

Christianity and Social Justice: What C.S. Lewis Said on the Subject

Few would disagree with the assertion that politics increasingly pervades our culture.

Much of the politicization stems from the ideology of social justice, the idea that the distribution of wealth, opportunities, and privileges in our society (and the world) is unequal and needs to be rectified. Christians increasingly are called to join this fight.

“Justice is central to the Christian faith,” Relevant magazine [declared](#) earlier this year, “yet many Christians, especially in the United States, leave the work of justice largely untouched. The signs of the times cry out for people who will stand in the gap and engage the pursuit of justice.”

[Numerous books](#) have been published in recent years detailing how Christians can pursue social justice to live out their faith (apparently this can be quite [an exhausting exercise](#), however).

To what degree are Christians called to be in the world and shaping it? It’s an ancient question, and a thorny one. But social justice, and the means we are to employ to pursue it, is a particularly tricky question for Christians grounded in the Lockean philosophy, which holds property, life, and liberty as natural rights.

One person who did have thoughts on the matter was C.S. Lewis, who touched on the issue in [The Screwtape Letters](#).

In the book, the demon Screwtape, writing to his nephew Wormwood, notes that the relationship between Christianity and

politics is a “delicate” matter.

“Certainly we do not want men to allow their Christianity to flow over into their political life, for the establishment of anything like a really just society would be a major disaster,” Screwtape writes. “On the other hand, we do want, and want very much, to make men treat Christianity **as a means.**” (emphasis mine)

A means toward what? Preferably toward personal advancement, Screwtape writes, “but, failing that, as a means to anything—**even to social justice.**” (emphasis mine) He continues:

“The thing to do is to get a man at first to value social justice as a thing which the Enemy demands, and then work him on to the stage at which he values Christianity because it may produce social justice. For the Enemy will not be used as a convenience. Men or nations who think they can revive the Faith in order to make a good society might just as well think they can use the stairs of Heaven as a short cut to the nearest chemist’s shop. Fortunately, it is quite easy to coax humans round this little corner.”

The message is a clear warning to those who’d be tempted to use the Gospel to build utopias here on Earth.

Lewis was saying the Christian faith should guide our ideas, and these ideas are of course expressed in all areas of political life. But, according to Lewis, all people—and perhaps social justice advocates in particular—should be wary of making political causes false idols of their faith.

To me, this seems like prudent advice. What do you think?

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