



Christianity and Socialism

Categories : [Contemporary Issues](#), [Social Gospel](#)

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Men verily swear by the greater (Heb. 6:16).

This truth remains ever and everywhere immutable. Any single truth or any series of truths always comprise what is “greater” for man, and this “greater” is man’s authority; he refers to it, he “swears” by it. Yet the same truths are not what is “greater” for all men. Sometimes what is “greater” is entirely false; yet man nevertheless swears by this illusory “truth” as though it were authoritative. The measures by which men approach the phenomena of the life which surrounds us are quite varied. Each chooses that authority which seems best to him, and therefore one may accept the position: Tell me what your authorities are, and I will say what sort of man you are. In the past, men were different, and their authorities were also different. The word of God, the laws of the Church - in the past these were the eternally immutable and perfect authorities understood and held dear equally by all. If something were in accordance with the word of God, with the laws of the Church, it was good; if something were not in accordance with them, or contradicted them, it could not be good. I. T. Pososhkov wrote his “A Father’s Testament” precisely “to corroborate the divine Scriptures”; there he states with certainty: “All of us who live in the Orthodox Faith know this well: that all truth is contained in the words of the Lord”; and to his son he says: “My son, I firmly exhort and adjure thee, that with all thy strength thou hold fast to the Holy Eastern Church as the Mother who gave thee birth... and that thou cut off from thyself all who oppose the Holy Church, and have no amicable relations with them of any sort, for they are the enemies of God.”

Now, many have quite different, and even contradictory, authorities. Truly, where now can one find in the “progressive” press any reference to God and the Church? Is not agreement with the laws of God and the Church of Christ now considered the hallmark of what is bad, of backwardness, while opposition to them is considered a sign of what is good? I recall a certain student (at the {Theological} Academy, alas!) who, seeing a man with whom he was unacquainted eating fasting food, said: “He is probably one of those who participates in the pogroms!” Another student, when I praised the Theological Academy in his presence, enumerating its good qualities, quite seriously interrupted me, saying: “No, tell me: What has your Academy done for the Revolution?” I declined to enumerate such dubious merits, yet such a statement is entirely characteristic of our times. Now it is not what is pleasing to God or the Church that is good, but what is “progressive,” “liberal,” revolutionary; that which is “right-leaning” is the concatenation of all evils. “It is in agreement with Marx!” - this is the highest praise for any teaching, for any opinion. Even holy Christian doctrine is assessed on the basis of this new standard. Thus, all of Christianity’s fundamental teaching concerning the personal struggle of repentance and humility is cast aside, while only some sort of



“social teaching” is taken up and given consideration, and in it only that which one can reinterpret in a liberal-revolutionary way is approved. Those who wrote and labored in the Church, even the great Holy Fathers, are assessed using the same debased, inferior coinage. We ourselves were witness to how a certain “orator,” delivering a panegyric to Saint John Chrysostom on November 13th, 1907, declared that the great hierarch ‘thought like Marx on some things, though not as well.’ Such - we dare to say - blasphemy is now troubling to very few. In life, some new world-view is urgently announcing itself; new gods, new idols are being erected. Of course, the Church of Christ is holy and without blemish. The people of the Church continue to live in accordance with the divine laws of the past, refusing to bend their knees before Baal. For them there is no other god than God and His Christ; there is no authority besides the authority of the Church. However, there are no few people who have already adopted the new world-view, who have already bowed down before the new idols, yet nevertheless have not for some reason left the Church entirely. Such people are constantly passing judgment on Christianity, on the Church. They pass judgment not as ones taught by the Church, but as ones who would teach it; they wish to “correct” the Church’s understanding of Christianity, replacing it with their own, in which the teaching of Christ is shown to bear a remarkable resemblance to all the most recent teachings and actions of the godless, up to and including revolutions, expropriations, and bombings. On the basis of such interpretations of Christianity, in renunciation of the authority of Church, there have appeared a “Christian Brotherhood [?!] of Struggle” and a “Christian Socialism,” and who knows whether there will appear at some point “Christian” brigandage, etc., etc.

Eras of decline are always characterized by the absence of definite, clearly expressed convictions. Men become, as it were, impotent; their laziness does not allow them to think a thought through to the end, and for this reason the most contradictory elements, taken from various sources, peacefully coexist within their world-view. Such is the nature of eclecticism. Our times may serve as an illustration of this. Do not many now desire to bring together in unity the most impossible things? There are far too many who share such a desire in our days!

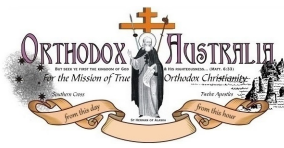
One of the more prominent misunderstandings which have arisen in this area is the misunderstanding about socialism. On the one hand, they aver that Christ was a socialist; and on the other hand, that socialism is entirely in agreement with Christianity. This implies that in all these discussions Christianity is not taken to be the only possible and definite form of the Holy Church of Christ. The Holy Church is mindlessly disparaged as “official,” “the one which put itself at the service of the old regime,” et al. Everyone interprets Christianity as he pleases, and only a small part of its sacred books is given any attention. The epistles of Paul are rejected; no one knows them! Even from the Gospels only that which is “appropriate” is selected, e.g., the expulsion of the merchants from the temple, as proof of the lawfulness and necessity of violence, though of course only revolutionary violence. With such devices, it is not difficult to demonstrate whatever one pleases, and not only some “agreement” between Christianity and socialism. In light publicistic literature one may constantly encounter attempts to reconcile pagan socialism and Christianity. It is sufficient merely to socialize Christianity and to Christianize socialism - and, lo! Christian socialism is the result!



Therefore, any attempt to investigate, from a strictly Christian point of view, the question of whether socialism is appropriate for Christians, or is our adversary, can only be welcome. One can especially welcome a serious and fundamental attempt. Such an attempt, which stands alone and prominent among the mass of others which are not well-founded and are lacking in seriousness, has been provided by V. A. Kozhevnikov in his remarkable brochure, "The Relationship of Socialism to Religion in General & to Christianity in Particular." It is not surprising that the author has provided an especially well-founded and unintentionally persuasive resolution of each question; the author knows socialism from its very sources, far better than the majority of our woeful socialists. The author speaks exclusively using the words of socialist literature, and provides such an overwhelmingly vast quantity of this literature that only bad faith will not believe him, will not be persuaded by his arguments. We highly recommend to each person who desires to be ready to give a well-founded answer to anyone who asks about Christianity and socialism, that he not only familiarize himself with Mr. Kozhevnikov's brochure, but keep it constantly at hand. But since not everyone can familiarize himself with this brochure, we wish, if only in brief, to pass on the results of Mr. Kozhevnikov's investigation. We ask the reader's pardon only because it is quite impossible to convey all the richness of the contents of this remarkable brochure; otherwise, we would have to reprint it here in its entirety.

V. A. Kozhevnikov states that, as far as the relationship of socialism to Christianity goes, there is not even partial truth: "Here everything is in content contrary to Christian truths, and is in form offensive to Christian sensibilities." In vain do some think that socialism is merely a theory of economics. No, socialism replaces everything with itself; it is founding its own religion. In the resolutions of the various socialist assemblies and the discourses of socialist leaders one finds clearly and definitely expressed the demand for a revolution in all human thought. "Socialism is not and cannot be a mere economic science, a question concerning the stomach only... In the final analysis, socialists are striving to bring about revolution throughout the entire juridical, moral, philosophical, and religious superstructure" (Vandervelde). "Is socialism merely an economic theory?," we read in the socialistic catechism of Bax and Kvelch; "In no way! Socialism envelops all the relations of human life." According to Bax, in religion socialism is expressed as atheistic humanism.

If socialism looks upon itself as a world-view, what, then, is this world-view? It is, first of all, a consistent materialism. A materialistic understanding of history, as acknowledged by the socialists themselves, comprises the essence of the entire theory of their teaching, its cornerstone, according to the expression of Bernstein. "One must seek the basic reasons of all social changes and revolutions not in the heads of men and not in their views on eternal righteousness and justice, but in changes in the means of production and distribution" (Engels). If socialism is so closely bound up with materialism, how can it bear any relationship to religion? Crudely distorting the moral and educational significance of religion, the materialistic criticism of Marx and Engels sees religion as the mere "handiwork of man," the product of ignorant imagination or profit motives; and God Himself as a reflection of economic relations. Even in the Christian God they dare to see an "anthropological idealization of a capitalism which thirsts for power and satisfaction." Religion is



called forth, in the words of Engels, “by the dark, primordial ideas of man concerning his personal nature and that which surrounds him,” and is defined in its permutations “by class, and consequently economic, relations”. Religion seemed to Marx to be a superstition which has outlived its time, “a dead question for the intelligentsia, but an opium for the people.” According to this, Marx considered “freedom of conscience from the charms of religion” to be “the assistance of the people toward real happiness.”

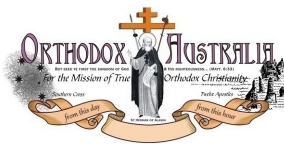
True, there are thinkers who maintain that socialism is not inescapably bound up with materialism, but they are not real socialists. Such thinkers try to impart to socialism a philosophical and ethical, even a Christian, coloration. Schtaudinger tries to convince his “brother socialists” that “the basic ideas of Christ are the same as ours; His idea of unity is our God. His idea of the existence of this unity is our Christ. And although we deny all dogmas, in principle our ethics are Christian”.

Dyed-in-the-wool socialists staunchly refuse to accept the recommended “deepening” of the bases of socialism, which, in their opinion, is entirely unsuitable for them. Bebel rains down mockery upon the invitation that “everyone study, and philosophize, and work on oneself.” Conrad Schmidt distances himself from Kantian humanism, because ‘in it there is no agitational power, there are only old metaphysical ideas, monastic asceticism, and morals more appropriate to angels.’ In the experiments at “deepening” socialism, Plekhanov sees “an opium to lull the proletariat to sleep.” Mering sees it as “turbid waters in which to catch an unclean fish.” Menger does not understand the reason for loud speeches about unneeded lofty philosophical principles, when we are facing “our own ethics, which overturn every religious foundation and are a guarantee even against the rebirth of religious consciousness.” Dietzgen long ago proposed “to jettison all that is majestic in morality,” because “the special logic of the proletariat delivers us from all philosophical and religious mysticism.” Similar thoughts are expressed by Kautsky, Lenin, and Axelrod. ‘We are fed up’, says Axelrod, ‘with the boring and monotonous pestering of the critics, teachers, the various perfecters of socialism; it is time for them to cease! To take their path would mean to fall into a dreadful muddle and a demoralization of mind, to take from socialism its living, revolutionary aspect, in other words, its essence, and to replace it again with the reactionary, religious character of the whole philosophical mentality.’

I think that to everyone it is now clear that socialism, as a distinct world-view, is in its essence the adversary of all idealism, of all the immutable principles of morality, and the enemy of all religion. Reducing everything in the world to matter, the socialist world-view leaves no place for the divine Principle.

Such is the theoretical relationship of socialism to religion. In practice, socialists often resort to compromise to gain tactical advantage, which in the language of morality one must call a betrayal of what is true and right.

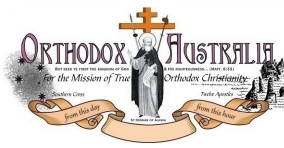
In practice, one has to consider the socialists as having the temper of village peasantry or even the traditional habits of the working class; we cannot even speak of spirituality and other conditions.



“The class of Christian workers shows the most stubborn opposition to propaganda” (Pannekoek). One must of necessity direct serious attention to religion, as Engels puts it, “that greatest of conservative powers.” “We will never succeed in earning trust if we begin to demand that the government take violent measures against the Church,” admits Kautsky. What to do? “In order to overcome the mistrust of the workers and infiltrate them more quickly, in our own ranks there is arising the aspiration to suppress our fundamental views and, in the name of temporary success, to sacrifice clarity of thought and the sensibilities of our own comrades.” This Anton Pannekoek openly and cynically admits. And so we see how socialists “adapt.” According to the Erfurt program, religion is a personal matter. According to the “worker’s catechism,” social-democracy demands neither atheism nor theism. Schtampfer maintains that “the theses of socialism are concerned neither with God nor the afterlife; it is slander to say that it is the sworn enemy of the Church.” One can be both a Christian and a social-democrat (Kautsky). In all these and similar statements, there is absolutely no sincerity. The Erfurt program does not satisfy the more consistent socialists; they demand that an inimical relationship with the Church be stressed more emphatically. In actual fact, the socialists are waging war against religion, but, in accordance with their tactical ploys, they take refuge behind a personal struggle against “clericalists,” and this struggle is justified by that fact that the “clericalists” 1) have pretensions to political power, 2) are fanatics, 3) foster ignorance, and 4) support the capitalist class. Yet all of this is, of course, a mere sham; the socialists are in reality inimical to all religion, are against God.

But is not such hypocrisy, such falsehood, immoral, scandalously immoral? To this the socialists answer us thus: “Mere moral means have nothing to recommend them to us. You will not get far in politics with them” (Bebel). “In each party perfidious tricks are unavoidable, and the laws of traditional morality here recede completely into the background” (Menger). What can you do with party tactics? But these tactics are such as would move Jesuits to ecstasy. The more direct and (if one can speak of honesty among them) honest socialists, however, let the cat out of the bag and openly state their enmity towards religion. On August 22nd, 1901, the French Social-Revolutionary Party resolved: “Citizens, the members of the Party vow that under no circumstances will they carry out any religious acts whatever in conjunction with representatives of any denomination” (freedom of conscience!!!). On December 31st, 1878, Bebel, in the presence of the entire Reichstag, declared: “In the area of religion, we aspire to atheism”; and on September 16th, 1878, he expressed “a firm trust that socialism will lead to atheism.” This same blasphemer Bebel calls himself the enemy of all religion, “of which people of high quality have no need.” At the Gall Assembly, Liebknecht expressed the hope that “the basic principles of socialism will overcome religious forms of popular ignorance.” According to Todt, “He who is himself not an atheist and does not commit himself with all zeal to the dissemination of atheism is not fit to be called a socialist.” Lafarge is indignant “that religious principles are still not utterly extirpated even from the minds of the learned,” but is comforted by the hope that in the future socialism would completely erase faith in God from men’s souls.

Certain socialists descry in the distance “the first day of socialism,” an international celebration of it in the Vatican and Saint Peter’s Basilica, when “the whole religious past will be made the subject



of curious conversations and merry jokes, when educational institutions, trade schools, and exhibits of the products of modern industry [not even art!] will be housed in the churches, and when the place of religion will be occupied by an amalgamation of all interests in economic solidarity!”

It is understood that in the socialist world-view there will also be no place for belief in the immortality of the soul. The denial of immortality is one of the main conditions for the success of socialism, “because with the weakening of belief in heaven, socialist demands for heaven on earth will be strengthened” (Bebel). Dietzgen advises that one prefer “a comfortable world here” to the other world. On February 3rd, 1893, a certain Catholic deputy asked the social-democrats of the German Reichstag the question as to whether they believed in the afterlife. They answered unanimously in the negative. One socialist newspaper, *Neue Zeit*, suggested that “the threats of hell be mocked, and that pointing to heaven be disdained.”

It is terrible to read the socialists’ blasphemies against religion in general, yet these blasphemies are even more greatly intensified when they speak of the Christian Faith. There was a time of sentimental socialism, when it assumed the role of a direct continuer of the commandments of the Gospel. At that time, one could encounter in the homes of certain socialist workers an engraving depicting Jesus as a carpenter, with the following inscription: “Jesus of Nazareth, the first Representative of the People.” On the feast of the Nativity of Christ, they would gather at democratic banquets to celebrate His birth. Prudhon himself, despite his anticlericalism, paid tribute to this fashion, and in his newspaper printed explanations and accounts of these Christian-socialist affairs.

On April 25th, 1848, a committee of democratic-socialist ladies organized in Valentino Castle “a banquet on the day of the Nativity of Christ,” with paid admission of 1 franc, 50 centimes (50 centimes for children). Prudhon’s newspaper, *Le Peuple*, published the following account:

“The assembly was opened appropriately, with the reading of the Sermon on the Mount; after a song in honor of brotherhood, sung with great animation, there followed a series of toasts, a list of which we will enumerate:

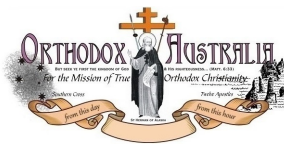
“For Christ, the Father of socialism!’ - offered by a certain lady, whose name we will not cite.

“For the coming of God to earth!’ - offered by Jeanne Derouan.

“Our friend, Pierre Lerue, who is always prepared to welcome the desires of his brethren and friends, again read and explained the Sermon on the Mount and greeted the coming of a new religion... This impromptu speech was accepted with the most ardent approval.

“Then followed most toasts:

“For Christmas!’ - offered by Mme. Brazier.



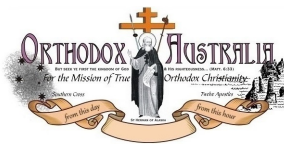
“For Saint-Just, the victim of the Thermidore!” - offered by Herve. “For the resurrection of Christ, for France!” - offered by Bernarome.”

We doubt that such blasphemous banquets would dispose any Christians to favor socialism, but now such affairs are a thing of the past. Now the socialists have but one desire: to debunk Christianity, to undermine trust in its historical principles, to mock the content of its ideals, and to drag even its moral teachings through the mire. Christianity arises from economic conditions and spiritual needs. For the sake of decency, they try to present the case as “scientific.” At the Mainz Conference, the demand was made “to provide a scientific refutation of the teachings of Christianity suitable for the purposes of agitation.” And so, a filthy and blasphemous caricature of Christianity appears in “scholarly” literature. “Here one does not know what to be more surprised at: the psychological limitations of the authors, their ignorance of history, the backwardness of their point of view from the standpoint of principle, or their dishonesty in distorting the facts and twisting the sense of the texts. In no single area does the science of this socialism, which boasts of its scholarship, bring such shame upon itself as here, in its juvenile, perfervid criticism of Christianity” (Kozhevnikov, p. 39).

“Irrefutable conclusions of science” arise among the socialists of Tubingen. Lafarge sees in the Christian Faith a “systematic amalgamation of ideals and myths, which dominated in the ancient world for hundreds of years.” For Bebel, the existence of Christ is “very uncertain”; Christianity borrowed from Egypt, from India, Buddha, Zoroaster, and even from Socrates; of course, it is of human origin, and “its elimination, from the point of view of progress, is essential.” The Church is “the yoke with which the clergy harness the people in the interests of the ruling classes” (Bebel).

The dogmatic aspect of Christianity is of no interest to the socialists. Who now considers dogmas obligatory? Yet the socialists dare to blaspheme even the moral teachings of Christianity and to propose their own “greater.” According to this teaching, all morality is conditional; it is immoral only to deviate from one’s own morals, and in no case from those of others (Kautsky). The conscience, according to Menger, is only fear of unpleasant consequences for opposing power and what is commonly accepted, and power and morality are in essence identical. “Hope in the Messiah is senseless; Christianity has not fulfilled its promises of universal redemption from the needs and cares of existence.” (But where is the proof that it ever made such promises?)

To criticize the moral teaching of Christianity, which they do not wish to acknowledge, the socialists do not undertake criticism, but prefer to wage war. Christianity is “a religion of hatred, persecution, and oppression” (Bebel). Christian charity is explained as a desire to belittle the dignity of the poor and to receive, in exchange for a paltry earthly outlay, fabulous, usurious interest in the form of heavenly rewards (Lafarge). Finally, the height of socialist blasphemy, for which may God Himself chastise them, is the wild expression of Bax concerning “the excess of continual references to the ideal perfection of the half-mythical, first-century Syrian [a blasphemous mis-reference to Christ], when there are so many higher examples among the ranks of the modern socialist movement.” (May God deliver us from these “higher examples”!)



The perfection of the “modern socialist movement” is not in Christian life on earth, nor in eternal blessedness in heaven. Both the former and the latter are relegated to the archives. “Our ideal is not poverty, nor abstinence, but wealth, and wealth immeasurable, unheard-of. This wealth is the good of all humanity, its holy object, its Holy of holies, toward the possession of which all our hopes are directed” (Dietzgen).

But enough! Enough of these mindless words! I hope my readers will forgive me for setting down these blasphemies of the socialists and offending their Christian sensibilities with them. I have only wanted to show what moral ugliness socialism is, what an abyss of falsehood lies within it, and, therefore, how mistaken is any attempt to reconcile socialism and the divine Christian Faith. Such attempts are being made not only by Christians who have lost their faith, who have “changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like the corruptible man, and birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things” (Rom. 1:23); certain among the socialists, or better to say, workers seduced by socialism, are also naively convinced that it is possible to combine socialism and Christianity. The socialist press is also trying to take advantage of this trust, arguing “that Christ belongs not to the churchmen, but to the socialists.” Oscar Zimmer, in his booklet “The Socialist from Nazareth”, reaches the conclusion that all the religious teaching of Christ was a mere addendum to His preaching of socialism. In the opinion of another author, Christ unfortunately could not fulfill His most important task - to write a manual of political economics; but the modern lights of socialism have brilliantly carried out this task.

All of these attempts at reconciling socialism and Christianity, whichever side makes them, do not satisfy present-day socialists in the least. The real convictions of the socialists are expressed by Bebel and Vandervelde: “Christianity and socialism strive for different things; they are as opposite as fire and water.”

If one could conceive the full satanic evil of socialism, which is expressed in the socialists’ own words, one’s heart would die of horror. In 1908, the magazine *The Christian* appended the book of Emilia Gregorovius, *Heaven on Earth*. The book produced a deep impression. It depicted socialism as a horrible monster, in the form of “a mockery of God.” Just such an impression is produced by our familiarization with the relationship of socialism to our Holy of holies, the Christian Faith. Socialism is the “mystery of iniquity” which the holy Apostle Paul prophesied (II Thess. 2:7). Is there any need to refute socialism? No, it is sufficient merely to say what socialism is, and those who have still kept their faith in Christ to any degree will reject this ungodly scandal with horror. The believing man is absolutely unable speak of any agreement between socialism and Christianity whatever. Socialism is not only not ours, it is our declared and dangerous adversary. It is guilty of enmity toward Christianity and deserves no condescension. It is our enemy. Every member of the Church must be aware of this, and it is essential that the Church explain this for all the world to hear. If passing into heresy entails separation from the Church, passing into socialism is an error more grievous than any heresy, and is even more deserving of punishment. “If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema” (I Cor. 16:22). We have already seen how socialism ‘loves’ Jesus Christ. It is necessary to commit all inveterate socialism to anathema. Ravening



wolves must be driven from the flock, else the whole flock will perish. How can one speak of the 'Christianization of socialism'? These are empty words. Can one Christianize atheism? "Christian socialism" is a contradiction in terms. What is Christian cannot be socialist. If we do not loudly and openly declare that socialism is the enemy of Christianity, nothing will result except harm and scandal. All compromises are inappropriate here. One must look one's enemy in the eye. To underestimate danger is always deleterious.

[Taken from Orthodox Life, May-June 1998 issue, pp. 35-44]

Source:

http://www.trueorthodoxy.org/non_christian_others_socialism_sthilarion.shtml