

# Do Christian ethics lead us to the left or to the right?

Does Christianity demand or lead to free market capitalism?

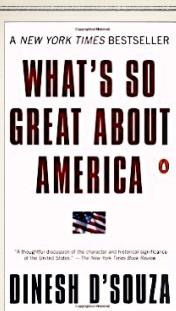
Does Christianity lay the groundwork for democratic socialism?

*Ecclesiastes 10:2*

"A wise man's heart directs him toward the right, but the foolish man's heart directs him toward the left."

**John Adams**

*"We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion. Our constitution was made only for a moral and a religious people. It is wholly inadequate for the government of any other."*



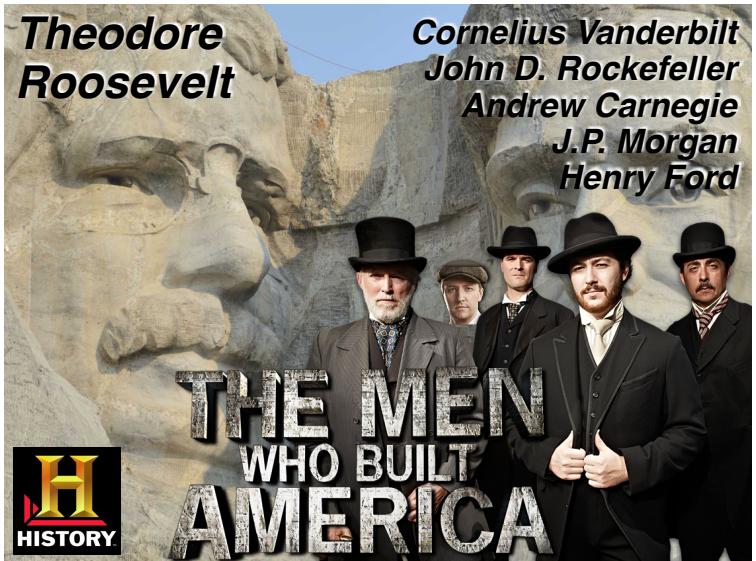
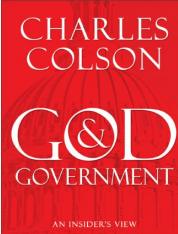
A defense of American exceptionalism

Michael Novak

The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism

A politically non partisan perspective

A defense of the role of Christian values in U.S. politics and economics



The best compliment that can be given the American system of government is:

**It embraces the most realistic view of human nature -**

**depraved dignity.**  
**E pluribus unum**

*Ephesians 4:28*

"He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need."

- **Private ownership** of property (the fruit of labor not theft) is assumed.
- Ownership calls for stewardship, **sharing** with those in need.
- One of the **marks** of Christian conversion - takers become givers.

# Disciples of Jesus have two callings:

- 1) They are to pray and
- 2) be the answer to someone else's prayer.

*Acts 4*

"<sup>32</sup> And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own; but all things were common property to them. <sup>33</sup> And with great power the apostles were giving witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. <sup>34</sup> For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales, <sup>35</sup> and lay them at the apostles' feet; and they would be distributed to each, as any had need. <sup>36</sup> And Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means, Son of Encouragement), <sup>37</sup> and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet."

***Is socialism sanctioned by the N.T.?***

## ***Observations on Acts 4***

- **Description is not Prescription** - This describes what happened not what was commanded.
- **The faith community** - This is what happened within the church fellowship not the state.
- **Voluntary** - This was not legislated or forced but voluntary.
- **Occasional** - There is no indication that this was the pattern outside the Jerusalem church in the very first days after Pentecost.

***This tells us a lot about the community spirit within the early church (but not about the structure of the state).***

## ***Are corporate decisions (socialism) sanctioned by the N.T.?***

**NO!**

***Not as a mandated system of civil government.***

**YES!**

***As a sentiment of the Christian Spirit.***

## ***Separation of church and state addresses:***

1. ***Union of any particular religious sect & state.***
2. ***Union of any particular system of government & state.***

## ***American capitalism's challenge to the Christian:***

- ✓ **Community** - How do we build and maintain a large tranquil community that is diverse?
- ✓ **Exploitation** - How do we keep the rich and powerful from manipulating the system?
- ✓ **Economic justice** - How do we maintain a sense of just distribution of the benefits of a free enterprise community?
- ✓ **Values** - How do we promote the higher values of the Christian faith when the system is driven by self serving (greed), competition, materialism, and individualism?
- ✓ **Anxiety, stress, & depression** - epidemic.

## ***Preamble to the U.S. Constitution***

"We the people of the United States, in order **to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty** to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."

***The government's role is to secure personal liberty by preventing it from destroying community.***



**John Kenneth Galbraith**

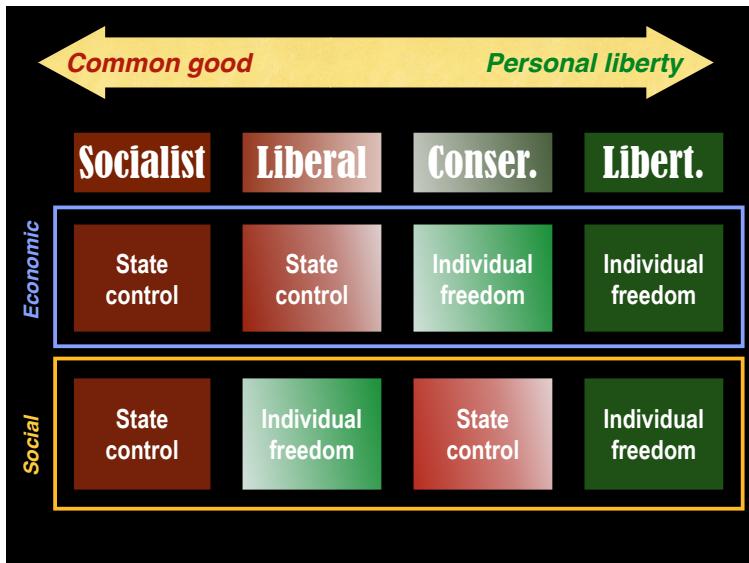
"Under capitalism, man exploits man. Under communism, it's just the opposite."

**Martin Luther King Jr.**

"Morality cannot be legislated, but behavior can be regulated. Judicial decrees may not change the heart, but they can restrain the heartless."

**Serj Tankian**

"Capitalism unchecked is not a democratic system."



### **Examples of socialistic principles in American capitalism**

- **Insurance** - where the costs and benefits are shared by a large pool of participants.
- **Regulations of commerce** - where those in power are not allowed to exploit those without it.
- **Public service** - Postal service, Education, Law enforcement, Standard measures & procedures, etc.
- **Community covenants** - where rules are made to protect and promote the general well-being of a neighborhood.

## **Christian capitalists**

### **Competition that is fair**

It is motivated by the pursuit of efficiency, and effectiveness as stewards more than personal comfort and power as consumers.

### **Cooperation that is proactive**

It is sensitive to the well-being of the community as well as the family and the individual.

### **Compassion that is sacrificial**

It is free to be generous and sensitive in addressing the true needs of others, especially those without power or dignity.

### **Common myths:**

- ✓ Capitalism is built on a commitment to self interest that is always toxic to the general welfare - especially the poor and weak. (Only when and if it is driven by selfish people and without reasonable government controls).
- ✓ Capitalistic systems **ALWAYS** work better than **socialistic systems** (except where socialistic systems are successful - Singapore, Scandinavia, Canada, Germany, Modern China?, etc).
- ✓ You should not **MIX** socialistic and capitalistic elements. (Almost all nations, like the USA, and China are a mixture of both for good reasons).

### **Both sides share somethings in common:**



- They are preoccupied with the temporal / material. “**It’s all about this life and now.**”
- They are convinced that the solutions are political. “**It’s all about social systems.**”
- They associate their politics with their theology. “**God is on our side.**”
- They are more committed to being “understood by” rather than “understanding” each other. “**We don’t need or care to hear about your ideas.**”
- They question the motives of those on the other side. “**We are the only ones addressing the real issues with the right motives.**”
- They fail to appreciate their need for each other. “**We are better off without you.**”

### **American Sacred Cows fear any and all forms of socialism**

- ✓ **Free expression** - Americans can 1) voice their true beliefs and feelings and 2) curse both government and God.
- ✓ **Free enterprise** - Americans can 1) create / produce and 2) manipulate / oppress.
- ✓ **Personal autonomy** - Americans are 1) free from enslavement to man or government and 2) from God.
- ✓ **Competition** - Americans are 1) able to rise to the limits of their ability and 2) have contempt for those who are not as competitive.

### **Why disciples of Jesus should like democratic socialism.**

- ✓ **It rewards the right things** - community, cooperation, social tolerance and respect.
- ✓ **It is sensitive to the marginalized** - poor, powerless, inept, victimized, etc.
- ✓ **It is just** - distributing material wealth more equitably than other systems.
- ✓ **It is efficient** - in coordinating resources & needs.

### **Why disciples of Jesus should be concerned about socialism.**

- ✓ It can discourage initiative & bureaucratic efficiency.
- ✓ It can minimize individual worth and significance.
- ✓ It can be inefficient in creating, maintaining, or ending.
- ✓ It too often rewards and promotes the inept & foolish.

### **Why disciples of Jesus should like free market capitalism.**

- ✓ **It works** - rewarding creativity, achievement, sensitivity to material needs, etc.
- ✓ **It is respectful of the individual** - consistent with personal freedom and responsibility.
- ✓ **It is self correcting** - disciplines through natural consequences.
- ✓ **It is better than the alternatives** - socialism, fascism, etc.

### **Why disciples of Jesus should be concerned about capitalism.**

- ✓ It glorifies competition, individuality, & privacy.
- ✓ It too often promotes greed, stress, and exploitation.
- ✓ It rewards (keeps score) with the wrong thing (money).
- ✓ It too often leads to social inequality and division.

## **Conclusions**

- Political systems make a difference but are not the main issue in Kingdom Ethics.
- In culture wars be careful that you do not die on the wrong hills (for the wrong issues).
- The USA has wisely combined capitalist and socialist principles in its commitment to liberty and justice for all.