

Marc Roby: We are continuing our break from studying theology to look at some current topics of great importance from a Christian perspective. Dr. Spencer, at the end of our session last week, you said you wanted to examine how Marxist ideology has become so common in our society today.

Dr. Spencer: And I'd like to begin by quoting the first line from Joshua Muravchik's book *Heaven on Earth*, from which we have quoted frequently. He grew up in a staunchly socialist home and he began his prologue, which is entitled "Changing Faiths", by writing, "SOCIALISM WAS THE FAITH IN WHICH I WAS RAISED."¹ (emphasis in the original)

Marc Roby: That's a surprising statement to most people I think, and a strange way to begin talking about how Marxist ideology has become so common today. But it agrees with the quote you gave last time from Whittaker Chambers, who called communism "man's second oldest faith. ... the great alternative faith of mankind."²

Dr. Spencer: Yes, Chambers made that point quite powerfully. And while this might at first blush seem like a strange way to begin talking about how Marxist ideology became so common, it actually makes a lot of sense, because if socialism *is*, in fact, a religion, that says a lot about how important it is to those who truly believe it. By the way, the terms socialism and communism, while there are distinctions between them in Marx's theory, are often taken to be roughly synonymous. Chambers and Muravchik are speaking about the same ideology, which is Marxist, independent of the fact that they use different words.

Marc Roby: Alright. But whether or not we can call socialism a religion obviously depends on the definition of religion.

Dr. Spencer: Very true. And I freely admit that most people think of religion as being a belief in a supernatural being of some sort; that is clearly the most common definition. But I would argue that it is not the most useful definition. God himself told us in the first commandment, which we read in Exodus 20:3, that "You shall have no other gods before me."³ And he wasn't saying that there really *are* other gods, in Jeremiah 10:10 we read that "the LORD is the true God; he is the living God, the eternal King." In other words, God is the *only* true and living God. All other so-called gods are figments of men's imaginations. And those figments of men's imaginations don't necessarily have to be supernatural beings, men can give their full allegiance to atheistic ideologies as well, in which case they function as a religion for all practical purposes.

¹ Joshua Muravchik, *Heaven on Earth, the Rise, Fall, and Afterlife of Socialism*, Encounter Books, 2019, pg. xi

² Whittaker Chambers, *Witness*, Regenery History, 2014 (republication – original was 1952), pg. xxxix

³ 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: OK, I'll grant you that. And it is a relatively common expression to say that someone is "religious" about a particular activity, so the word certainly admits of a broader definition than just belief in a supernatural being.

Dr. Spencer: It absolutely does. Therefore, let's look at the second definition given by the Merriam-Webster dictionary; it says that a religion is "a personal set or institutionalized system of religious attitudes, beliefs, and practices"⁴, and the fourth definition given is "a cause, principle, or system of beliefs held to with ardor and faith".⁵

I would argue, based on these definitions, that materialism, as expressed in Marxism, *is* a religion. It is a worldview, a system of beliefs, which attempts to explain what is real and provides a basis for making statements about everything. And it is held to with ardor and faith.

Marc Roby: We have noted before that everyone has a worldview and that our worldview affects how we view everything. It determines which questions we deem appropriate to ask and how we evaluate and internalize every experience or thought that we encounter.

Dr. Spencer: Exactly. And every worldview says something about the existence of God as well. Materialism, of course, simply denies that there is such a being as God. For all practical purposes, that *is* a religion. Most materialists don't go to some kind of special building, like a church, on a regular basis, but in every other meaningful way, it is a religion. Now most materialists, like most professing Christians, aren't all that zealous about it, but those who are fervent believers in materialism can be very zealous indeed.

Marc Roby: As anyone who has ever had an encounter with a committed member of the campus atheist club knows! Alright, even if our listeners don't agree with this definition, they at least know what definition you are using. So let's go on to see the point you want to make about Marxist ideology.

Dr. Spencer: Well, as we have noted before, any worldview must try to explain where we came from, what is wrong with the world, and how we can fix what is wrong. In Christian terms, those three things are creation, fall and redemption. And as we pointed out in Session 163, Marxism essentially denies the idea of creation. Either the universe popped into existence out of nothing or it has always been here, but it was not created. The material universe, or multiverse, simply exists. With regard to the fall, Marxism views the creation of private property as the problem, rather than sin, and it views the solution, or redemption, as consisting in a progression from capitalism to socialism to communism and, finally, to the government simply withering away, because, as Marx and Engels wrote in the Communist Manifesto, "Political power, properly so called, is merely the organized power of one class for oppressing another."⁶ Therefore, in their view, when all the classes have dissolved, so will organized political power. At that point mankind will supposedly have arrived at utopia; I'm tempted to say nirvana, but that would be mixing religions.

⁴ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/religion>

⁵ Ibid

⁶ *Great Books of the Western World*, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1952, Vol. 50, pg. 429

Marc Roby: Although there are some interesting parallels between the Buddhist view of nirvana and the Marxist view of utopia, they both view the individual as somehow getting lost, if you will, in a collective identity. It never ceases to amaze me how naïve it is to believe that human beings will arrive at this utopian vision without a fundamental change in character.

Dr. Spencer: It is only surprising if you understand that all men are sinners by nature, which is part of the Christian worldview. But if you start with a materialist worldview and deny the universal existence of sin, then I suppose it becomes more believable. Although I think you have to constantly ignore a mountain of evidence that daily argues against your worldview, both evidence from without and from within. But, given their materialist view of man, Marxists believe that they can create a new man by proper indoctrination. According to their view we are, after all, only automatons and we can, therefore, be re-programmed.

Marc Roby: Believing that requires more faith than I possess, and giving anyone enough power to do that is extremely dangerous.

Dr. Spencer: I agree completely. But if someone is a true believer in Marxist ideology, this materialist view of man is a foundational principle. And we certainly don't criticize Marxists, or anyone else, for wanting to make this world a better place. Most, if not all, people desire this world to be a better place than it currently is. Therefore, if you are zealous Marxist, you are going to devote your life to trying to achieve heaven on earth. You may well think it won't happen in your lifetime, but it is nonetheless a compelling motivation and you will dedicate your life to it. The problem is that it will never work because your worldview is wrong.

Marc Roby: Yes, that's make good sense. And I remember from our last session that Whittaker Chambers spoke about devoting your life to a cause, he wrote that "Communists are that part of mankind which has recovered the power to live or die – to bear witness – for its faith."⁷

Dr. Spencer: He did write that. He also wrote that "The revolutionary heart of Communism is ... a simple statement of Karl Marx, further simplified for handy use: 'Philosophers have explained the world; it is necessary to change the world.'"⁸

And given that statement, I want to read a statement made by Angela Davis in an interview that was just published last month in a special edition of Vanity Fair. She said, about her life's work, "We do this work because we want to change the world."⁹

Marc Roby: I don't know if she was consciously quoting Marx, but that is perfect. But I suspect that our younger listeners in particular may not know who Angela Davis is, so perhaps it would be good to provide some background.

⁷ Whittaker Chambers, op. cit., pp xxxix

⁸ Ibid, pg. xxxviii

⁹ Ava Duvernay, *Ava Duvernay Interviews Angela Davis on This Moment – and What Came Before*, Vanity Fair, Special Issue, August 26, 2020 (<https://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2020/08/angela-davis-and-ava-duvernay-in-conversation>)

Dr. Spencer: I agree. And I chose that quote from her not just because it was so perfect, and timely, but also because Angela Davis will come up again soon; she is a perfect example of how and why Marxist ideology has become so prevalent in our society today.

Angela Davis retired from being a professor and the director of the Feminist Studies program at the University of California in Santa Cruz in 2008.¹⁰ She was a member of the Communist Party in the United States until 1991 when she was expelled from the party for opposing the coup against Gorbachev.¹¹

Marc Roby: Certainly, those of us who are old enough and lived in California in 1970 also remember that she was charged with murder in the Marin County courthouse shootings in 1970.

Dr. Spencer: That's true. She purchased the shotgun that was used to kill Superior Court Judge Harold Haley, who had been taken captive along with others, and the other guns used in the case were also registered to her. In all, there were four people killed and two wounded. She was, however, acquitted of all charges due to insufficient evidence.

Independent of the fact she was acquitted though, there was more than enough evidence to make it clear in my mind that she was involved; not only did she purchase the guns, but the purpose of taking the hostages was to get other prisoners released, including Angela Davis' lover. In addition, she fled and used aliases and disguises to elude authorities for two months.

In addition to the Marin County courthouse shoot-out, she was affiliated with the Black Panther organization, which was responsible for a number of criminal acts, including murders.

Marc Roby: It does seem strange that such a person should have landed a position as a professor at the University of California.

Dr. Spencer: Strange to say the least. She has never made any serious contribution to scholarship of any kind, she is merely famous for her work as a revolutionary, and a violent one at that. She has advocated for the abolishment of prisons and is extremely critical of our legal system, although she certainly profited from our system's bending over backwards to be fair to the accused.

Angela Davis is also not alone, as we will see, there is a large number of former 1960's revolutionaries who have gone on to prominent and influential positions. And as a way of transitioning to that topic, I'd like to look at another interesting comment Davis made in the interview.

Marc Roby: What's that?

Dr. Spencer: She was commenting on the fact that the current Covid-19 pandemic and the George Floyd killing presented an unusual opportunity for the kind of riots we have seen erupt around the country – she didn't say riots by the way, that's my word. What she did say was that

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angela_Davis

¹¹ David Horowitz, *The Professors: The 101 Most Dangerous Academics in America*, Regnery Publishing Inc., 2006, pp 115-119

“The protests offered people an opportunity to join in this collective demand to bring about deep change, radical change. Defund the police, abolish policing as we know it now. These are the same arguments that we’ve been making for such a long time about the prison system and the whole criminal justice system. It was as if all of these decades of work by so many people, who received no credit at all, came to fruition.”¹²

Marc Roby: OK, she talks about decades of work coming to fruition and she used the plural pronoun we. What, and who, is she talking about?

Dr. Spencer: She’s talking about what has been called the long march through the institutions. And there have been a number of people involved.

Marc Roby: I suspect a number of our listeners have heard that phrase – the long march – but I doubt that many know exactly where it comes from and what it means.

Dr. Spencer: I’m sure you’re right about that. The phrase comes from a German Marxist sociologist named Rudi Dutschke.¹³ To quote from Roger Kimball’s book *The Long March*, this phrase “signified – in the words of Herbert Marcuse – ‘working against the established institutions while working in them.’”¹⁴ The phrase was meant to harken back to Mao Zedong’s Communist Red Army’s long march in 1934-35, but that march isn’t germane to our topic today so we aren’t going to discuss it, I just point the fact out as an example of the communist thinking and sympathies of these people.

Marc Roby: OK, so how did this idea of working against the established institutions while working in them play out?

Dr. Spencer: Well, there were a large number of leftists, including Angela Davis, who discovered that the violent tactics of the Black Panthers, the Students for a Democratic Society, the Weathermen and other groups of 1960’s revolutionaries didn’t work. They realized that they could bring about radical change to this country by taking over the educational institutions instead. They could then use that platform to indoctrinate young people into their anti-American, anti-Christian, Marxist ideologies. That is why Davis spoke about decades of work by so many people coming to fruition. And it is important to note that she was a student of Herbert Marcuse.

Marc Roby: Who was Herbert Marcuse?

Dr. Spencer: He was, like Dutschke, a German Marxist who studied the philosopher Hegel. Our listeners may remember that Marx was a disciple of Hegel as well. In any event, Marcuse was a part of what is called the Frankfurt School; a group of leftist scholars who developed and promoted a mix of Freud and Marx called critical theory. This group, which contained a lot of secular Jews, fled Nazi Germany before World War II and finally ended up at Columbia

¹² Duvernay, op. cit.

¹³ Roger Kimball, *The Long March: How the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s Changed America*, Encounter Books, 2000, pp 14-15 (also see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rudi_Dutschke)

¹⁴ Ibid, pg. 15

University. This idea of theirs, critical theory, is at the heart of much of what is going on in America today.

Marc Roby: OK, and what is critical theory?

Dr. Spencer: Well, in order to answer that question, we need to go back one step. We need to go back to Europe in the early part of the 20th-century. We've briefly mentioned the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, led by Lenin, but there were communist movements in other countries as well. In Germany and Italy however, these communist movements lost to fascism. Now, we need to remember that true Marxist communism envisions a final utopian condition where there is no need for government and so it just dissolves away. In other words, true communism is not nationalistic, it thinks of the world as a whole. Fascism, on the other hand, while still being socialist, is strongly nationalistic. Remember that the official name of the Nazi party in Germany was the National Socialist German Workers' Party. Therefore, there was very strong antagonism between the fascists and the communists.

Marc Roby: Well, that's all interesting history, but what does it have to do with critical theory?

Dr. Spencer: Well, there was an Italian communist by the name of Antonio Gramsci who played a very important role. He was born in 1891 in Italy. In 1913, he became an activist in the Italian Socialist Party, or PSI. Some of his writings were praised by Lenin and Gramsci eventually left the PSI to help found the Communist Party of Italy. At one point he even spent two years in Moscow. He became a member of the Italian parliament and when his party was outlawed by the fascist Mussolini, Gramsci was arrested and then sent to prison in 1928. He was released in April, 1937, only a few days before his death.¹⁵

Marc Roby: And how then did he become so influential?

Dr. Spencer: While he was in prison, he thought about why socialism had been unable to succeed in countries outside of Russia. Remember that we discussed Eduard Bernstein in Session 166. He had noted the failure of Marx and Engel's ideas in England. The problem was, put simply, that capitalism was successful and a middle class developed that was comfortable and didn't see a need for revolutionary change. But let me quote from Mike Gonzales' book *The Plot to Change America*, he wrote that "Gramsci came up with a useful meta-explanation. The bourgeoisie had acculturated the working man to do his bidding, giving him 'false consciousness.'"¹⁶

Marc Roby: What does that mean? What is this "false consciousness"?

Dr. Spencer: It means that the workers had accepted the "hegemonic narrative". In other words, as Marx had already posited, Gramsci viewed all social institutions and even histories as being constructs by which the ruling class enslaves the workers. So, when workers buy into the cultural norms, they are participating in their own subjugation. Let's look at this in terms of what has gone on in this country since the end of World War II.

¹⁵ Mike Gonzales, *The Plot to Change America*, Encounter Books, 2020, pg. 123

¹⁶ *Ibid*, pg. 117

Marc Roby: Alright, that would be very helpful.

Dr. Spencer: At the end of World War II and on up into the early 1960's, when the so-called Baby Boom generation was born, the average middle-class American accepted as true certain basic principles. For example, that hard work, honesty, being on time, telling the truth, getting married before having children, avoiding substance abuse and so on, were good things. Gramsci would say, however, that these are all part of the hegemonic narrative, or script, by which the ruling class subjugated the workers.

Marc Roby: And yet, everything you just named could be backed up as being a biblical norm, which Christians are duty-bound to accept and practice.

Dr. Spencer: You're right. And that is part of why this whole critical theory idea is irreconcilably anti-Christian. And just in case some of our listeners have been too busy just living their lives as decent, hard-working citizens and are unaware of how much things have changed in the universities and the intellectual centers of our country, let me give just one example.

Marc Roby: Please do.

Dr. Spencer: In 2017, two law professors, Amy Wax of the University of Pennsylvania Law School and Larry Alexander of the University of San Diego School of Law, published an opinion piece in the Philadelphia Inquirer that caused quite a stir. It was entitled *Paying the price for breakdown of the country's bourgeois culture*.¹⁷

They noted a number of problems plaguing our society, like drug abuse, unemployment, crime, single-parent families and so on, and they said, "The causes of these phenomena are multiple and complex, but implicated in these and other maladies is the breakdown of the country's bourgeois culture.

"That culture laid out the script we all were supposed to follow: Get married before you have children and strive to stay married for their sake. Get the education you need for gainful employment, work hard, and avoid idleness. Go the extra mile for your employer or client. Be a patriot, ready to serve the country. Be neighborly, civic-minded, and charitable. Avoid coarse language in public. Be respectful of authority. Eschew substance abuse and crime."

Marc Roby: That doesn't sound very divisive or controversial to me.

Dr. Spencer: That's because you, like me, are of a "certain age" ...

Marc Roby: OK, that's unnecessarily cruel.

¹⁷ Amy Wax and Larry Alexander, *Paying the price for breakdown of the country's bourgeois culture*, Philadelphia Inquirer, August 9, 2017, available at <https://www.inquirer.com/philly/opinion/commentary/paying-the-price-for-breakdown-of-the-countrys-bourgeois-culture-20170809.html>

Dr. Spencer: And you are a Christian, which makes you and me part of the problem in the eyes of those on the far left. We are the oppressors who have created this hegemonic narrative, or script, as a part of our plan for oppressing others.

Marc Roby: And here I thought it was simply God's Word regarding how we are to live lives that give him glory and lead to the most joy and peace here on earth. And that has been around, without change, for 2,000 years.

Dr. Spencer: And you are right in that view. But, and this was big eye-opener for me when I first read about this article, it generated an amazingly harsh backlash. For example, the dean of the Penn law school, Ted Ruger, published an op-ed in the student newspaper, which suggested that Professor Wax's views were "divisive, even noxious." And half of her law-faculty colleagues signed an open letter denouncing her piece. There was a similarly harsh response at the University of San Diego, even though it is a Catholic university. The dean of the law school, Stephen Ferruolo, put out a memo repudiating the piece.¹⁸

Marc Roby: That is simply incredible. One wonders what these people think good values are. Lying? Being lazy? Getting drunk?

Dr. Spencer: It does make you wonder. And Professors Wax and Alexander were careful to state that they were not claiming that things were perfect back in the 1950's. They recognized that many problems and hypocrisy existed. They were simply making the case, which is absolutely forbidden in academic and intellectual circles today, that these biblical values are good and proper and lead to better outcomes for everyone in society.

Marc Roby: So, Gramsci decided that the culture itself was somehow oppressive and had to be changed, and that has led to the harsh reception this opinion piece received.

Dr. Spencer: Exactly. To quote Gonzales again, "The cure, Gramsci thought, was to carry out a 'consciousness raising' indoctrination campaign that would convince the proletariat of his having been duped by tradition, religion, the family, the education system, and all the cultural trappings of society."¹⁹ And that idea has led to the organized efforts we are seeing now to destroy our culture and our country. It is the result of the long march through the institutions and is part of what real believers on the far left view as a necessary revolution on the way to establishing heaven on earth.

Marc Roby: Well, I very much look forward to continuing this discussion but we are out of time, so I'd like to remind our listeners that they can email their questions and comments to info@whatdoesthewordsay.org. We would love to hear from you.

¹⁸ See Heather Mac Donald, *Higher Ed's Latest Taboo Is 'Bourgeois Norms'*, Wall-Street Journal, September 19, 2017, available at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/higher-eds-latest-taboo-is-bourgeois-norms-1505774818>

¹⁹ Gonzales, op. cit., pg. 117