirmed in Scripture.
 - a. Exodus 20:15 and Matt. 19:18 -- command not to steal
 - b. Deut. 19:14, 27:17 - family owned land was legally attained
 - c. Acts 5:4 - private ownership is affirmed
2. Free enterprise is commended in Scripture.
 - a. Prov. 31:10-31 - The “Excellent wife”
 - b. The apostle Paul engaged in the making & selling of tents (Acts 18:3)
 - c . Lk. 19:11 -27 -- The parable of the talents
 - d. Matt. 20:1 -1 6 -- The parable of the landowner
 - e. Prov. 10:4, 13:11 - Diligence in labor leads to wealth and dominion
 - f. Prov. 20:23 -- The Bible calls for honesty and fairness in an open market.
- 3 . Self-interest (the “profit motive”) is employed in Scripture.
 - a. Lk. 19:17 -- profit making is commended as just reward for diligent labor
 - b. Matt. 6:20 -- God appeals to man' s self interest by offering a spiritual reward

- c. 1 Tim 6:10 -- A distinction is made between healthy self-interest and greedy materialism, or the love of money which is evil.
- d. Because God is the final Judge, it is in man's self interest to use his wealth in a compassionate way

- 4. Capitalism's view of man is that he is a sinner by nature
 - a. This is biblically accurate.
 - b. It puts man's selfish nature to a good social use.
 - c. It makes some regulation necessary in order to guard the public interest
 - d. It works, due to the appeal to natural self-interest

B. SOCIALISM AND COMMUNISM

- 1. False view of man: man is seen as essentially good
 - a. Evil is falsely blamed on outside forces (environment, private ownership, capitalism) rather than on human depravity (cf. Psalm 14:1-5).
 - b. Man's redemption is seen as political and economic rather than spiritual.
- 2. Public (state) ownership and distribution are unBiblical
 - a. Private ownership and free enterprise, which are biblical, would be abrogated.
 - b. The state becomes absolute or sovereign, and thus a form of idolatry
 - c. The state, and thus man himself, is seen as the architect of man's salvation.
- 3. The equality which is sought is not an equality of opportunity, but of income results ("Equalitarianism").
- 4. The concept of class warfare promotes social strife and envy; It is contradicted by the command to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:18).
- 5. Violence and the idea that "the ends justify the means" is antithetical to Scripture (cf. James 1:20, Rom 12:17-21).
- 6. Liberation Theology constitutes a false gospel which substitutes Marxist socialism for salvation.
 - a. The Exodus is often used to justify all "liberation" movements. But that was a case in which God freed His people (not a revolution) so that they could serve Him (not a socialist state).
 - b. The early church had "all things in common" and shared with those in need (Acts 2:44-45). But this was voluntary. Charity loses its meaning if it is dictated by the state. In any case, communism sees charity as merely justice, since what is given by the rich "belongs" to the poor to begin with.
 - c. The year of Jubilee (Lev. 25) is used as an argument against private property. But this simply made the land revert to its original owner, not to the state or to society at large.

C. FASCISM

- 1. The criticisms involving state sovereignty and the lack of personal liberty apply here as well.
- 2. The worship of the state and its political leader is idolatrous.
- 3. The heavy-handedness of state control makes private ownership and free enterprise somewhat meaningless.

III. CONCLUSIONS

- A. The state must not become so powerful as to have total sovereignty over the individual.
1. This would seem to call for a democratic / republican polity which is best supported by capitalism
 - a. Capitalism is the only economic system whose basic elements have a Biblical basis
 - b. It has had excellent results, but must be properly regulated with checks and balances.
 2. Socialism has an admirable and Biblical concern for social welfare, but carries certain unbiblical presuppositions and uses unbiblical means to try to achieve its desired ends.
 - a. "Workfare" programs are allowable (Deut. 24:19).
 - b. Redistribution schemes are a form of theft unless mutually agreed upon by members of society from whom the money is being taken.
- B. Communism and Fascism are both antithetical to true Christianity. They are absolutist (and thus idolatrous) ideologies which we as Christians must oppose. Social concern must not become a mask for political and economic enslavement.
- C. Christians must seek to transcend whatever economic system under which they live to display the love of Christ and to minister to the needs of people.

"Rational individualism implies toleration, while collectivism repudiates it . . . a collectivist system treats the individual as a means, to be used or destroyed as experience suggests, to an end - theoretical social perfection." -- Edward Heimann

"That should alert us to the lie in the old fraud that property rights can somehow be separated from human rights and are inferior to them. There are no societies that are cavalier toward property rights but which safeguard human rights. The state that lays its hand on your purse will lay it on your person. Both are the acts of a government that despises transcendent law." -- Herbert Scholssberg

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