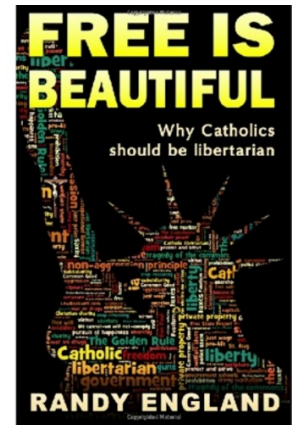




Book Review: Why Catholics Should Be Libertarians

Randy England, a Catholic writer and criminal defense attorney, took it upon himself to write a brief primer on libertarianism for Catholics. It should be understood up front that England is not talking about the Libertarian political party or electoral politics but about a political philosophy and how one views government action. In an interview with *The New American*, England explained his motivation for writing the book. “I wrote *Free is Beautiful* so that Catholics may understand that libertarianism is the political philosophy most compatible with Christianity and the only one that takes human dignity and free will seriously.”



[Free Is Beautiful: Why Catholics Should Be Libertarian](#) is definitely geared to make Catholics become libertarians, but England’s argument might also persuade a few libertarians to become Catholic. This is the third book England has written, and it shows. His style is very easy to read and maintains one’s interest, as he clearly explains what libertarianism is, as well as what libertarianism is not. He also makes the case for how libertarianism is perfectly in line with Catholicism. England separated his book into two parts, with part one focusing almost entirely on explaining why libertarianism is consistent with Christianity and part two further explaining how libertarianism relates to the rest of society.

Simply put, England explains, libertarianism is about the non-aggression principle, which “prohibits the initiation of physical force (or the threat of force) against people or property. The use of force is only legitimate in defense of life or property.” This idea applies to both individuals and governments. That means that if something is wrong for an individual to do — robbery or murder as an example — then that is also wrong if a government does it. England points out that every “government relies on the kind of aggression that would be criminal if used by an individual — that is, the initiation of violence.” Sadly, in present times, we have become accustomed to government using aggressive force or the threat of force to achieve its goals. Libertarians, England states, reject “violence as a solution” and “embrace the goal of eliminating all authority that relies upon the initiation of force to accomplish its ends.”

The supporters of state action on the Left and the Right would be quick to label such rhetoric as the ranting of an anarchist, which, in practice, would produce a lawless society. England addresses such criticism by arguing that order can be accomplished through voluntary, nonviolent means. England reminds readers that authority does not need to come only from an “aggressive government. There are other ways to secure agreement so that orders may be given and obedience expected. Authority based on reciprocity and trust is more powerful than that based on physical coercion.” One idea proposed later in the book is cooperative contractual agreements, which are based on private property rights. These cooperatives, many of which exist today, can take the place of the role presently handled by coercive governments.



Written by [Patrick Krey](#) on September 27, 2012

As England explains, a society that is based on voluntary association will not make a “perfect world, but real virtue makes a better world than compelled virtue.... Liberty frees us to live — if we choose — a virtuous life in this world, and a life capable of sharing in the divine life in the next.” England echoes that last point throughout the book. “Only free men can become good men. True virtue requires liberty.” This might be met with grumbling from the conservative wing of Christians who view moral evils as an area for state action, but the author reminds the reader that we should have learned from similar approaches in the past, such as the failure of alcohol prohibition, which have shown us that criminalizing vices do not rid us of social problems and, in the majority of cases, end up making the problems far worse.

Libertarianism and the Church

England spends an entire chapter explaining why libertarianism is entirely consistent with Catholicism. From Papal Encyclicals to the writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas, England highlights the similarities and consistent themes between the two belief systems. Such alignment may sound off the wall to Catholics because there are clear pronouncements from church authorities that advocate the use of government coercion to solve social ills, such as for unlibertarian laws like taxes, wage laws, and — in modern times — government-run healthcare and even a global political authority.

Unfortunately, he does not address this contradiction in the book, which some critics might label as misleading. England did not attempt to reconcile libertarianism with the church’s statements, though such a seeming contradiction is easily explained, as he briefly told me in an interview about the book:

Church social teaching calls on authorities to promote the common good.... Peace, protection of rights, defense of persons and property; these are the very values that libertarians consider absolute. Those who want government intervention cite certain passages in the social encyclicals that seem to call for government manipulation of wages, the economy or other matters. It is easy to make too much of such statements for the church has always recognized strict limits to its competence in prescribing solutions to problems, as noted in more recent encyclicals, [Pope John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 1987, 41 and Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 2009, 9.]

England further explained that the church cannot “bind” Catholics on these “technical solutions” using government power and that any pronouncements that go this far in advocating certain “technical solutions” comes at the expense of the church’s true authority in matters of faith and morals.

Libertarianism and Abortion

The book’s greatest achievement is when England delves into the subject of liberty and the right to life. This chapter is a must-read for those struggling to reconcile the abortion issue and concepts of individual liberty. There really shouldn’t be much to struggle about, since abortion is the murder of an innocent life and is therefore contrary to principles that protect the right to “life and liberty.” Alas, we live in an age of massive disinformation, where people have been programmed to believe that the murder of unborn children is not only acceptable in certain circumstances, but that it is actually a “right” to be celebrated. This confusion has unfortunately even spread to people who consider themselves liberty-minded. England corrects this for libertarians by stating that “the political platform of a libertarian has only one plank — the non-aggression principle.... Abortion is not only immoral but also criminal. Because it kills a human being, it is the ultimate violation of the non-aggression principle. For this reason, the Catholic Church teaches that ‘abortion and infanticide are abominable crimes.’”

To further explain this point, England delves into a decades-old debate from two very high-profile, well-



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known libertarians from yesteryear; Murray Rothbard and Father James A. Sadowsky, who just recently passed away. Rothbard had taken the position, common to many on the left side of today's political spectrum, that the unborn child is a parasite trespassing in the "host's" (i.e., the mother's) body and that an abortion is simply the removal of an unwanted guest. Sadowsky quickly poked holes in the position by reminding Rothbard that the purpose of an abortion is not to simply remove the child from the womb but to kill the child. "Most of those seeking abortions would be horrified at the thought that the child might survive his expulsion. Just ask your friends if all they are after is simply a premature birth."

Sadowsky further challenges the "removal of a trespasser" argument by comparing it to the discovery of a stowaway on a plane. Would it be justifiable to throw the stowaway out of the plane to his death? Or would the more sensible thing to do to be to wait until the plane arrives at the destination before removing the stowaway? Sadowsky went further into debunking Rothbard's position that the unborn child can even be considered as a trespasser at all. "A mother's womb has one purpose: to nurture and protect the unborn child," explains England. "How can one trespass in the one place they inarguably belong?" England does not stop at just explaining why a truly libertarian and moral position is pro-life, he also explains how even a libertarian-leaning government would lead toward a more pro-life outcome. "If the U. S. government were limited solely to its constitutionally granted powers, there would be no *Roe v. Wade* decision." This would lead to the states being able to adopt their own laws regarding restrictions on abortions and, as England explains, if "each state had the freedom to punish the killing of the unborn, many of them would do so immediately, and the number of abortions would fall drastically, perhaps to the pre-*Roe* levels."

England continues tackling big issues throughout the rest of the book. Economic regulation, occupational licensing, and even the criminal justice system are dissected and reanalyzed, according to libertarian principles. Though many libertarian writers fall into the habit of writing lengthy, academic-sounding essays that overwhelm the reader and lose their interest, England avoids any such traps by presenting his positions in simple, easily digested segments that walk the reader through how a libertarian society would work. England's experience as a litigator, who has to persuade a jury, has served him well and is evidenced in his writing. This book would be a great asset in efforts to convert Christians to the cause of liberty.

[*Free Is Beautiful: Why Catholics Should Be Libertarian*](#), by Randy England, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, April 20, 2012, 166 pages, paperback.

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