

Marc Roby: We are continuing our break from studying theology to look at some current topics of great importance from a Christian perspective. In our last session we noted that we have had 150 years to prove that Karl Marx's theory of history was wrong. Dr. Spencer, what do you want to examine today?

Dr. Spencer: I want to begin by looking at what the proper role of government is according to the Bible. That will establish a framework within which we can then look at some specific examples of the failure of Marx's ideas.

In his book *Politics According to the Bible*, Wayne Grudem argues that the first and most important role of government is to safeguard human liberty.

Marc Roby: How does he support that contention?

Dr. Spencer: He writes that "The Bible consistently places a high value on individual human freedom and responsibility to choose one's actions."¹ For example, at the very beginning, we read in Genesis 2:16-17 that "the LORD God commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.'"² Notice that this statement shows both freedom and responsibility. God gave man the freedom to choose, but then he also gave him a prohibition and told him what the penalty would be if he violated that prohibition. Adam was a free moral agent who was accountable to God for the choice he made.

Marc Roby: In other words, while the Bible puts a high value on our freedom, that freedom is never absolute.

Dr. Spencer: That's right. We are made in God's image and make real choices, but we are creatures and so, unlike God, our freedom is not absolute.

Marc Roby: That Creator/creature distinction just keeps cropping up.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, it does. And the fundamental failure of all Marxist ideologies is that they deny this biblical principle. They think man is absolute and not accountable to anyone.

But, returning to the proper role of government, in the famous passage about government in Romans Chapter 13 we read, in Verse 4, that the ruler, "is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer." That clearly supports the idea that the government is there to serve the people, it is to do us good, which certainly includes protecting the individual rights enumerated in the Bible, including the right to own private property.

¹ W. Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible*, Zondervan, 2010, pg. 91

² All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® (1984 version). Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com The "NIV" and "New International Version" are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™.

Marc Roby: And in order to do good to its subjects, the government must have the power both to defend its citizens from outside aggression and to punish those in the society who do evil.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that power is necessary because people are sinners. In Federalist Number 51, either Hamilton or Madison famously wrote that “If men were angels, no government would be necessary.”³

Marc Roby: If men were like angels, we’d be in heaven.

Dr. Spencer: That is only true in heaven, you’re right. On the flip side, the statement in Federalist 51 went on to add that “If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary.”⁴

Marc Roby: But, unfortunately, we don’t have angels to govern us right now.

Dr. Spencer: No, we don’t. And so some controls are necessary as we will discuss in a later session. But now, to cite just one more verse about the main purpose of government, Grudem also uses Deuteronomy Chapter 30, where Moses was speaking to the people on the plains of Moab prior to their entering the Promised Land. For those who don’t know the context, God had delivered his people from bondage in Egypt, but had then consigned them to wandering in the desert for forty years because of their disobedience. Moses was speaking to the children of those who had died in the desert and had just finished telling them the blessings that God promised for obedience and the curses that he threatened for disobedience and he then says to them, in Deuteronomy 30:19, “This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live”.

Marc Roby: And again we see liberty, but liberty fenced in by responsibility. People can choose whether or not to obey God, but there are blessings and curses set before them, and their choice determines which they will receive.

Dr. Spencer: And that is a reasonable pattern for civil government to follow as well. People have a God-given right to personal liberty, but there must be laws that bring punishment if they do things that are harmful to others in the society. This isn’t the time to talk about what those laws should be, but the key point is that government’s main role is to provide a structure that protects each citizen’s liberties or rights from being infringed by others—whether by individuals or by the government itself.

Marc Roby: That sounds suspiciously like our Declaration of Independence, right after the famous line that “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty

³ *Great Books of the Western World*, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1952, Vol. 43, pg. 163, also available at <https://guides.loc.gov/federalist-papers/text-51-60>

⁴ Ibid

and the pursuit of Happiness.” It goes on to say, “That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed”.⁵

Dr. Spencer: And we are very privileged to live in a country that was founded on that principle. But there have also been a number of attempts over the years at founding societies on socialist principles.

The first one I want to mention was founded by a man named Robert Owen. He was a Welsh textile manufacturer who became wealthy and decided to start a voluntary community of people who would own everything collectively. It was Owen and his supporters who came up with the name “socialism” to describe such an arrangement.⁶ He founded a famous experiment, called New Harmony, on the bank of the Wabash River in Indiana in 1825.

Marc Roby: I remember from Muravchik’s book that Marx’s and Engels’ views of Owen, and others who tried similar experiments, were somewhat disparaging. They called the approaches “utopian”, and meant that in a pejorative sense.⁷

Dr. Spencer: That’s very true. Even though Marx believed that communism was inevitable, he had come to the conclusion that the best way to bring it about was by violent revolution. He was afraid, for very good reason as history has shown, that the proletariat might be satisfied by just having good jobs and good lives and might not see their need for a complete revolution.

Marc Roby: That’s awfully ungrateful of those proletarians, not recognizing what wonderful things Marx wanted to do for them and being satisfied with simply achieving a comfortable life.

Dr. Spencer: Marx would certainly have thought so. In his address to the Central Committee of the Communist League in 1850, Marx argued that “the workers must counteract ... the bourgeois endeavors to allay the storm, and must compel the democrats to carry out their present terrorist phrases. Their actions must be so aimed as to prevent the direct revolutionary excitement from being suppressed ... instances of popular revenge against hated individuals or public buildings ... must not only be tolerated but the leadership of them taken in hand.”⁸

Marc Roby: Alright, that’s downright frightening. And it sounds very much like what is going on right now in Portland, Seattle and elsewhere.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, Marx and Engels were also clear about their goals in the Communist Manifesto. They wrote that “The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social

⁵ From a transcript of the Declaration of Independence, available at <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>

⁶ Joshua Muravchik, *Heaven on Earth, the Rise, Fall, and Afterlife of Socialism*, Encounter Books, 2019, pg. 28

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid, pg. 75

conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Workingmen of all countries, unite!”⁹

Marc Roby: That is very different from the ideas of Owen.

Dr. Spencer: Very different indeed. Owen thought that socialism would simply be so successful that it would attract people from all over the world to adopt it. But getting back to Marx and Engels, even though they had contempt for the peaceful means used by Owen and others, they acknowledged Owen’s influence. I don’t want to spend a lot of time on the New Harmony experiment, it was a complete failure. Interested listeners can look in Muravchik’s book for the details. But I do want to mention three things.

First, Owen believed that no human “is responsible for his will and his own actions” because “his whole character – physical, mental, and moral – is formed independently of himself.”¹⁰

Marc Roby: Well, we at least have to admire him for being a consistent materialist. As we have noted before in these podcasts¹¹, if the physical universe is all that exists, then there is no free will. Human beings are reduced to being nothing more than sophisticated biological machines.

Dr. Spencer: That’s true. And because Owen thought human behavior is entirely controlled by physical nature and external circumstances, he believed that you could create a new man, perfectly suited for the socialist life, by educating him properly.

Marc Roby: It might be more accurate to say indoctrinating him properly.

Dr. Spencer: I agree. But, in any event, he envisioned three five-year stages of education, beginning at birth, and he thought that the result, at age fifteen, would be “men and women of a new race, physically intellectually and morally; beings far superior to any yet known to have lived upon the earth.”¹²

Marc Roby: It’s interesting that he lists morals even though he thought we are all basically automatons.

Dr. Spencer: Well, its hard, if not impossible, to be 100% consistent as a materialist. But Muravchik makes a very important point about this, he wrote that “the idea of a new man, dimly foreseen by Babeuf but sketched sharply by Owen, became the enduring centerpiece of the socialist vision.”¹³ We will see in a future podcast that education, or indoctrination, plays a large role in what is going on in this country now too.

⁹ *Great Books of the Western World*, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1952, Vol. 50, pg. 434, also available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Manifesto.pdf>

¹⁰ Muravchik, op. cit., pg. 33

¹¹ See Session 1 page 4 and Session 102 page 6

¹² Muravchik, op. cit., pg. 34

¹³ Ibid, pg. 35

And, much like the vision Marx and Engels sketched of all conflict somehow miraculously ending, Owen said that with this new man, “There will be no cruelty in man’s nature”¹⁴. In fact, he even thought that the animal world would somehow completely change in character.

Marc Roby: That’s incredible. To summarize, the first thing you wanted to note about the New Harmony experiment is essentially that Owen thought he could create a new race of people through education. What else did you want to point out?

Dr. Spencer: The second thing I want to mention is how completely hostile to God Owen was, which is what you might expect from an ardent materialist. Owen said that “There is no sacrifice ... which I ... would not have ... willingly and joyously made to terminate the existence of religion on earth”.¹⁵

Marc Roby: Wow. I would say that describing that as hostile is accurate.

Dr. Spencer: And there is a connection with Marx and Engels. Engels attended the so-called “Hall of Science” in Manchester, England in 1843, which was a venue for spreading Owen’s socialist ideas that held Sunday services very much like a church.¹⁶ Engels reported that in the meetings “frequently ... Christianity is directly attacked and Christians are called ‘our enemies.’”¹⁷

Marc Roby: Well, one certainly couldn’t accuse them of trying to hide their hostility toward Christianity.

Dr. Spencer: No, you can’t. And Owen openly espoused a number of ideas that are fundamentally opposed to biblical Christianity. For example, speaking about the New Harmony community again, and quoting from Muravchik, “[Owen’s] critics charged him with advocating free love, and he gave them basis for the charge. Owen argued that the institution of marriage was ‘unnatural’ and ‘rendered prostitution unavoidable.’”¹⁸

Marc Roby: That is irreconcilably opposed to the biblical view that God created man male and female, established marriage and family in the garden, and said that marriage was for life.

Dr. Spencer: It is absolutely opposed to God’s plan and opposition to the traditional nuclear family is still part of communist beliefs. And Owen’s position went even further. Muravchik notes that “Owen’s design for ‘villages of unity and cooperation’ had been criticized for their proposal that boys and girls share common dormitories in their teen years. ... Owen asserted that in the new moral world ‘celibacy, beyond the period plainly indicated for its termination by nature ... will be known ... to be a great crime.’”¹⁹

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Ibid, pg. 33

¹⁶ Ibid, pg. 57, and also see <https://radicalmanchester.wordpress.com/2009/10/29/the-hall-of-science/>

¹⁷ Ibid, pg. 58

¹⁸ Ibid, pg. 45

¹⁹ Ibid

Marc Roby: It sounds like Owen would have been right at home in the 1960's in this country.

Dr. Spencer: Well, we'll get to the 1960's in a later podcast, but they bear a remarkable similarity to these socialist ideas for a very good reason. But let me get to the third and final thing I want to say about New Harmony.

Marc Roby: What is that?

Dr. Spencer: Why it failed. Owen, of course, had his own view. He said that it failed because people who had not been trained as socialists lacked the proper "characteristics of forbearance and charity necessary".²⁰ But that explanation really doesn't make a lot of sense since the people who joined the experiment were self-selected, they were people who thought it was a good idea. So, I'd like to read how Owen's son explained the failure of the experiment, he was a bit more objective.

Marc Roby: Very well. What did his son say?

Dr. Spencer: Well, his son, Robert Dale Owen, who went on to become a member of the US House of Representatives and to push through the legislation that created the Smithsonian Institution²¹, wrote that the most potent factor in the failure was that "All cooperative schemes which provide equal remuneration to the skilled and industrious and the ignorant and idle, must work their own downfall, for by this unjust plan of remuneration they must of necessity eliminate the valuable members – who find their services reaped by the indigent – and retain only the improvident, unskilled, and vicious members."²²

Marc Roby: Ouch! That's brutal. In other words, socialism doesn't take into account human nature.

Dr. Spencer: True. But he was speaking particularly about voluntary communities of people. The same problem manifests itself in different ways when people do not have the freedom to quit the cooperative arrangement as we'll see later.

We don't have time to go into more examples of voluntary communities in any detail, but if people read Muravchik's book, they will learn of other similar experiments both before and after Marx. The most recent, and – how shall I put this – least of a failure? Is the Kibbutz movement in Israel. In the 20th century there were hundreds of kibbutzim, but by early in the 21st century they had all voluntarily abandoned communal living. It simply doesn't work, even with people who are passionate about trying to make it work.

Marc Roby: But, of course, most of the experiments in socialism have not been voluntary groups of individuals.

Dr. Spencer: No, unfortunately, they have not. And the history of socialism among countries is much sadder than the failure of the voluntary communities. There has not been a single solitary

²⁰ Ibid, pg. 47

²¹ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Dale_Owen

²² Muravchik, op. cit., pp 48-49

example of a socialist or communist nation that has been successful in providing a good standard of living and freedom for its people.

Marc Roby: And I look forward to examining that topic further next time, but we are out of time for today, so I'd like to remind our listeners that they can email their questions and comments to info@whatdoesthewordsay.org. We will do our best to answer you.