

Was the First Church in the Book of Acts a Form of Socialism?

Short answer: No

Communism is a social, political and economic system in which all property and the means of production is publically owned. Karl Marx explains the system in his writings "Capital, volume one" and a collaborative work with Friedrich Engels "The Communist Manifesto". The slogan "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs" was made popular by Karl Marx.

Socialism can be summed up as follows: Government ownership of the means of production. This type of economy takes away private ownership of business and puts it into the hands of the government. The government hires experts who are better able to plan what society needs.

Fascism (started by Mussolini) is when the government allows private ownership of property, but the government dictates what is done with the property. Fascism was the direction of government taken by Nazi Germany.

Centralized planning and distribution of all commodities is the hallmark of these systems. The outcome is Godless and man is emphasized as the moral dictator. Further progression of these systems leads to despotism.

The Churches beginning in the book of Acts begins with the day of Pentecost. The 120 received the Holy Spirit with various signs and wonders. Peter began his bold career with his explanation of what was happening. The church began to grow as many began to believe in the Lord Jesus. The Apostles took charge of teaching the new followers about Jesus. In the days that followed the believers would gather at the Temple in Solomon's Portico for teaching and in their homes for the breaking of bread. Believers began sharing their possessions with each other to the extent that they had "all things in common". Some even went so far as to sell their property and lay it at the Apostles feet so it could be distributed "to those who had need". Barnabas a Levite from Cyprus sold a field and gave the proceeds to the Apostles. Likewise, a man named Ananias and his wife Sapphira sold a piece of property and also gave the proceeds to the Apostles. The major difference between the two offerings was the intent of Ananias and Sapphira not being truthful about what they had given.

It should be clear that the members of the early church did not sell all they had to begin a communal living arrangement. Acts 5:42 states clearly "in the temple and from house to house". They did begin a policy of large scale sharing. Voluntary sharing!! Voluntary sharing is encouraged throughout both the old and new testaments. The appointment of the seven in Acts chapter 6 does not create a system of central planning but a relief of duty for the Apostles in the daily distribution of food, specifically mentioning widows. (A first concept of meals on wheels?) Donations were accepted for the purpose of sustaining the work of the ministry and helping those believers who were in need. This in no way absolved those who were able to work and contribute to the Christian community from doing so. The Apostle Paul in his writing to the church in Thessalonica stated emphatically "If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat". The Apostles were able to forsake their livelihoods and commit themselves "to prayer and to the ministry of the word". This became their labor and their substance was sustained by the Christian community.

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