

THE CHRISTIAN POST

Many People Don't Support Capitalism - They're Making a Mistake

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According to a Harvard University survey, 51 percent of young adults between the ages of 18 and 29 do not support capitalism. Many millennials feel that capitalism causes more harm than good. In his essay "Capitalism and Poverty: Economic Development and Growth Benefit the Least the Most" in the new book, *Counting the Cost: Christian Perspectives on Capitalism*, Doug Bandow, however, challenges this prevailing viewpoint using historical data on capitalism's economic and non-economic benefits. Although capitalism is not a sufficient solution to the problems of humanity, it creates a conducive environment for more work to be done by people of faith to promote human flourishing.

After reading *Counting the Cost* and listening to Doug Bandow's recent lecture at Northwest Nazarene University, I contend that capitalism is the best system in which to practice the Christian faith.

Freedom of choice facilitated through the adoption of capitalism allows for more religious freedom. The world may lack perfect laissez-fair economies. Most countries, however, have adopted policies based on the fundamentals of capitalism, where people can freely decide where they want to work and on what terms.

Based on Doug's arguments and my own life experiences, I believe the following is true about capitalism as an economic system:

1. Lack of Religious Freedom Impacts Other Freedoms

Living in the United States, we may find it difficult to comprehend how government institutions can impact the freedom to make fundamental decisions about your life. In Iraq or North Korea, Christians pay a great price to practice their faith. A young professional in Iraq, for example, fled his home after he heard that ISIS had put a bounty on him for being Christian. Our sisters and brothers in faith still face persecution today. In fact, Dr. Bandow reports that in North Korea, "since 1953, at least 200,000 Christians have gone missing." Missing! In countries like North

Korea, where the authoritarian government exerts its influence on most aspects of people's lives, people not only lack the freedom to choose their occupation but also their religion. Sure, North Korea may be an extreme case, but religious persecution still occurs all over the world.

2. Economic Freedom and Growth Fosters Religious Freedom

The inverse is also true: a society with more economic freedom and less government involvement encourages the freedom of religion. China provides an example of this. China has seen enormous economic growth in the past couple decades. As the economy has moved further away from central planning, the Chinese people have enjoyed an increased freedom to choose—in many areas of their lives.

Growing up in the mission fields in China, I personally witnessed a transition in people's standard of living during this time. In the '90s, when I was a little boy, I would often help my parents prepare huge meals to feed the church. Ten years later, the same congregation we fed started regularly inviting us to eat at the fanciest restaurants in China. The poor we were helping to feed started feeding us. The data in Bandow's essay, in fact, reflects this impact. He reports that "between 1961 and 2000, per capita calories per day increased by 39 percent in the developing world. The increase for China was 61 percent."

It is hard to ignore the connection between religious and economic freedom. Freedoms build on one another—where one is lacking, others are lacking; and where one gains a foothold, other freedoms follow. From this experience, it seems that the less authoritative a government is, the more freedom and resources people have to practice their faith.

3. The Freedom Capitalism Brings Comes with Responsibilities

The success story of capitalism, however, now introduces new challenges to Christians. In capitalism, people are free to act out of love instead of duty.

The overall rhetoric of socialism is that people should act out of duty. For example, when a government mandates that its citizens pay more taxes to support the elderly, people no longer help senior citizens out of concern for them but rather out of duty. The government persuades people to transfer the responsibility of loving and caring for others to the state. However, these policies have not worked. Bandow points out that overall happiness levels of a country do not increase through income redistribution but rather through an overall increase in absolute per capita income.

Christians living in a free society should help those in need out of love. Bandow writes, "Although increasing economic success is a huge human benefit, it places new responsibilities on Christians." Indeed, we cannot know and have compassion for the problems of our neighbors without asking and being in a relationship with them.

Policy changes in China have certainly brought more economic freedom, as well as religious and political freedom. Politics, however, is not the only avenue for change. Ultimately, freedom, coupled with conscience nurtured by religion, helps societies and economies advance. Bandow challenges Christians to become the moral agents in a free economy. Christians should not

depend on the government to execute things of moral responsibility. Though it may not be a perfect system, economic freedom and capitalism might be the best way forward.

To my fellow Christian millennials, we might want to start accepting that capitalism has allowed us to freely act upon our beliefs and vocational gifts, and that we need to start tackling the new challenges we face as Christians in a free society.