

# Biblical Private Property Versus Socialistic Common Property

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The true people of God have always advocated 'private property' and have never opted for 'community of property'. Not so Gus Hall (alias Arvo Halberg), however! Hall has repeatedly been the Communist Party's candidate for the Presidency of the United States. More importantly, at the funeral of Eugene Dennis, he is reported to have declared how he longs for the day when the blood of the children of Christians (who always sing about the precious blood of Jesus) will itself be shed when the communist revolutionaries cut their throats. Thus, even blood is neither private property nor precious!

On April 10th, 1963, Pope John XXIII issued his important Encyclical 'Peace on Earth'. There, he pleaded for an open dialogue even with communists. Gus Hall then promptly called this Papal Encyclical "the work of a great Pope". And Hall added that "Marxists have shown their remarkable willingness to go along with Pope John's giant step forward." (**Political Affairs**, June 1964.)

Thus arose the great dialogue between Communism and Catholicism, promoting the increasing abandonment of private property in favour of the transition to common ownership. Even in the above 1964 statement, Hall was already declaring that "in this dialogue, some have cited Scripture as the basis of our co-operation. Especially the following: 'And all who became believers, were together; and possessed all things in common. And they sold their properties and possessions, and divided the proceeds among all, according to the needs of each one. And day by day, they persevered with one accord in the temple. And they broke bread from house to house. And they enjoyed their food with gladness and singleness of heart' (Acts 2:44-45)!"

Communists have perverted this Scripture to try to justify the Marxist ideal of 'community of property'. Some Catholics too have misused this Scripture, to try to support their own 'community of goods' in their monasteries. Indeed, they have even

argued (with Thomas Aquinas their greatest theologian) that Adam and Eve practised 'community of property' before the Fall — and that this is still the ideal today (especially in the monasteries). Modern Anabaptists too like Ron Sider, not to mention the so-called 'theology of revolution', have propounded strange views. Particularly since 1964, the dialogue between Communism and Catholicism has increased dramatically (especially in Central and South America and South-East Asia). In the July 1966 issue of **Political Affairs**, Gus Hall further wrote: "The dialogue is underway — meaningfully, and ecumenically!" Also, in 1968, the Roman Catholic scholar Girardo declared (in his book **Marxism and Christianity**) that Marxism in his opinion is not revolutionary enough! Worse yet — apostate "Protestant" Philip Potter, sometime General Secretary of the "World(ly) Council of Churches", subsequently indicated that "resurrection" means insurrection!

What should true Bible-believing Christians say about all of this? "What does Scripture say?" (Romans 4:3)

## BIBLICAL PRIVATE PROPERTY

### In the Godhead

Scripture anchors private property in the Triune God Himself, before the foundation of the world. In Him, the propriety of private property is immediately apparent. For the Father, the Son, and the Spirit have Each, from all eternity past, always possessed some 'private property' which the Other Two of Them never have and never will possess. Compare Malachi 3:5 with Romans 11:29-36 and James 1:17. Only the Father possesses paternity (Hebrews 1:5-8). Only the Son possesses filiation (John 1:14-18). And only the Spirit possesses procession (John 15:26). Paternity is the private property of the

Father; filiation is the private property of the Son; and procession is the private property of the Spirit — alone! Each of the Three Persons' private property is intimately connected to His own individual personality quite distinguishable from that of Each of the Other Two Persons (Luke 3:21-22). As the great modern Reformed theologian William Geesink rightly remarks: "Property rights root in eternity, and precede all man-made laws!" Hence, man must never steal the tithe he has always owed the Lord (Genesis 4:3-4 and 14:20ff cf. Malachi 2:14-16 and 3:8-10).

### **Before the Fall**

It is true that man owns nothing at all — over against God (Psalm 50:9-11)! Yet God gives what He wants to some men, while withholding what He wants from others (Romans 9:15,21). So man indeed owns many things, over against his fellow man (Matthew 20:15). For all men (as images of the Triune God) have different personalities from one another (Genesis 2:18,23 and 3:20). Here, when taken all together, men resemble the various Persons of the Triune God Himself within the Trinity (Genesis 1:26-27, 5:1ff and 9:6). Each human personality is strengthened by his or her private ownership of property (Genesis 1:26, 2:24 and 4:4, and 1 Corinthians 7:4). For God's Trinity too is undergirded by the private property possessed by Each of the several Divine Persons "over against" the Others. Compare Genesis 1:1-3 and 1:26, John 1:1-18 and 17:1-5, and Hebrews 9:14 with Matthew 28:19.

It is very important to remember that God gave private property dominion to Adam as an individual, over against Satan, even before the creation of Eve (Genesis 1:26-27 and 2:15 cf. 3:1). Even initially, God revealed to man that private property was sacrosanct (Genesis 2:17 and 3:3,11). Internally, the law of God, including the principle of the commandment 'you must not steal' (which implies the existence of stealable property belonging to another) was stamped on Adam's heart (Ecclesiastes 7:29 cf. Romans 2:14-15). Externally, God revealed to the unfallen Adam that he may not steal from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which did not belong to him or to any other man, but which was indeed God's very own private property (Genesis 2:16-17 cf. 3:3-11). Adam possessed his own male sex (and his own farming tools) "over against" Eve, and Eve possessed her own female sex (and her own household utensils) even before the Fall. Compare Genesis 2:18's "k<sup>e</sup>negdo" or "opposite him". For the Triune God, Whose image man is, has always had His own private property held by Each Divine Person

and maintained "over against" the Other Two Divine Persons (Genesis 1:26-27 and John 1:14,18 cf. 1:1's "pros ton Theon" or "with God" and meaning "over against God the Father").

It is true that, on the creation of Eve, Adam entered into a community of marriage with her, which had property ramifications. But he entered into this community with one woman only, so that the two of them then possessed their private property over against all other human persons (Genesis 2:24, Malachi 2:14-16, and Matthew 19:4-5). All of Adam's descendants would do the same. For their property is and always would have been limited to one man and one woman alone over against all of the other marriages and their properties (cf. Genesis 2:24). Accordingly, the very influential view of the great Roman Catholic theologian Thomas Aquinas, that there was no private property but only common ownership among mankind before the human Fall, is radically unbiblical. Indeed, the pre-Fall life of Adam and Eve was anything but "monastic" (Genesis 1:26-28 cf. 2:24). The simple fact is this: precisely the theft of private property is what caused the Fall! (Genesis 2:17 cf. 3:2-7ff, 11)

### **After the Fall**

Shortly after the Fall, we are specifically told that Abel brought '**his** offering' of 'the firstlings of **his** flock' unto the Lord (Genesis 4:4) — Abel's offering and Abel's flock which Abel owned "over against" Cain's offering of the fruit of the ground (Genesis 4:3,5). Indeed, precisely Genesis 1:26-28's pre-Fall dominion charter was again repeated after Noah's great Flood (Genesis 9:1-7 cf. 11:1-9). This dominion charter presupposes that, as men separated from one another by multiplying and filling the earth, those who went and settled in the Old World would possess its land-mass "over against" those who went and settled in the New World, and vice-versa (Genesis 1:26-28 and 2:24 cf. Acts 17:26). Also, those who settled in Europe would possess its land-mass "over against" those who went and settled in Asia and Africa. And those who settled in Australia should possess its land-mass over against all others elsewhere. Ultimately, every man would also possess his **own** piece of ground and even his **own** vine and his **own** fig-tree (Micah 4:4); just as Adam possessed his own male sex (and his own farming tools) and Eve her own female sex (and her domestic utensils) "over against" one another even before the Fall. Indeed, even without the Fall, men would **leave** their fathers and mothers and cleave to their wives, and trek forth into all the world — to hold their **own** private property within the various

national boundaries (Genesis 2:24 cf. Deuteronomy 32:8 and Acts 17:26). And "cursed be he who removes his neighbour's landmark!" (Deuteronomy 19:14 and 27:17, Job 24:2, Proverbs 22:28 and 23:10-11, and Hosea 5:10)

Even after the Fall, this pre-Fall Genesis 1:26-28, with all its private property ramifications, was repeated to Noah (Genesis 9:1-7). So Noah then planted his own vineyard and dwelt in his own private tent (Genesis 9:20-21 cf. Micah 4:4). Abraham held land "over against" even his nephew Lot, and became "**very rich** in cattle, in silver, and in gold"; for that 'father of believers' insisted that his wife Sarah's slave Hagar was not his but rather **her** very own private property (Genesis 13:2-14ff and 16:1-6, and Romans 4)

It is true that the Fall of man introduced misery into human society, including misuse of private property on the part of its owners, such as by way of neglect or wilful destruction (Luke 15:14 cf. Genesis 41). But the Fall also introduced (and was in fact caused by) theft, alias stealing another's private property, which again presupposes the propriety of the latter (Genesis 2:17 cf. Exodus 20:15,17). Abraham acquired ownership of a cave, by buying it from its previous owners (Genesis 23). Jacob correctly maintained his own property rights over his flocks, even against his own father-in-law (Genesis 30:31-43). God re-iterated through Moses His Eighth and Tenth Commandments to all mankind: "you shall not steal" and "you shall not covet" (Exodus 20:15,17). "He who steals a man and sells him. . . , shall surely be put to death" (Exodus 21:16). "If a man steals an ox or a sheep. . . , he shall restore five oxen for an ox and four sheep for a sheep" (Exodus 22:1ff). "If a person sins. . . in taking a thing away. . . , he shall restore what he took" (Leviticus 6:2-5). "You shall not steal, neither . . . shall you defraud your neighbour nor rob him" (Leviticus 19:11-13). "You shall not remove your neighbour's landmark" (Deuteronomy 19:14). Right down throughout the Bible, private property is presupposed and protected. Jesus Himself clearly taught: "you must not steal" (Matthew 19:18, Mark 10:19 and Luke 18:20). And even after Calvary, Paul urged even Christians: "a man should not steal" (Romans 2:21); "you must not steal" (Romans 13:9); and "let him who stole, steal no more" (Ephesians 4:28). Even ancient Egypt and ancient China agreed.

God's Word also clearly teaches that private property may be inherited. God gave each tribe of Israel its own inheritance (Cf. Numbers 32 and Joshua 13-22). Naboth did not hesitate to defend his own inherited private property even against the absolutistic 'eminent domain' claims even of the king as the personification of the Israelitic state (1 Kings

21 cf. Psalm 16:5-6). "A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children," and "house and riches are the inheritance of fathers" (Proverbs 13:22a and 19:14). For "children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children" (2 Corinthians 12:14 cf. Galatians 3:15-18, Romans 9:4ff, Hebrews 9:16ff and Luke 15:12ff,30ff).

### According to Christ

Christ's advent brought about no change in all of this. While warning against the misuse and idolization of private property, He Himself clearly stated: "Is it not lawful for Me to do what I will with My own goods?" (Matthew 20:15). Our Lord gave many parables defending private property to the hilt. Such were the parables: of the labourers hired at different times; of the two sons; of the farmers; of the talents; of the lost sheep; of the lost coin; and of the unrighteous manager (Matthew 20:1ff, 21:28ff, 25:14ff, and Luke 15:1ff, 16:1ff). Hence, contracts of hire, while certainly entitling the hired labourer to receive his full agreed pay, do not entitle him to share in the benefits (and duties) of ownership, and still less to strike. The above, being some of the 'all things whatsoever' which Christ taught His disciples to teach all nations in the Great Commission, are still to be taught today — and even till the very end of the world (Matthew 28:19). (Nonetheless, it could otherwise be said that Christ used the status quo as illustrations, and when faced with the issue "Master speak to my brother . . ." (Luke 12:13-15), He went behind property to motives.)

### In the Church

Nor did the descent of God the Holy Spirit into the Church on the Day of Pentecost change any of this. On the contrary, it rather confirmed and indelibly etched the unchanging Law of God deeper than ever into the believers' hearts (Hebrews 8:8-10 and 10:15-16 cf. 2 Corinthians 3:3,18). The so-called 'community of property' of the early Christian Church (Acts 2:44-6:2), was certainly not communistic, for it was not compulsory. And it simply involved only the voluntary sale largely of real estate or immovable property, and the distribution of the resulting money but not of goods. These monies were not given to all men indiscriminately, nor even given to any needy unbelievers. Nor were they given to all Christians indiscriminately, but only to those Christians who were truly needy. And all unsold goods, even where used by Christian owner and Christian non-owner, remained the permanent property of the Christian owner alone! (Acts 2:44-45 and 4:23-5:4)

Hence, even after redistributing the absolute necessities of life to needy Christian widows in Jerusalem (Acts 6:1-2ff), private property continued unabated even in Jerusalem and the surrounding countryside. Simon the tanner, Mary the mother of Mark, Lydia the purple-seller, and the tentmakers Priscilla and Aquila, continued to live in their own houses and continued to conduct their own businesses or private enterprises (Acts 10:6, 12:12, 16:4, and 18:2-3). Paul visited Christian disciples in their own homes (Acts 20:20). He himself lived in his own hired house and wrote to the various house churches which met in privately-owned dwellings (Acts 28:30 and 21:8,18, and Romans 16:3-11). Indeed, Paul continued defending the ownership rights both of himself and of others. He even insisted that husbands and wives had property rights in one another's bodies (1 Corinthians 7:2-4). He stressed that nobody should eat, if he refused to work (2 Thessalonians 3:10). He required the nearest blood relative and not the state to take care of impoverished widows (1 Timothy 5:3-8). Indeed, even the church was only to care for aged Christian widows; for younger Christian widows, if they did not remarry (which Paul advised), needed to go and work (1 Timothy 5:9-16).

Paul even valued his own cloak and his old parchments enough to request that they be brought to him, and he looked forward immensely to receiving his very own crown (2 Timothy 4:8,13). Indeed, he even insisted on the Christian Philemon's right to keep on owning his own runaway slave Onesimus, whom Paul sent back to his owner Philemon (Philemon 2-18). (Not that Paul, by appearing to express no complaint against slavery, should be seen to be supporting slavery *per se*, for he was merely stating the then custom in a Christian context.) Furthermore, Paul even encouraged poor Christians, by hard work, to acquire their own wealth. "Let him who used to steal, no longer steal. But rather let him labour, doing good with his hands, so that he may have something to distribute to the needy" (Ephesians 4:28).

The Christian is not to depend on civic charity; but he is to gain possession of his own wife in holiness and honour; and to conduct his own business affairs and work with his own hands — behaving honestly toward outsiders, and himself asking for and indeed needing nothing from others (1 Thessalonians 4:3, 11-12, 15ff cf. 1 Timothy 3:4,12). He is never to eat another man's food without being willing to pay for it (2 Thessalonians 3:8a). But he himself is always to work and to earn money, so as never to be a burden to others (2 Thessalonians 3:8b). He is to work quietly, and thus to eat his own bread (2 Thessalonians 3:12). And, while charitable to all, he

is to censure all those who do not try to fend for themselves (2 Thessalonians 3:14, 1 Timothy 6:17-19, James 1:9-10, Ephesians 4:28, and 1 John 3:17). Indeed, all must work — even the kings of the earth, who bring their glory and honour into the Kingdom of God (Revelation 21:26)!

Even after his death the Christian knows he will go to his own dwelling-place (John 14:2). There he will receive his own crown and his own white stone of victory with his own new name written on it "which nobody knows excepting he who receives it" (2 Timothy 4:8 and Revelation 2:17). As a very law-abiding or meek citizen of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ, the true Christian will inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5). He will sit under his own vine and his own fig-tree (Micah 4:4). The saved kings of the various nations shall bring their own glory and honour as well as that of their nations into the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:24,26). And Each Person of the unchangeable Triune God will everlastingly maintain the private properties of His own children forever — just as He does those of His Own Personality, over against those of the Other Two Divine Persons, as well as over against all of His various human creatures and all of the angels (cf. 1 Timothy 6:14ff).

## THE JERUSALEM CHURCH OF ACTS CHAPTER 2

Right after the 33 AD death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, the Christian owners of substantial property in Jerusalem **retained** their own control and **ownership** over their own goods. Yet soon, for a short time of less than a year, they did indeed start sharing the **use** of their own possessions with needy fellow Christians in Jerusalem (Acts 2:44-47 and 4:31-34ff). It does not say they shared with any of the many needy unbelievers or non-Christians in Jerusalem (cf. Matthew 26:9-11, Mark 14:5-7 and John 12:5-8). Indeed, perhaps many of the needy **Christians** so helped were **temporary lodgers** in Jerusalem (visiting it from even other countries etc.), who had unexpectedly stayed on there to learn more about Christianity **after their sudden conversion** to Christ during the **Feast of Pentecost** and thereafter (Acts 2:5-10,14,41-47; 4:4,32-37; 5:1-4,14; 6:1-7; 8:1-4; and 8:27-28). In addition, some of the wealthier Christians in Jerusalem sold their surplus **non-residential lands** and **extra houses** there, and then **helped the needy Christians with the resultant proceeds** (Acts 4:34-37). The Christian property owners **did not sell** their **less substantial** property in Jerusalem, **nor** did they sell or **share** their own Jerusalem **residences**.

Indeed, most of what the wealthier Christians then shared with their needy Christian brethren in Jerusalem was **monies** realized from voluntary sales of their own **excess** immovable property in that city. The chief emphasis here was not so much on Christian owners sharing the use of their property with other Christians, but rather on their (wholly **voluntary**) liquidation or **selling** of "their possessions and goods" such as "lands or houses" etc., in order to turn them into **liquid assets** (Acts 2:45, 4:34ff, and 5:4). The money or "**price**" thus obtained, was then used to help benefit their **needy** or necessities-lacking Christian brethren, so that no Jerusalem **believers** "lacked" (Acts 2:44-47, 4:31-32ff, and 5:2-3 cf. Galatians 6:10 and 1 Timothy 5:8).

Such sales, in 33 AD, were chiefly in respect of **non-residential real estate** and **other substantial goods** (Acts 2:45, 4:34, and 5:1 cf. Matthew 19:21-22,29, Mark 10:22,29, and Luke 8:3). This was indeed most providential. For the very next year, in 34 AD, most of these Jerusalem goods would in any case have had to have been abandoned, when great persecution of the Jerusalem church broke out and scattered most of her members abroad (Acts 8:1-4). Only the Apostles and perhaps a few other Christians then remained behind and continued to live in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1,14 cf. 11:1-2,27, 15:2ff, and 21:15-18ff). After that, the remnant of the Jerusalem church remained impoverished, right down to the time of its total evacuation from that city in 66½ AD (Acts 11:28ff and 24:17, Romans 15:25-26, 1 Corinthians 16:1-5, 2 Corinthians 8:1,4,14 and 9:1-7,12-14, and Galatians 2:1, 9-10). This was at the beginning of the 3½ -years-long Roman siege of the doomed Jerusalem from 66½-70 AD. Then, all remaining substantial property and almost all of the human beings left in the city would be lost during that siege. This is why Jesus Himself had warned even that very same "generation" of Jerusalem Christians to flee from that doomed city even without a second set of clothes, just as soon as they saw the Roman armies approaching in 66½ AD! (see Acts 6:1,8,10,14 cf. Matthew 23:33-38, 24:1-2 and 24:15-35, and 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16 with Daniel 9:24-27, 11:30-31 and 12:1,11). Note too that the very same writer of Acts 1:1ff, 2:44ff and 4:32ff also wrote Luke 1:1ff, 17:31-37 and 21:10-34. Hence, "as many (of the **Jerusalem** Christians) who were possessors of **lands** or **houses**, sold **them** " (Acts 4:34ff cf. 5:1-3). **Outside** the doomed city of Jerusalem, however, the early Christians never followed this practice at all.

Indeed, outside the doomed Jerusalem, the early Christians continued to own all of their real estate for themselves (Acts 9:11,17,43; 10:2,6; 20:20; and 21:8, Romans 16:5-23, 1 Corinthians 11:22, 1

Timothy 3:4-5 and 5:8,13-14, and Titus 2:3-5, etc.). But even inside the doomed Jerusalem, it is clear that each Christian family continued to possess its own home, even after selling off its redundant extra houses and lands, and distributing the proceeds therefrom among the needy brethren. Even after that, each individual Christian family continued to live alone in its own family residence and continued to live separately even from other Christians. For even after we are told that some of the various "possessions and goods" were sold and imparted to all those who "had need" (Acts 2:45), we are further told that Christians went on visiting and fellowshiping with one another "from **house** to **house**" (Acts 2:46). "In **every house**, they did not cease to teach" in Jerusalem (Acts 5:42). Indeed, even the anti-Christian persecutors soon thereafter entered "into *every house*" in Jerusalem, in order to haul the Christian men and women off to prison, around 34 AD (Acts 8:1-3).

**Not so much the goods** themselves, then, but **rather the money** realized by their sale was given to needy Christians. The recipients were not given what **they** felt they wanted, but only what the **Apostles** knew they **needed!** Not the poorer Christians nor the very needy themselves nor even the Christian church in Jerusalem by democratic vote, but the **Apostles themselves decided** who should receive aid and **who should not be given financial assistance** Acts 4:37, 5:2,6 and 6:1-7). Moreover, the recipients were probably themselves required to share some of what they received with certain other needy Christians too (such as their own dependents). Not all needy Christians had the same needs, and **the distribution of the monies by the Deacons** was supervised and **unequally disbursed** by Apostolic decree. Hence, the sellers of the immovable property "brought the prices of the things sold, and laid them (the prices) at the Apostles' feet. And distribution was made to every man according to his need" (Acts 4:34-35). In fact, **the recipients who could do so were no doubt required to work** for the congregation, out of gratitude for the monies thus received (compare 2 Thessalonians 3:10 with 1 Timothy 5:5,9,10,16,18b).

The whole action, then, was a voluntary one — **not for the benefit of all humanity**, but only for the benefit of such local Christians in the doomed Jerusalem who had individual needs (generally of a pressing nature). The measure was **not ordered by any political body** with monopolistic enforcement powers against the contributors. **No non-Christians**, nor any **Christians either who dwelt outside of the doomed Jerusalem**, were brought into this arrangement. Nor were any non-needy Jerusalem Christians or any needy Jerusalem non-Christians either (Acts 5:4). For only those of **Christ's**

"brethren" or suffering "sheep" who really needed food, drink, shelter and medicine etc., and none of the deal's "goats", were here under consideration (Matthew 25:33-40).

Perhaps the chief reasons for the wealthy Christians' selling their excess property in Jerusalem in Acts 2-6, were to care for their widows and to get out of real estate before the holocaust of 66 AD. Yet there were also probably at least two other reasons why redundant immovable property was sold in Acts 2-6. First, many visitors to the Jerusalem Feast of Pentecost, after being unexpectedly converted there, stayed on for instruction in Christianity, thus creating a crisis as to their maintenance there (Acts 2:1,5-11, 40-47 cf. 8:27-28). Second, most Jerusalem Christians would need to flee that city not merely by 66½ AD (cf. Matthew 24:15-17ff), but even in a matter of months (perhaps 42 months? — Daniel 9:27 and 12:7-11, and Revelation 11:1-3) after Calvary (Acts 2:23,44; 6:14ff; 7:51ff; and especially 8:1-4). In such circumstances, speedy liquidation of all redundant immovable property, and its conversion into portable wealth, became wise and even urgent, as soon after Pentecost as possible (Acts 2:20,40,45).

These Christian arrangements in the doomed Jerusalem for the needy faithful before their scattering abroad one year later, were indeed greatly blessed by God. They were in no sense a failure. Yet possibly, some of the wealthier Christians in Jerusalem may perhaps then have 'overgiven' themselves, and this could have played a role in their own later impoverishment (2 Corinthians 8:3, 13-14). For subsequently, the Jerusalem Christians received much financial aid from the younger churches on the foreign mission field (Acts 11:27-30 and 24:17, Romans 15:25-28, 1 Corinthians 16:1-5, and 2 Corinthians 8-9). As it was, these property arrangements of Acts chapters two through five were apparently quite short-lived. They seem to have lasted for less than a year, and to have ended by the time of (or even been ended by) the Acts 8 "scattering" of the Christian church from Jerusalem. Indeed, we are already told as early as Acts chapter six that some of the Christian widows in Jerusalem were being neglected even by their fellow Christians, so that permanent Deacons had to be appointed to assist them to help themselves (Acts 6:1-7,14 cf. Philippians 1:1, and 1 Timothy 3:8-15 and 5:3-16). Moreover, according to Acts chapter twelve, it is quite certain that Mark's mother never sold and still possessed her own large residence even in Jerusalem (Acts 12:12 cf. 1:13ff). And outside doomed Jerusalem, there is no record whatsoever that Christians ever sold their goods and shared the resultant monies. On the contrary, the record clearly shows that the New Testament Christians outside

Jerusalem continued to possess their own homes and their own private property (see 1 Corinthians 11:22, 2 Thessalonians 3:8-14, and 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12).

## CHRISTIANS IN SOCIETY

Of course, Christians should always help their really needy fellow Christians — to help themselves (Matthew 25:33-40, Galatians 2:10 and 6:2, 1 Timothy 5:3-16, and Titus 2:3-5 etc.). Indeed, in the Name and for the sake of Jesus alone (Matthew 10:41-42 cf. Mark 9:41), Christians should "do good unto all men; (but) especially to those who are of the household of faith" alias the Christian Church (Galatians 6:10). For if **any** Christian "does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his own home, he has denied the faith and is **worse than an unbeliever**" (1 Timothy 5:8). However, the misguided attempts of both so-called 'Christian socialists' (sic!) as well as non-Christian leftists to twist Acts chapters two through five and try to make them teach compulsory liquidation of private property and equal or graduated redistribution of wealth at least among one's fellow Christians (if not everywhere in the 'third world' or even among all men indiscriminately), is most reprehensible! Indeed, the fanatical communist views of many of the sixteenth-century Anabaptists, some of whom practised not just community of property but even community of wives, is but a further misapplication of this unbiblical doctrine of "sharing". One such Anabaptist — in no way at all to be confused with modern godly Baptist Christians — was the 1524 Thomas Munzer, Said Marx's friend Engels: "Just as Munzer's religious philosophy approached atheism, so his political program approached communism. . . By the 'Kingdom of God', Munzer understood a society in which there would be no class differences or private property".

Martin Luther, the great Protestant Reformer, promptly denounced Munzer as "Satan stalking". The 1561 Belgic Confession of the Reformed Churches in Holland urges true Christians to "detest the Anabaptists and other seditious people. . .who reject. . .magistrates and would. . .introduce a community of goods" (Article 36). And the 1646 Westminster Confession of Faith, drawn up by the British Puritans, insists about true Christians: "Nor doth their communion with one another, as saints, take away or infringe the title or prosperity which each man hath in his goods and possessions" (Chapter 26:3). Sadly, however, Anabaptist views, though somewhat modified in form, are still being propounded by modern thinkers like Ronald J. Sider! His influential book **Rich Christians in an Age of**

**Hunger** (1973) has been ably refuted by David Chilton in the latter's polemic **Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators**. Indeed, whenever Christians even unwittingly succumb to Anabaptist misinterpretations of Christian doctrine, they simply play into the hands of the enemy of souls. For his agents, including socialists and communists, pervert passages like Acts 2:44ff and 4:32ff, and twist them into tools promoting their own devilish dialogue and detente with Christians, while bent on destroying them.

Following Karl Marx in his **Communist Manifesto**, socialists too have rejected the Bible's flat tax rate (compare Leviticus 27:32, Numbers 30:11-15, Matthew 17:27 and Ephesians 6:9). Instead, they have instituted the iniquitous graduated income tax, in order to overtax the thrifty and to redistribute that wealth to the improvident. But God's commandments "you shall not steal" and "you shall not covet" still apply, and do so not just to citizens, but also to governments and their bureaucracies. Hence, socialism is theft, theft of part (and sometimes even of the whole) of private property. It is theft of value stolen from individual owners, theft committed by a bandit bureaucracy that has elevated itself even above the Law of God Himself. This demoralizes the diligent, and decapitalizes and improverishes society as a whole, ultimately bringing it down under the judgment of Jehovah (cf. Proverbs 14:34).

## CONCLUSIONS

We repeat: the so-called 'common Christian ownership' of 'the early Church' is a fiction! In the doomed Jerusalem alone, there was indeed some common use of one another's property (excluding the residential use of private homes). And there was also much sale of 'doomed' immovable properties and distribution of the monies realized therefrom, to needy Jerusalem Christians. All this took place in 33 AD, just before the 34 AD great persecution of the Jerusalem Church and its scattering abroad. These short-lasting emergency measures in the economic field were providential, and were confined exclusively to the doomed Jerusalem; doomed to be further destroyed by the Romans in AD 70, and announced to be doomed both in AD 33 and subsequently. Yet even in that doomed city of Jerusalem, this economic arrangement was only temporary (33-34 AD). There is no indication it continued even in Jerusalem, after the 34 AD expulsion of almost all of her Christians (Acts 8:1-4). And even from 33 to 34 AD, it was set up only on a completely voluntary basis. As such, it was no model

for the Church outside of Jerusalem, even in the first century AD. Nor is it a model for the Church universal today. Now, as always, Christ's Kingdom is to be governed by the normative Biblical directives, including those urging us to help our suffering fellow Christians. ("Remember the poor. . .; bear one another's burdens"; and "do not forget to be hospitable to strangers. . .; remembering those who are in bonds" — Galatians 2:10 and 6:2, Hebrews 13:2-3 cf. Matthew 25:35-40.) This also means that individuals should be urged to possess their own private property and to use it in expanding God's Kingdom by keeping God's Eighth and Tenth Commandments: "you shall not steal" and "you shall not covet".

Accordingly, an adequately-paid employee has no right whatsoever to complain to his employer against the same wages being paid to other employees for doing **less** work and labouring for a **lesser** number of hours in the **same** kind of job. To such a complaining yet adequately-paid employee, Jesus says: "Friend, I do you no wrong! Did you not agree with Me to work for a day's wages? Take that which is yours, and go on your way! **I want** to give the same to this other worker. . . **Is it not lawful for Me to do what I want with My own?** Is your eye evil, because I am good?" (Matthew 20:13ff) Indeed, even our 'eyes' are not common property, but our own private possessions — forever! For Job said (19:25ff): "I know my Redeemer lives, and that He shall stand on the earth in the last day. And even after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh I shall see God. I shall see Him for **myself**. And my eyes and **no one else's** shall behold Him."

"Choose then today, whom you will serve!" (Joshua 24:15). Serve either Jesus Christ — or Karl Marx! No man can ever serve two masters (Matthew 6:24). For there is no middle ground here, between Christian private property, and socialist common property.