

# Political Witness: Religion and Socialism—the ‘Gospel of Envy’

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*“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge...”*  
Hosea 4:6

When a theologian (“Decision at the Polls,” SCP [Southern California Presbyterian] November 1962) describes “conservatism” as the rejection of new ideas and “liberalism” as the espousal of them, it could be political naiveté, or it could be a complete collapse in communications. As Alice says, it could be any number of things in the land of wonder, including Humpty Dumpty’s own definition, but one thing is certain: It is a total misunderstanding of terms.

I am a political conservative. At the same time I am a practicing Christian who, in 1952, was forced to admit that as a political independent, I didn’t know a small “d” democrat from a small “r” republican; and that, for me, John Dewey was either the hero of Manila or the founder of the decimal system. That he was neither, but a secular humanist and therefore an anti-God influence upon our educational system, had yet to appall me. In short, “politically independent” was just a very nice name for politically indifferent and politically ignorant....

I was what many still are, a conservative unaware—unaware that I helped every political cause in the world except my own by not coming to grips with the term politically, socially, economically, but, above all, religiously. For, while I was unaware, many were very much aware of what they were doing and just where they—and we—were headed.

For example, in the May-June 1947 issue of *Partisan Review*, a political liberal named Arthur Schlesinger wrote: “If socialism—i.e., government ownership of all significant means of production—is to preserve democracy, it must be brought about step by step.” Noting that time is no obstacle, Schlesinger went on to say that “the gradual advance of socialism in the United States could be brought about through a series of New Deals.” Today, Dr. Schlesinger is assistant to President Kennedy and directing one of that series, the New Frontier. He properly calls it Democratic Socialism. Its goal? The “welfare state.”

Now, what has all this to do with religion? To be successful, the socialist must render obsolete the Ten Commandments that proclaim God as our fountainhead, preserve the family physically and morally, and establish private property (thou shalt not steal) and personal accomplishment (thou shalt not covet). Small wonder that Churchill calls socialism “the gospel of envy.” It envies God Himself and supplants Him with government. So, naturally, Schlesinger laments in *Partisan Review* that “too often people believe in patriotism or religions, or read comic books, go to the movies, play slot machines and patronize dance halls. In one way or another, they try to cure their discontent by narcotics rather than surgery.” Calling for leadership by the intellectual, ... Schlesinger notes that it is the intellectual who is “more likely to escape from his confusion than the capitalist from his irresponsibility, or the worker from his impotence.” It is no accident that the Kennedy Administration is well staffed with Harvard professionals!

To date, I have heard no official church voice raised against Schlesinger’s presumption in lumping religion with comic books; nor has his mood been likened to that of the master socialist brewer, Marx, who wrote more bluntly that “religion is the opium of the people.” One wonders not only at our indifference, but at our long, long silence....

To think we can wash our hands like Lady MacBeth, Pontius Pilate, or the Pavlovian-conditioned is to fashion our own limbo. Reality, be it hell or heaven, has to be faced.... The political message is urgent: Political liberalism or socialism under any label, is not the espousal of new ideas, but the return to a very, very old one—paganism.

Such liberalism recognizes no God, but the gods of all men; no Kingdom but the welfare state; no Bible, except its own malleable translation of the Bill of Rights; and no Commandments except its own variable code of ethics, set forth by an elite. It flies under the ephemeral flag of “progress.” But...if new ideas are always identified with progress, why has every civilization, pre-Rome to Great Britain, fallen flat on its face at the very height of its “progress?” New ideas, apparently, are not always good ideas. As a matter of fact, any historian may prove they are not even new.

We have now arrived at “conservatism”—what and why. Men like Burke, Lincoln, and Chesterton addressed conservatism to their times—men like Russell Kirk, Barry Goldwater, et al., are vocal in our time. But they can all be gelled into this one: Conservatism is the reconciliation of new ideas with old ideas. Consider for a moment that the Bible, always topical, is a reconciliation of new ideas with old ideas, and that Christ is the reconciliation of God and man....

In “Prospects for Conservatives,” Russell Kirk defines conservatives as those who “seek to reconcile the best in the wisdom of our ancestors with the change that is essential to a vigorous civil social existence, who “believe in Principle,” or enduring values.... “The liberal in American parlance has been a man in love with change....” A liberal has nothing to conserve.

How can Christians NOT reconcile new ideas with old ideas? “Political problems are, at bottom, moral and religious problems,” says Kirk. Christ Himself said that he did not come to throw away the old law, but to fulfill it....

“Do the work of an evangelist,” says Paul. But in a nation with freedom of speech to discuss politics and religion, we have refused to discuss either. In a nation with freedom of Christian witness, we have refused to testify. More Buddhist than Christian, we see, hear, and speak no evil. But the consequences of evil remain absolute. And nowhere are the consequences of evil more glaring than in the “practical politics” that has replaced “Principled politics....”

[Christians must give witness.]

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