



WORLDVIEW MADE PRACTICAL
Volume 16 Number 9
March 3, 2021

The Social Justice Heresy - Part 1
What Is It?

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This article is part one of a two part series on a modern day heresy that is becoming increasingly prominent in American society – even in many churches and denominations.

Heresies Have Always Been Around

Since the very beginning of the Christian faith, false beliefs have been a problem for the church. In fact, much of the New Testament was actually written to address heretical teachings. For instance, prominent New Testament heresies included:

- Judaizers - Judaizers were people who converted to Christianity from Judaism, but maintained that Christians must still keep the Jewish law in order to please God. Some of the places this heresy is addressed can be found in Acts 15:1-35, Paul's letter to the Galatians, and his letter to the Colossians.
- John the Baptist - John the Baptist pointed to Jesus as the Messiah, but many of his followers never fully understood the Christian gospel message. After the Baptist's death, some of those people continued to preach John's baptism, and Christians had to be able to explain the difference. Places where this is addressed can be found in the Gospel of John and in Acts 18:23-28.
- 1. Gnostics - Gnosticism was a religion that combined certain animistic beliefs with beliefs taken from Christianity. It denied the deity of Christ and asserted that people had to pay Gnostic teachers to gain special knowledge in order to achieve salvation. This hybridization distorted the truth about God and his salvation. The

Gospel of John, Paul's letter to the Colossians, and 1 & 2 John are particular places where this heresy is addressed.

- Greek/Roman Animism - Animism was the dominant societal worldview during the New Testament era, and various animistic teachings and practices had to be dealt with by the early Christians. In particular, they had to deal with issues related to meat that had been offered to idols and temple prostitution. We see this particularly addressed in Paul's letter to the Romans, and in his first letter to the Corinthians.
- Epicureans - The Epicureans were the Naturalists of the New Testament era. Their understanding of Naturalism was somewhat different from the modern day variety, but their bottom line, that the natural universe is all that exists, was a commonality. We see that Paul had to deal with believers of this faith in the book of Acts when he visited Athens.

There are more that could have been mentioned, but these make the point.

Some of the Old Heresies Are Still Around

While most of the heresies that existed in New Testament times do not still exist in the same form as in that early era, there are still variations of them. For instance, there are:

- No Judaizers but many legalists - There are numerous religious groups that assert the necessity of keeping some set of legal regulations in order to please God. You will find this in some forms of Judaism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Oneness Pentecostals, and numerous others.

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- No disciples of John the Baptist, but many groups with a false view of God - God has carefully revealed Himself and His ways in the Bible, but there are numerous faiths like Mormonism, Hare Krishna, and Islam that understand God in ways that are not consistent with what is taught in the Bible.
- Few Gnostics, but many Animists - Gnosticism actually does still exist in some places, but its adherents are actually very few and far between. However, the animistic foundation that Gnosticism is based upon has produced many false beliefs that are very common today such as Astrology, Japanese Shinto, Voodoo, New Age, and many others.
- No temple prostitutes but widespread acceptance of immoral practices such as sex outside of marriage, abortion, and gay marriage - The form of Animism that existed in the early New Testament period has pretty much disappeared, but the immoral practices that are natural expressions of it remain in certain belief systems such as Wicca, The Family International, Fundamentalist Latter Day Saints, and the Nxivm Cult.
- No Epicureans, but many naturalistic theologies - Epicureanism pretty much died out in the 3rd century (though it has revived in a very small way in more modern times). But its basic naturalistic foundation has pretty much taken over modern Western civilization. Modern expressions of Naturalism such as Secular Humanism, Postmodernism, Atheism, and Marxism have also had a massive influence in certain Christian denominations in the form of Higher Criticism, Liberation Theology, Postmodern Theology, and the Social Justice Movement.

What Is Social Justice Theology and Where Does it Come From?

At this point, we want to focus in on a particular heresy that is increasingly prominent in Christian circles – the Social Justice Movement. Social justice relates specifically to the concerns some people have regarding humanity's material needs. It defines the concept of justice in terms of *racial, social, and income equality*, rather than on the legal paradigm that the word actually fits into. Those who promote this notion believe that there is injustice where there are inequities in wealth distribution and differences in the privileges available to the various classes and other categories of society. Thus, in order to even things up, they see it as necessary to pick winners and losers. The "haves" must be specifically disadvantaged in order to take care of the needs of "the have nots."

The emphasis of the Social Justice Movement, then, is to break down barriers to social mobility and create economic safety nets for those considered disadvantaged. Based on the beliefs associated with this movement, it is seen as the responsibility of the various institutions of society to make sure that this kind of "justice" is enforced. It is accomplished as the government structures society's political and economic environment in ways that advantage the politically and economically "oppressed," by creating disadvantages to those considered the "oppressors" (those with money and privilege).

While there are significant portions of self-identified Christians who promote this point of view, its origin is straight out of naturalistic philosophy and is focused only on actions taken in this world. In fact, that is the underlying foundation of all expressions of social justice, whether by groups claiming to be Atheists or those claiming to be Christian.

Naturalistic philosophy, or Naturalism, begins with the assumption that

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the natural universe operating on fixed natural laws is all that exists. It promotes the belief that there is no God and no transcendent reality. Even self identified Christians who believe in social justice live out the implications of this belief, though their liberal theology does at least give a nod to the notion of God. That said, it does not represent Him as He has revealed Himself in the Bible. Liberal theology is essentially naturalistic belief dressed in biblical vocabulary.

To fully understand social justice, it is particularly important to understand how the notion of "justice" fits into the equation. People who accept this belief feel that justice requires equality of outcome – that is, everyone in society should be equally taken care of. They consider that it is *unjust* for some people to be wealthy while others are materially in need. They particularly feel this way as it relates to the working class. They believe that since it is the workers who do the work (for a company for instance), they should be the ones who receive the bulk of the money that the company earns in profits. This is a classic Marxist notion.

The way this is generally promoted is through a collectivist paradigm – some form of Marxism. They believe that it is the government's responsibility to make sure that the needs of all people in society are taken care of, and they do this by wealth redis-

tribution – taking from the "haves" and giving it to the "have nots." This is accomplished using such vehicles as taxation, social insurance, public health programs, public schools, various public services, labor law, and governmental regulation of the markets. Rather than a focus on providing individuals with opportunities to lift themselves up, they seek to level the playing field by providing governmental services in ways that redistribute wealth.

In part 2 of this article, we will turn our focus to exploring specifically how the Social Justice Movement plays out in life, and how Christians need to be able to respond to it.

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