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## Heart and Soul ... A Weekly Meditation

March 6, 2016

### Christianity and Communism

*“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me.  
He has sent me to preach good news to the poor,  
to proclaim release to the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to liberate the oppressed, and to  
proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”*  
Luke 4:18 (Common English Bible)

Raised in the sixties and seventies, I was taught to loathe and fear Communism. I was taught well and I did. Yet, as childhood gave way to adulthood my capacity to think and reason for myself developed. One natural result was that I began to question everything, including the political ideology of Communism. College studies introduced me to *The Communist Manifesto* and my curiosity continued to mature and deepen. That personal and intellectual growth included my love and appreciation of The Holy Bible. Initially, I was surprised to discover that at least one basic value in Communism, a value that is held as essential to that ideology, is shared with the Christian faith: a passionate concern for the poor and social justice. According to Luke’s Gospel, Jesus’ first recorded sermon establishes this value as intrinsic to the mission of Jesus.

This uncomfortable truth is why many Protestant pastors and Christians in general supported Fidel Castro’s revolution in Cuba in the late fifties and his establishment of a Communist government. The great social needs of the Cuban people, once the responsibility of the Christian Church, would now be addressed more comprehensively by the government. The hungry would now be fed, the naked clothed and the poor provided opportunity. This all had a familiar sound of Holy Scripture. The question pressed, what exactly is there to loathe and fear about that? Communism and Christianity share the same value and same mission to lift the poor and the marginalized. This is undoubtedly one reason that Communism has such a strong appeal to underprivileged people around the world.

But there is a critical difference between Christianity and Communism – a difference that became very much apparent to me during my recent trip to Cuba: Communism makes no place for God. Communism expects to usher in a new day of equality for all people by its own, unaided efforts. Religion in general and Christianity in particular, is little more than wishful thinking. Governments are purposeful, they take charge and act. Christianity cedes responsibility to an unseen deity, argues Communism. The trouble comes when Communism seeks to advance its values through any means including force, violence, and imprisonment. The same people for whom the government seeks to provide equality are treated as instruments of the Communist cause.

I no longer loathe and fear Communism – those are strong words. Nor do I entertain any notion that Communism is the hope of the world. The world has one hope, and that hope is centered in the person of Jesus Christ. Under Communism, life is cheap. In the Christian faith we embrace the conviction that each person is created in the likeness of God and is deeply valued. Communism advances its mission through force and intimidation. Christ advances his mission through the power of faith formation and the transformation of the human heart. Cuba lacks that perfect society for which *The Communist Manifesto* aspires. That is because such a perfect society will be found first and last in the person of Jesus Christ whose mission was, and is, the lifting of the poor by people just like us whose hearts have been changed, not by fear, but by love.

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