



## Sharing the Good News!

Penn Northeast Conference of the United Church of Christ

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### FROM EACH... TO EACH...

One of the lectionary readings for this Christmas season is Mary's Song (a.k.a. *The Magnificat*). Note the underlined revolutionary phrases:

**My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior... He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.**

(Luke 1.46f, 51-53 NRSV here and elsewhere)

I write this essay *before* November 4<sup>th</sup>—Election Day. But I know it will not be read by anyone until well *after* the ballots have all been counted and those irksome chads are no longer hanging. So the point of this piece is not to ask you to vote for or against any candidate for political office—but rather to consider casting a “vote” for Jesus and his priorities. Let me explain.

As the 2008 Presidential race draws to a close, one side is charging the other side with perpetrating political heresy. Spouting strange, scary-sounding words like “redistributionist,” the accusing side is alleging their opponents are calling for a radical redistribution of wealth that all but amounts to anti-capitalist socialism—nay, revolutionary Marxism!

The accusers' polemical *coup de grâce* is a syllogism that goes something like this:

1. Redistributionism = a government-imposed “sharing of the wealth” = a taking “from each according to his ability” in order to give “to each according to his needs.”
2. But we all know the expression, “from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs,” is a slogan first popularized by Karl Marx, the founder of atheistic, totalitarian Communism.
3. Therefore, any tax policy that dictates a substantial “sharing of the wealth” (from rich to poor) is Communist-Marxist; and anyone who calls for such a policy is in effect advocating ... *Communism!*

Seems to make sense, doesn't it? As one who majored in economics in college, I would have to say that this appears to be a fair representation of one facet of Marxist-Leninist political and economic thought.

But there is a problem with this syllogism, one that I recognized thirty-five years ago. I don't think the accusers are aware of the problem, and of how dangerous to themselves as self-acclaimed Christians their argument truly is.

When the Church of Jesus Christ first organized in Jerusalem, the disciples of Jesus—according to Holy Scripture's Book of Acts—**“were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need”** (Acts 2.44f).

So as not to miss the point about the early Church's radical redistribution of personal wealth, Acts reports later that **“no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common.... There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need”** (Acts 4.32, 34f).

Some time passed, and then one day a prophet stood up in Antioch (where the believers were first called “Christians”) and announced that a severe famine would soon envelope the entire world—this occurred during the reign of Emperor Claudius, who ruled from 41-54 A.D./C.E. According to Acts again, **“the disciples determined that according to their ability, each would send relief to the believers living in Judea”** (Acts 11.29).

Note the emboldened phrases, and note the economic “redistributionist” contexts in which they appear.

Finally, when the Apostle Paul implored the churches in Greece to provide financial assistance for the poor in Jerusalem, he wrote: **“For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has -- not according to what one does not have. I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a FAIR BALANCE between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a FAIR BALANCE”** (2 Corinthians 8.12-14).

I don't know about you, but this sure sounds like a redistributionist talking to me! On one level it appears to be voluntary, I'll admit; but on a deeper level God's Will for the Church is never voluntary, is it?

So who's the Marxist now? And who's the Christian? (And I wonder: could Marx have been a Christian?)  
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