

Was Jesus a Socialist?

The resurgence of socialism in America, especially among the young, seems to be based on a widespread form of wishful thinking and historical ignorance. Most people who support Bernie Sanders, for instance, do not realize that most of his ideas have been tried already—and discarded as unworkable.

Similarly, many Christians who support Sanders don't realize that for centuries socialism has been considered incompatible with Christianity. Since the mid-1800s, every Catholic pontiff—from Pius IX to Benedict XVI—has forthrightly condemned socialism. Protestants don't have a single leader to make that judgment call, of course, but we too have determined that based on Scripture socialism is incompatible with biblical principles.

Yet despite the obvious disconnect between Christianity and socialism, some people go even further and claim that *Jesus Himself* was an advocate of socialism.

A solid, thorough rebuttal to this baffling notion can be found in Lawrence W. Reed's essay, "Rendering Unto Caesar: Was Jesus a Socialist?"

I first heard "Jesus was a socialist" and "Jesus was a redistributionist" some 40 years ago. I was puzzled. I had always understood Jesus's message to be that the most important decision a person would make in his earthly lifetime was to accept or reject Him as Savior. That decision was clearly to be a very personal one—an individual and voluntary choice. He constantly stressed inner, spiritual renewal as far more critical to well-being than material things. I wondered, "How could the same Jesus advocate the use of force to take stuff from some and give it to others?" I just couldn't imagine Him supporting a fine or a jail sentence for people who don't want to fork over their money

for food-stamp programs.

“Wait a minute!” you say. “Didn’t Jesus answer, ‘Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s’ when the Pharisees tried to trick Him into denouncing a Roman-imposed tax?” Yes indeed, He did say that. It’s found first in the Gospel of Matthew 22:15-22, and later in the Gospel of Mark 12:13-17. But notice that everything depends on just what truly did belong to Caesar and what didn’t, which is actually a rather powerful endorsement of property rights. Jesus said nothing like “It belongs to Caesar if Caesar simply says it does, no matter how much he wants, how he gets it, or how he chooses to spend it.”

The fact is, one can scour the Scriptures with a fine-tooth comb and find nary a word from Jesus that endorses the forcible redistribution of wealth by political authorities. None, period.