

How the Pilgrims Proved That Bernie Sanders Is Wrong About Socialism

Many years before socialism brought about the collapse of the Soviet Empire, the inadequacies of socialism were demonstrated right here on American soil. The Pilgrims who landed at Cape Cod in the fall of 1620 at first attempted a communal type of living, but disbanded it when it became obvious their community could not survive with such a system.

The Pilgrims Experience the Pain of Socialism

The Pilgrim's journey to America was funded by a group of venture capitalists who provided the ship and supplies for their journey to the New World. In return, the Pilgrims agreed to live communally with everyone receiving the same recompense for their work, and with everything above their basic necessities going into a common fund to be used to pay their creditors.

William Bradford, who served as governor of Plymouth for many years, told of the challenges of this socialist system. Young men, he said, resented getting paid the same as older men when they did so much more of the work. As a result they tended to slouch and slack since they knew they would receive the same no matter how hard they worked.

The older men felt they deserved more honor and recompense because of their age and resented getting paid the same as the youngsters in their midst. Bradford said that the women often refused to go to the fields to work, complaining of headaches, since to have compelled them to go would have been considered tyranny and oppression.

This socialist system discouraged work and innovation and

almost destroyed the colony. When it became obvious that lack and perhaps starvation would be their lot, Bradford and the leaders of the colony decided to make a change. After much prayer and discussion, they decided to dispense with that part of the agreement with their creditors that required them to live communally until their debt was paid.

They Experience the Gain of Free Enterprise

According to Bradford, they then divided the land around them, allotting to each family a certain portion that would be theirs to work and use for their own needs. Bradford said there was an immediate change. The young men began to work much harder because they now knew they would eat the fruit of their own labors. There were no more complaints from the older men for the same reason. And now the women were seen going into the fields to work, taking the children with them, because they knew they and their family would personally benefit.

Instead of lacking food, each family now grew more food and corn than they needed, and they began to trade with one another for furnishings, clothes and other goods. They also had enough excess to trade with the Indians for furs and other items. In short, the colony began to prosper when they got rid of their socialist form of government and implemented a free, entrepreneurial system.

Of their experience with socialism, Bradford wrote:

“This community [socialism] was found to breed much confusion and discontent and retard much employment that would have been to their benefit and comfort ... and showed the vanity of that conceit of Plato’s, and applauded by some of later times, that the taking away of property and bringing in community into a commonwealth would make them happy and flourishing; as if they were wiser than God” (Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 120-21).

No Socialism in the Early Church

Based on a superficial reading of Acts 2:44-45; 3:34-37, some claim that the early church practiced a form of socialism. It should be pointed out, however, that their having *all things in common* was not the result of a system implemented from without, but a voluntary overflow of compassion from within. This is confirmed by the fact that there is no evidence that this community experience was ever suggested anywhere else, or that it continued in Jerusalem.

That no one was required to share their property and goods with others was made clear by the experience of Ananias and Sapphira. This couple sold a piece of land and Ananias brought a portion of the proceeds to Peter but claimed it was the entire amount. He was struck down on the spot and when his wife arrived later and affirmed his lie, she too fell over dead.

Their sin was not that they had kept back some of the proceeds from the sale of their property. They were completely free to keep it all if they had chosen. Their sin was that they lied about what they had given to try and impress Peter and others of their generosity and spirituality. They were hypocritical!

This is clear from the words of Peter who said to Ananias, "While it remained unsold, was it not your own? And when it was sold, was it not under your authority?" (Acts 5:4). In other words, the property belonged to them before it was sold and was theirs to utilize however they chose. And after they sold the property, the money was theirs to use as they pleased.

This clearly shows that there were no rules governing how the people used their property and money in the early church in Jerusalem. Ananias and Sapphira were struck down, not for holding back certain monies, but for lying in the midst of a mighty and powerful work of the Holy Spirit.

Christianity and Capitalism

Bradford believed that socialism did not work because it ran counter to God's will for humanity in a fallen world. Because of mankind's fallen state, he cannot be expected to labor for no reward. In Scripture, God rewards individuals for their labor and good works. Capitalism works because it is compatible with the reality of human nature and the world in which we live.

For capitalism to fully succeed, however, it must function in a strong Christian milieu. Otherwise, the strong and powerful will tread underfoot the weak and poor. Capitalism worked for the Pilgrims because they were a compassionate people who looked after those in their midst when they were sick, injured or unable to work.

True Christianity brings a compassion that helps the weak and poor, apart from initiative-destroying government programs. This is what happened in the early church and is what happened with the Pilgrims, who wanted to emulate that church.

Conclusion

Just a few years ago, identifying one's self as a socialist meant being ostracized from most of American society. It would spell doom for a politician. That Bernie Sanders is attracting huge crowds and grabbing so much media attention under that banner shows the change that has occurred in the American mindset. It shows that much of the American populace is willing to look to government as the answer for the nation's problems.

As Christians, our responsibility is to call people to Christ and help them live out their Christianity in the real world. Living out our Christianity means a life of responsibility, not looking for government handouts but working and prospering in a way that we can give a hand up to those in need. We desire the best for the greatest number of people which is why

we must pray for Bernie Sanders, but reject his vision of a government-mandated socialist system in America. {eoa}

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