



Foreword by
MICHAEL NOVAK

POPE FRANCIS
and the
CARING SOCIETY

Edited by **ROBERT M. WHAPLES**

INDEPENDENT INSTITUTE

Foreword*

Michael Novak

THIS MARVELOUS BOOK, *Pope Francis and the Caring Society*, is much needed and could not have come at a better time. Completed in response to Pope Francis's invitation in *Laudato si'* to a dialogue on the economy, the environment, and charity, the book shares his commitment to Judeo-Christian teachings and institutions. In the process, the book's authors are seeking constructively to engage and educate civic and business leaders and the general public to understand the legacy and meaning of the natural law, moral and economic principles of liberty, personal responsibility, enterprise, civic virtue, family and community, and the rule of law.

The education of each pope begins anew when he is elected to office. For he is no longer a member of one nation only, but now of a universal community. He must learn, for example, about economics as practiced in other parts of the world besides his own. Notably, Pope John Paul II spent his youth under Nazism and then Communism and was not familiar with how life was lived under other economic and political systems. It took him a while to develop a universal vision in these arenas. Most of the Italian popes before him had similar experiences. Likewise, it would be odd if Pope Francis were not now expanding his own view of political and economic affairs.¹

*Note: I adapted material in this Foreword from Michael Novak and Paul Adams, "Saint Francis in America," *National Review*, October 2, 2015, and Michael Novak, "Agreeing with Pope Francis," *National Review*, December 7, 2013. ©2015 & 2013 *National Review*. Used with permission.

1. Adapted from Michael Novak, "What Will Pope Francis Say?" *Washington Examiner*, September 22, 2015.

I have closely studied the early writings of Pope John Paul II (born Karol Wojtyła), which grew out of long experience of an oppressive Communist regime that pretended to be wholly devoted to “equality,” yet enforced total control over polity, economy, and culture by a thorough and cruel state. From 1940 (under the Nazi/Soviet occupation) until 1978 (when he moved to the Vatican), Karol Wojtyła had virtually no experience of a capitalist economy and a democratic/republican polity.

Year by year into his papacy, John Paul II learned how differently things looked in other nations in other parts of the world. He learned the difference between being an archbishop in one locality and becoming a universal pastor. A profound social thinker himself, he gradually developed a new vocabulary for illuminating the new social possibilities of our time.²

Pope Francis seems to be following the same trajectory. Year by year, his wisdom seems to grow. On a great many matters, he is in alignment with the principles of St. John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI. Gradually he has been adjusting his language to realities, especially economic realities outside his lifetime experience in Argentina. For example, at first he often said, “the poor always get poorer,” but slowly he is becoming aware that in many advanced countries, people who were poor only two or three generations ago are no longer poor. There is a fact described as “upward mobility.” It happens faster and more securely in economies based on the freedom of initiative, creativity, invention, and discovery. Such economies highly value human capital over material capital, because only humans invent and create.³

As I found that John Paul’s early writings reflect the influence of his pre-papal life under Nazism and Communism, I also found that, having spent not a little time lecturing in Argentina and in Chile since the late 1970s, it is helpful to read Francis’s writings with an ear for echoes of daily economic and political life in Argentina.

In my visits to Argentina, I observed a far sharper divide between the upper middle class and the poor than any I had experienced in the United States. In Argentina, I saw very few paths by which the poor could rise out of poverty.

2. Adapted from “The Virtue of Social Justice: An Interview with Michael Novak,” *The Stream*, January 18, 2016. At <https://stream.org/virtue-social-justice-interview-michael-novak/>.

3. *Ibid.*

In the U.S., many of those who are now rich or middle class had come to America (or their parents had) dirt poor, many of them not speaking English, with minimal schooling and with mainly menial skills. But before them lay many paths upward. As Peru's Hernando de Soto has stressed, the U.S. has the rule of law and clear property rights, on which one can safely build over generations.

Virtually all my acquaintances while I was growing up had experienced poverty in their families. Our grandfathers were garment workers, steelworkers, store clerks, gardeners, handymen, blue-collar workers of all sorts, without social insurance, food stamps, housing allowances, or the like. But they labored and somehow were able to send their children to colleges and universities. Now their children are doctors, lawyers, professors, editors, and owners of small businesses all over the country.

In his *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), Adam Smith compared the economic history of Latin America with that of North America. He noted that in Latin America there were still many institutions of feudal Europe—large landholders, plantations, and plantation workers. In North America, only the southern United States had a similar system.

At the time Smith wrote, throughout Latin America many economic powers and permissions were doled out by government officials in far-off Spain or Portugal. In the Dominican Republic, for example, a farmer who wanted to build a small iron foundry had to wait months or years until a decision came back from Spain. Trading with pirates was easier. In the English-speaking colonies of North America, however, a farmer could just build his foundry without asking anybody. And even after the various Latin American countries achieved independence, habits of state direction were still entrenched, as if by immemorial habit.

Besides, the experience of the former British colonies had led to a distrust of monarchs and their courts, and later of barons and dukes and the aristocracy as a whole, since these people could not be counted on either to see or to serve the common good. By contrast, the opposite habit of mind had grown throughout the Latin world.⁴ There, officials of the state were regularly entrusted with minding the common good, despite a long record of official

4. Vargas Llosa, *Liberty for Latin America*.

betrayals of duty, outbreaks of tyranny, and the use of economic resources to enrich successive leaders of the state. In Latin America, the pluralistic private sector was mistrusted, but not the state.

As the twentieth century began, Argentina was ranked among the top fifteen industrial nations, and more and more of its wealth was springing from modern inventions rather than farmland. Then a destructive form of political economy, just then spreading like a disease from Europe—a populist fascism with tight government control over the economy—dramatically slowed Argentina’s economic and political progress. Instability in the rule of law undermined economic creativity. Inflation blew to impossible heights. (I brought home from Argentina in the early 1980s a note for a million Argentine pesos that had declined in worth to two American pennies.)

Over three generations, very little of the nation’s natural wealth and opportunity for social advancement have overflowed into the upraised buckets of the poor. Upward mobility from the bottom up was (and is) infrequent. Today, the lot of Argentina’s poor is still static. The poor receive little personal instruction in turning to independent creativity and initiative, and few laws, lending institutions, and other practical arrangements support them in moving upward. Human energies are drained by dependency on state benefits. The visible result has been a society with little opportunity for the poor to rise out of poverty. A great inner humiliation comes over the poor as they see their lack of personal achievement and their dependency.

By contrast, in the U.S., under a government strictly limited by law, there grew up almost universal property ownership by individuals (except under the evil institution of slavery, America’s primal sin), a large swath of small enterprises, and a huge base of prospering small farms. Smith described the creation of wealth in North America as welling up from below, from the prosperity at the bottom, where frugal habits led to wise investments in railroads, canals, and other large business corporations.

Less than seventy years after Adam Smith wrote *The Wealth of Nations*, a son of the frontier farm country of central Illinois, Abraham Lincoln, spoke eloquently about the evidences of global trade visible in homes across the prairie—tobacco, cotton, spices, whiskey, sugar, tea, glassware, silverware. He attributed this enprospering trade to the daring of American seamen (as Tocqueville also did).

Lincoln also wrote about the patent-and-copyright clause of the U.S. Constitution, which guaranteed to inventors the right to the monetary fruit of their inventions. Lincoln thought this small clause one of the six greatest contributions to liberty in the history of the world. He thought it critical to liberating human beings everywhere from misery and tyranny.

That single clause—the only time the term “right” is used within the body of the Constitution—launched a wholly new economic model for the world, based not on land (as it had been for thousands of years) but on creative ideas, inventions, and discoveries, which greatly speeded up a cascade of new improvements and new products to enrich the lives of ordinary citizens. The more people these improvements helped, the higher the inventors’ royalties. By serving others, they reaped rewards. These rewards furthered the common good.

John Paul II recognized this huge social change in *Centesimus annus* (*On the Hundredth Anniversary of Rerum novarum*, 1991), paragraph 32 of which opens: “In our time, in particular, there exists another form of ownership which is no less important than land: the possession of know-how, knowledge, and skill. The wealth of the industrialized nations is based much more on this kind of ownership than on natural resources.” The rest of this paragraph is concise in its penetration of the causes of wealth and the role of human persons and associations in the virtue of worldwide solidarity, of which globalization is the outward expression.

John Paul II quickly recognized that today “the decisive factor [in production] is increasingly man himself, that is, his knowledge, especially his scientific knowledge, his capacity for interrelated and compact organization, as well as his ability to perceive the needs of others and to satisfy them.”⁵

Then in paragraph 42, John Paul II defined his ideal capitalism, succinctly, as that economic system springing from creativity, under the rule of law, and “the core of which is ethical and religious.” In his first social encyclical ten years earlier, *Laborem exercens* (*On Human Work*, 1981), directly rejecting orthodox Marxist language about labor, the pope had already begun to project “creation theology” as a replacement for “liberation theology.” A bit later, he reached the concept of “human capital.” Step by step, he thought his way to

5. John Paul II, *Centesimus annus*, 32.

his own vision of the economy best suited to the human person—not perfectly so, in this vale of tears, but better than any rival, Communist or traditional.

Despite the fact that Francis of Assisi (1180–1225) has been for eight centuries, all around the world, the most beloved saint of all, Francis is the first pope to choose the name. He is most known for his concern for the poor, and is widely beloved because he is seen by some as the best model of Jesus Christ anywhere on earth today.⁶ The image of the poor and humble Christ is brought to the fore wherever Francis goes. But I am worried whether he has a very good theory for how you get the poor out of poverty. And the main practical task of our generation is breaking the last round of chains of ancient poverty.

In 1776, there were fewer than one billion people on Earth. A vast majority of them were poor, and living under tyrannies. Just over two centuries later, there are more than seven billion human beings. Rapid medical discoveries and inventions have helped to more than double the average lifespan, vastly reduce infant mortality, and provide relief for hundreds of diseases. Thanks to economic progress, six-sevenths of the greatly expanded human race have now broken free from poverty—over a billion people from 1950 to 1980, and another billion since 1980. But there are another billion more still in those chains. The Jewish, Christian, and humanist task is to break them free as well.

Whatever Christians pray in worship on Sunday gets its truthfulness from what Christians actually do in their daily lives to help the poor. If one does not come to the aid of the poor, one does not love God. Francis has done a very good job humanizing Christianity and giving it a distinctive, down-to-earth voice of a sort that no pope, even John Paul II, has expressed before.⁷

As Francis grows in his knowledge of the world beyond Argentina, he will hopefully better understand the political economy that best helps the poor to move out of poverty. A fine place to start would be in the well-reasoned pathway of paragraph 42 of John Paul II's *Centesimus annus*:

Can it perhaps be said that, after the failure of Communism, capitalism is the victorious social system, and that capitalism should be the

6. Adapted from Michael Novak, "Why the Name Francis?" *The Huffington Post*, March 14, 2013.

7. Bowyer, "Scholar Who Taught John Paul II to Appreciate Capitalism Worries About Pope Francis."

goal of the countries now making efforts to rebuild their economy and society? Is this the model which ought to be proposed to the countries of the Third World which are searching for the path to true economic and civil progress?

To this John Paul II answered, in effect, “Yes and no.” He wrote:

The answer is obviously complex. If by “capitalism” is meant an economic system which recognizes the fundamental and positive role of business, the market, private property and the resulting responsibility for the means of production, as well as free human creativity in the economic sector, then the answer is certainly in the affirmative, even though it would perhaps be more appropriate to speak of a “business economy,” “market economy” or simply “free economy.” But if by “capitalism” is meant a system in which freedom in the economic sector is not circumscribed within a strong juridical framework which places it at the service of human freedom in its totality, and which sees it as a particular aspect of that freedom, the core of which is ethical and religious, then the reply is certainly negative.

The Marxist solution has failed, but the realities of marginalization and exploitation remain in the world, especially the Third World, as does the reality of human alienation, especially in the more advanced countries. Against these phenomena the Church strongly raises her voice. Vast multitudes are still living in conditions of great material and moral poverty. The collapse of the Communist system in so many countries certainly removes an obstacle to facing these problems in an appropriate and realistic way, but it is not enough to bring about their solution. Indeed, there is a risk that a radical capitalistic ideology could spread which refuses even to consider these problems, in the a priori belief that any attempt to solve them is doomed to failure, and which blindly entrusts their solution to the free development of market forces.⁸

Although economic growth falls far short of being the only goal of free societies, its blessings in terms of education, medical improvements, the prospering

8. John Paul II, *Centesimus annus*, 42..

of freedom of conscience, and the private financing of civic life and multiple philanthropies are not inessential to the common good.

Further, it is not market systems alone that produce upward mobility, economic progress for all, and wide economic opportunity. Argentina has always had a market economy. So, too, have almost all the peoples in human history. Jerusalem in the biblical period cherished private property (“Thou shalt not steal,”⁹ “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s goods”¹⁰), and it lived by a vital market (as the commercial interface of three continents). But for the 1,800 years after Christ, none of the world’s markets—nor the aggregate thereof—produced much economic development. The world’s economies remained relatively static, as they faced a merciless cycle of “fat” years followed by “lean” ones. Before the rise of capitalism, traditional market systems experienced famines and massive outbreaks of deadly diseases in nearly every generation.

Pope John Paul II came to see this historical reality. We might expect Francis to turn more attention to John Paul II’s prescient passages as he continues to tour all the economic alternatives on this planet.

On another matter, Pope Francis sometimes talks with great certainty about matters he has not been trained to deal with. He sometimes allows close advisers to disparage those who are not intimidated by a highly politicized scientific “consensus.” Can there be “science” where there is so much political pressure and public mockery? Is the pope alert to the fact that to put climate control into the hands of a world government is to create a center of enormous power, able to bring on world decline by wildly erroneous miscalculations? He has not yet indicated that.

As some in Europe have already learned to joke, Greens are like tomatoes. They begin the spring green, but by late summer have turned very red. All movement is toward the state. Consider, then, that in any likely world government, cultures that are growing fastest and are most inimical to the West—and to Jews and Christians in particular—are most likely to predominate and to dictate terms.

And climate has always been a fickle master. Climate history is complex, tangled, and not easy to explain: warm, even hot weather (when Greenland

9. Exodus 20:15 (King James Version).

10. Excerpted from Kinkead, *Baltimore Catechism No. 4 (of 4) An Explanation of The Baltimore Catechism of Christian Doctrine*, Lesson 34, 386 Q.

was not yet covered with ice), then a thousand-year Ice Age, and then a “global warming” that also does not show up as predicted. Time spans are long and changeable. There have been cosmic forces at play, from giant meteorites to solar explosions. Breakthroughs in science regularly overturn the conventional “consensus,” but the conventional wisdom at any one time is seldom questioned. If Francis turns out to be wrong on climate control, his mistake may end as a far greater blow to the Church than the Galileo Affair.

Finally, I would like to offer a bet: More human beings by far will move out of poverty by the methods of democracy and capitalism than by any other means.

Following his first visit to the U.S., Pope Francis joked with reporters about how fallible he is in economic matters, and he admitted that he has erred by largely ignoring the middle class while he has much to say about the poor. Let us hope that as he continues to serve, he and others learn from the phenomenal worldwide growth of the middle class the lessons that will best serve the poor he cares so deeply about.

Now with *Pope Francis and the Caring Society* we have the essential and enlightening book to equip us all to understand the crucial issues of economics, the environment, and charity in order to serve and uplift the lives of others.

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