

## **Capitalism and Marxism—Opposite Sides of a God-less Coin?**

The following is my paraphrasing summary of part of a short book I highly commend, *Christianity and the Class Struggle*, by Abraham Kuyper. It is a lecture he gave in 1891 as the No God-No Master premise of the French Revolution washed over Europe and drove it toward socialism/social democracy. Bold font is my emphasis; italics in the original.

### **Appreciating the driving force of Capitalism to Socialism**

When we, as a society, “cut off the horizon of an *eternal life*,” people are “impelled...to seek happiness on earth, and thus in *earthy* things, and this created a sphere of lower drives, in which money was the standard of value, and everything was sacrificed for money. Now add the loosening of all social organization,” which our United States Supreme Court has been doing quite nicely for us for the last 100 years, “followed by the proclamation of the mercantile gospel of ‘laissez faire,’ you understand how the *struggle for life* was announced by the *struggle for money*, so that the law of the animal world, dog eat dog, became the basic law for every social relationship.”

Even if the “opportunities at the beginning of this struggle had been equal for both parties,” the struggle grew “much worse now that the opportunities were so manifestly unequal. On the side of the bourgeoisie, there was experience and insight, ability and association, available money and available influence. On the other side was the rural population and the working class, bereft of all means of help, and forced to accept any condition, no matter how unjust, through constant necessity of food. Even without prophetic gifts, the result of this struggle could readily be foreseen. It could not end otherwise than in the absorption of all calculable value by the large and smaller capitalists, leaving for the lower strata of society only as much as appeared strictly necessary to maintain these instruments for nourishing capital—for in this system, that is all the workers are held to be.”

Turns out the equality that mankind dreamt of with the abolition of God turned out to be a “revised version of the fable of the wolf and the lamb. Would there not necessarily arise in the suffering class of society this very natural question: ‘With what right do men force on us this desperate poverty? We were taught that we were as good as anyone else; and also that the numerical minority must subject itself to the majority. Well, are we not the majority; the great majority; the overwhelming masses.’”

Thus, the capitalism of acquisition whereby human value was now measured was seen as “a violation of the principles of the French Revolution, and a scoffing at the holy slogan” of liberty, equality, and fraternity “for which so much costly blood flowed at Paris.”

### **Appreciating the Biblical, God-centered Alternative to this Struggle**

The following is my short paraphrase of part of the first lecture given by Abraham Kuyper to Princeton Seminary in 1889:

If a God-focused, God-driven theology “places our entire human life immediately before God, then it follows that all men or women, rich or poor, weak or strong, dull or talented, as creatures of God, and as lost sinners, have no claim whatsoever to lord over one another, and that we stand as equals before God, and consequently equal as man to man.”

“Hence we cannot recognize any distinction among men, save such as has been imposed **by God Himself**, in that **He gave** one authority over the other, or enriched one with more talents than the other, **in order that the man of more talents should serve the man with less, and in him serve his God.**”

This kind of God-focused and God-driven theology “condemns not merely all open slavery and systems of caste, but also all covert slavery of woman and of the poor; it is opposed to all hierarchy among men; it tolerates no aristocracy save such as is able, either in person or in family, **by the grace of God**, to exhibit superiority of character or talent, and to show **that it does not claim this superiority for self-aggrandizement or ambitious pride, but for the sake of spending it in the service of God.**”

Unlike the subject (human) directed theology of modern evangelicalism in which God exists for our sake, this kind of theology “was bound to find its utterance in the democratic interpretation of life; to proclaim the liberty of nations; and not to rest until both politically and socially every man, simply because he is man, **should be recognized, respected and dealt with as a creature created after the Divine likeness.**”

“This was no outcome of envy. It was not the man of lower estate who reduced his superior to his level to usurp the higher place, but it was all men kneeling in concert at the feet of the Holy One of Israel.”

If the denial of God brought us to our current struggle between capitalists and Marxists, and it did, then only bringing God back into the discussion will change the dynamic.