



To Pope Francis: Hearts, Not “Economies,” Is the Object of Christian Charity

In his speech for the Catholic Church’s World Day of Peace, marked for New Year’s Day, *Time*’s most recently elected “Person of the Year” decried the “widening gap between those who have more and those who must be content with the crumbs.” Pope Francis, it is obvious, is hammering the same theme that he sounded a few weeks ago when he called upon the world to reject “trickle-down economics,” “an economy of exclusion and inequality,” for “such an economy,” he informed us, “kills.”

The Left is thrilled by this Pope’s remarks. As a traditional, practicing Roman Catholic Christian and lover of liberty, I decidedly am not.

While Pope Francis is correct to admonish us to condemn murderous economies, what he is describing doesn’t exist. Furthermore, we must grasp that he articulates not the cardinal tenet of Christian charity, but an ideology of welfare-state socialism.

Contrary to what many a contemporary cleric would have us think, Jesus never once — never ever — spoke about the need for His disciples to “narrow the gap” in “income” and “wealth” between “the rich” and “the poor.” He never once deplored “inequality,” for He came not in the service of an ideology of Equality, but in the service of saving humanity from its sins. The only “economy” in which Jesus ever expressed an interest is the economy of salvation.

Of course, this does not mean that Christians should be indifferent to the world’s affairs generally, and “economies” that “kill” in particular. What it most certainly does mean is that if it is the latter that our discipleship calls upon us to resist, then it is on just those economies, those “systems,” that we must set our sights.

And “the free market” ain’t one of them.

At a minimum, within “capitalist” societies, standards of living for all have risen to an extent that even the nobility of earlier times never could have imagined. The poor has nowhere been better served than in such societies. At the same time, it is economies of the kind on behalf of which the Pope advocates — particularly those within which there exists an obsession with promoting greater material “equality” — that have eventuated in greater rates of suffering and death.

“Capitalism” is indeed deserving of its share of criticism. But socialism is deserving of a significantly





larger share.

Christian charity is doubtless among the noblest, most beautiful things to have ever graced this fallen world of ours. As much as its critics hate to admit it, the fact is that the vast majority of the planet's charitable organizations, and all of the most influential of such organizations, are inspired by the person of Christ: charity — love — is the greatest of commandments for the disciples of Jesus.

However, Jesus was clear that charity is not defined by material conditions. Those "in need" can and not infrequently are from all walks of life. If being alive for more than a handful of years isn't enough to convince people of this, then maybe some reminders of the fact that Jesus befriended, and served, the wealthy, as well as the poor, the powerful, as well as the powerless, might do the trick. Christ, let us not forget, not only healed the servant of a Roman centurion; He commended the soldier — an agent of the Roman Empire, mind you — for having more faith than that of anyone that He had encountered up to that point in Israel.

It is crucial to grasp that this incident with the (relatively wealthy) Roman soldier was no fluke: In spite of the sense of His fellow Jews that they were living under oppressive foreign rule, and in spite of the fact that Christ Himself was eventually executed by Rome, He never once so much as critiqued the Roman government — while He tirelessly critiqued the children of Israel.

Jesus never condemned human slavery, and even told parables featuring slaves and slave masters, parables suggesting that slave masters had authority (even if qualified by God's authority) over their slaves. He as well told a parable of an employer in which he clearly affirmed the employer's right to pay his laborers just the wage that they agreed to be paid — regardless of whether he chose to pay other laborers differently, or unequally.

The point here isn't that Jesus was an advocate for slavery, "capitalism," or any other "ism." The point is that He was not an advocate of any.

Jesus was concerned not with changing "super structures," "systems," "states," and/or "economies." He was concerned with changing people's hearts. Perhaps He realized that focus on the former detracts from focus on the latter.

Pope Francis and people everywhere would be well served to realize this as well.



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