

**MARXIAN SOCIALISM AND
RELIGION: A STUDY OF THE
RELATION OF THE MARXIAN
THEORIES TO THE FUNDAMENTAL
PRINCIPLES OF RELIGION**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649134984

Marxian socialism and religion: a study of the relation of the Marxian theories to the fundamental principles of religion by John Spargo

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JOHN SPARGO

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PREFACE

THE Socialist challenge to the heart and brain of modern civilization has inspired a literature of vast magnitude. Socialism has been advocated and opposed, praised and condemned, in a bewildering array of books and pamphlets, printed in all languages and dealing with the subject from every point of view imaginable.

A considerable portion of this great mass of literature deals with the subject of religion and the relation of Socialism thereto. Anti-Socialist writers have claimed, in numerous books and pamphlets, that Socialism is the deadly enemy of religion, while the advocates of Socialism, in books and pamphlets equally numerous, have denied the accusation.

To support their charge, the Anti-Socialists have gleaned from the writings and speeches of Socialists a formidable array of atheistic and anti-religious quotations. Every statement by a Socialist, assailing or ridiculing religious beliefs, ceremonies or institutions, has been carefully preserved to become a shaft in the Anti-Socialist quiver.

To refute the charge, the Socialist advocates

have declared that the anti-religious utterances quoted against them must be regarded as the expression of individual opinions, in nowise binding upon or committing the Socialist movement. They have made the most of the formal declarations of the Socialist parties that Socialism is not antagonistic to religion. Against the anti-religious statements of some Socialists they have balanced the religious statements of other Socialists, and the Socialist utterances of noted religious leaders. In England, the charge that Socialism and atheism go together was met by the challenge of the Socialists that for every atheist among Socialists named by the Anti-Socialists they would name a dozen among well-known members of the Liberal and Tory parties. As in the theological controversies of an earlier day, there has been a warfare of texts.

Naturally, this method of controversy has brought forth all the evils manifested in the theological disputations of the past. Textual warfare develops the worst phases of partizanship. Isolated passages, torn from their contexts, have been made to convey meanings quite opposed to the intention of their authors; numerous and interminable disputes have taken place over the interpretation of obscure texts, and there have been mistranslations, cunning interpolations and for-

geries — quite after the fashion of theological controversy.

But the gravest objection of all to the method is that it leads nowhere and can determine nothing except the fact that many Socialists have opposed religion. And that fact no candid mind will attempt to deny. When so much has been shown, we are as far as ever from knowing whether opposition to religion by Socialists is accidental, an individual matter, resulting from the mental and temperamental peculiarities of individuals, or from their intellectual environment, or whether it is the logical and necessary outcome of the Socialist philosophy.

So far as I am aware, the present volume is the only work on the subject of Socialism and religion which absolutely ignores the warfare of texts. It is the only work on the subject, so far as I am aware, which attempts to determine whether or not Socialism and religion are opposed to each other, by means of a candid analysis and comparison of both. Whatever the defects of this contribution to the discussion may be, it has at least this merit: it approaches the question in a more philosophical spirit than has generally prevailed, and in a manner less open to abuse.

I have carefully distinguished between Socialism as an economic programme and the Marxian the-

ories which form the theoretical and philosophical basis of the modern Socialist movement. After a careful analysis of religion, ending with a definition of religion which is entirely candid and free from the charge of evasiveness, I have carefully outlined the Marxian synthesis, with special emphasis upon the one doctrine in it which has been held by most Anti-Socialist writers, and some Socialist writers, to be incompatible with religious belief. I have tried to show that there is nothing in the Marxian theories, or in any of their necessary implications, which the essential principles of religion either explicitly or implicitly oppose or deny. I believe that I have demonstrated this beyond reasonable doubt, and that the open-minded reader will be compelled to acknowledge that Marxism and religion are not mutually exclusive; that there is nothing in the Marxian system of thought which requires a denial of belief in God, the Creator and Moral Ruler of the Universe, or of belief in the immortality of the soul.

In my attempt to show how the Marxian theory of the materialistic conception of history applies to the evolution of religious conceptions, how man's conceptions of God and of immortality are influenced by his economic conditions and his material environment in general, I have advanced a number of suggestions which, I must in fairness

warn the reader, are personal speculations only. They are no part of the theory itself and their refutation would not weaken the theory in any particular. Furthermore, while the Socialist movement may be charged with responsibility for the theory so long as its advocates and spokesmen base their arguments upon it, for these personal speculations in which I have indulged the Socialist movement cannot justly be held responsible. I wish that it were possible for me to believe that this statement will prevent any of the critics of the Socialist movement from making the claim that the suggestions to which I refer are inherent in the Socialist philosophy and holding my comrades responsible for them. My experience forbids the hope. Nevertheless, for honest minds, I have forestalled that trick.

As far as possible, I have acknowledged in the text my indebtedness to other writers. But I am especially indebted for their definitions of religion to Professor Thomas C. Hall, D.D.; Rev. George Hodges, D.D.; Professor Charles P. Fagnani, D.D.; Rev. Samuel Schulman, D.D.; Rev. Maurice Harris, D.D.; Rev. John Augustus Ryan, D.D.; Professor Simon N. Patten and Mr. Rufus W. Weeks. I am also obliged for various courtesies to the Principal of Manchester College, Oxford, Dr. J. Estlin Carpenter; Rev. Anson Phelps

Stokes, of Yale; Professor Walter Rauschenbusch, and Mr. Algernon Lee, Educational Director of the Rand School of Social Science, New York.

It is my earnest hope that the book will contribute to a better understanding of Socialism by many men and women of religious belief and affiliations, and to a better understanding of religion by my fellow Socialists. If it lessens the misunderstanding and prejudice between these two classes I shall be well content.

J. S.

“NESTLEDOWN,”
Old Bennington, Vermont.
August, 1915.

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