



The Real Pope Francis

Pope Francis is once again insisting that he is not a communist, that his abiding concern for “the poor” is grounded in the Gospel of Christ, not the ideology of Marx, Engels, or any other communist.

Back in 2010, while still a Cardinal, he felt the need to do the same.

Why?

It may very well be inaccurate to describe the Pope as a communist. But — and it pains this Catholic writer to admit this — one can be forgiven for suspecting that he is friendlier to this noxious ideology than many of us would care to think.

First, neither Francis’ recent remarks nor those from 2010 include an express repudiation of communism. That his concern for the poor reflects Francis’ commitment to Christianity in no way speaks to his thoughts on communism. Logically, subscription to one theory is perfectly compatible with respect for and appreciation of any number of others — and it certainly doesn’t entail an unqualified rejection of all others.

That is, one can believe that Christianity contains “the fullness of truth” while simultaneously affirming what truth is found in other systems of thought. St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas are two notable examples of Christian thinkers who did precisely this vis-à-vis the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, respectively.

Similarly, while Francis derives his motivation from Christianity, this doesn’t necessarily mean that he cannot and/or does not sympathize with communism.

Secondly, “communism” can mean different things to different people. For instance, Martin Luther King, Jr. denied that he was a communist on the grounds that he rejected “materialism,” the philosophical doctrine that matter is all that there is, the doctrine underwriting Marxism.

However, to reject Marx’s theory of communism, much less his theory of materialism, does not translate into a rejection of communism as such. To suggest otherwise is like saying that if I reject Calvin’s theology of Christianity, I must reject Christianity as such.

The closest Francis has come to criticizing communism is when he articulated a heavily qualified criticism of “liberation theology,” a hard leftist approach to Christianity. And even then, the Pope simply noted that its “Marxist interpretation of reality” — again, whatever exactly this means — was a





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“limitation” while commending liberation theology for “its positive aspects.”

When communism is understood as most of us understand it, as an ideology demanding a radical redistribution of goods for the purposes of “Equality” or “Fairness” or whatever, then it should be obvious that it can afford to dispense with philosophical materialism and even its “Marxist interpretation of reality.”

In other words, “Christian communism” is not a *meaningless* moniker.

That the Pope has refused to unabashedly, unequivocally repudiate communism (and/or socialism) is doubtless one big reason that some have viewed him as a communist sympathizer. Yet there is another: His Holiness has adamantly repudiated that system commonly called “capitalism.”

Now, Francis’ supporters have leapt to his defense on this score. For example, the Catholic writer Selwyn Duke has observed that Francis has never critiqued “capitalism” by name, but instead has simply called for “a God-centered ethics.” Daniel Doherty writes that while the Pope is critical of “unfettered capitalism and capitalism generally,” his remarks on these matters “hardly” constitute “a clarion call for Marxist revolution.”

What Duke and Doherty say of the Pope can be said just as easily of almost any Democratic politician in the United States. Democrats, especially among election time when they are busy courting the Christian vote, spare no occasion to put a Gospel dress on their socialism — all the while refraining from criticizing “capitalism” by name. They are all in favor of “a God-centered ethic” then.

There is more. This Pope has made comments regarding our economic system that can and have been made quite frequently by socialists of various stripes.

For one, he has blasted “trickle-down economics” for its “crude and naïve trust in the goodness of those wielding economic power and in the sacralized workings of the prevailing economic system.” Of course, in the real world, “trickle-down economics” hasn’t a single defender. The only people who speak as if the term had a referent are the socialist-minded.

Francis has also referred to ours as “an economy of exclusion and inequality.” “Today,” he explains, “everything comes under the laws of competition and the survival of the fittest, where the powerful feed upon the powerless. As a consequence,” Francis concludes, “masses of people find themselves excluded and marginalized: without work, without possibilities, without any means of escape.”

Where have we heard this lingo before?

In fact, Francis has spoken out more forcefully than Obama or any other Democrat against our economy when he charged it with violating the commandment against killing. “Such an economy,” Francis insists, “kills.” (Emphasis added.)

Though painful for people to admit it, the truth is that Pope Francis is no friend to the liberty that some of us Americans still treasure.



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