

**Robert M. Whaples, editor, *Pope Francis and the Caring Society*.  
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Following its publication in 2015, Pope Francis's *Laudato si'* continues to garner widespread attention and response, but by no means all of it positive. Similar to various pronouncements from the much beloved, much de-

ridged pope, this encyclical leaves many wondering how to reconcile what often appear as incomplete and conflicting conclusions. Entering into this fray, *Pope Francis and the Caring Society* presents an authentic and stimulating response to Francis's invitation "to enter into dialogue" (*Laudato si'*, no. 3) and in so doing offers a model that is timely and enduring.

Edited by Robert Whaples, a research fellow with the Independent Institute and professor of economics at Wake Forest University, *Pope Francis and the Caring Society* endeavors to advance "the dialogue at a critical juncture" wherein Pope Francis has "called into question the benefits of free markets and advocated measures to protect the environment from excessive consumption and harmful production practices" (2). Following a brilliant foreword by the late Michael Novak, and Whaples's own equally marvelous introduction, seven of today's leading thinkers present a range of responses to Francis that are notable in their own right but also for the collective scope and balance they offer. By no means shy, Francis's interlocutors are every bit as compelling and penetrating as the challenges and difficulties he raises. Robert Murphy, also a research fellow at the Independent Institute and research professor with the Free Market Institute at Texas Tech University, wraps up this formative work with a concluding essay aimed at bringing all "camps" together through "a more thoughtful reading of the other's perspective" (202).

In "Pope Francis, His Predecessors and the Market," Andrew Yuengert contends that Francis steers Catholic social teaching "from an attitude of . . . increasing unease about the functioning of markets in society" to a movement of "alarm" (47). "What his predecessors warned about, Francis claims has come true," writes Yuengert. While he does not view this assessment as "too extreme" (48), Yuengert nevertheless concludes that Francis harbors a "deep hostility to markets [which] poses two dangers": One, an inability to truly dialogue with businesspersons whose integrity is "publicly and repeatedly doubt[ed]" (48); two, the unviability of reforms lacking market economies, which have historically proven to be the best cure for poverty. As he aptly notes, "Getting yourself out of a ditch is not enough to keep your car functioning" (49).

In "Understanding Pope Francis: Argentina, Economic Failure, and the *Teologica del Pueblo*," the ever-seminal Samuel Gregg argues that one cannot fully assess Francis's perspective without also knowing something of his roots. In this case, that means Argentina's descent from a once relatively inclusive economy to an extractive "crony capitalism" that is anything but free. Breaking down a long and systemic perversion of economic liberalization that resulted in a severe depression and the tragic legacy of

Peronism, Gregg deftly notes that it left Latin America, including many Catholics, with “a jaundiced view of free markets” (58).

In “Uneven Playing Fields: Markets and Oligarchy,” Gabriel Martinez maintains that Pope Francis’s pro-market critics misjudge both him and the economic reality in other areas of the world. “Market liberalization,” he explains, is often code for oligarchies that leave far too many outside the bell jar and that it is this which Pope Francis in reality opposes. Reminiscent of the Roman pontiff’s repeated emphasis on personal morality and lives of service, Martinez reminds readers that, “It is not the force of gravity, nor mere ‘economic growth’ . . . that yields inclusion,” but rather market economies operating within cultures that instill virtue and “personal habits of self-restraint and self-denial” (73).

In contrast to the deferential approach of Gregg and Martinez, Lawrence McQuillan and Carol Park take Pope Francis to task for a “condemnation of capitalism that undercuts his call to the poor” (111). In “Pope Francis, Capitalism, and Private Charitable Giving,” the authors maintain that Francis’s line of reasoning and vocabulary ignore the truth of capitalism and undermine its ability to authentically serve all persons, especially the marginalized. Only economic freedom, property rights, and private philanthropy, they assert, will “spur the type of voluntary charity that alleviates human suffering and improves the well-being of those less fortunate around the world” (112).

In chapters 5 and 6, A. M. C. Waterman and Philip Booth direct the conversation to the environment. In his compelling “Pope Francis on the Environmental Crisis,” Waterman outlines the tenets of *Laudato si’* and examines the scientific, doctrinal, and philosophical influences in Francis’s thinking. He concludes that the pope’s “account of the evils now facing us and its warning of the disaster that impends are truly prophetic” and provides a “normative framework . . . for environmental stewardship.” Nevertheless, Waterman finds two major reasons for concern: One, Francis’s belief that population growth is fully compatible with an integral ecology and, two, his trust in public policy over the more reliable incentive of self-interest.

In one of the most enlightening chapters of the book, Philip Booth draws upon the Catholic Church’s rich and growing body of scholarship—including Aquinas, the Late Scholastics, and Pope Leo XIII, as well as that of the late economist Elinor Ostrom—about the particular ability of private property to protect and preserve the environment. Accounting for the Church’s longstanding debate about private property as a natural right or a socially beneficial human construct, Booth presents a strong and convincing argument that, “Private property can promote environmental con-

servation in a number of direct and indirect ways” (178). Not least among these are “community-managed systems,” which have outpaced government fiat in preserving renewable resources such as forests, fisheries, and irrigation systems, and the economies they serve (175).

In “The Family Economics of Pope Francis,” Allan Carlson summarizes Francis’s critique of individualism and consumerism and their adverse effect on marriage, family, and the environment. “This criticism,” observes Carlson, “carries over into a fairly dark vision of the industrialized city” that leads to “the depersonalization of all humans” (188). The antidote, Carlson explains, lies in Francis’s ethic of simplicity and a “Christian home economy” (188), grounded in conventional marriage, traditional gender-labor categories, and the begetting of children consistent with the Catholic Church’s teaching on procreation.

None of this is to say that the wide-ranging and uplifting analyses offered in *Pope Francis and the Caring Society* do not at times disappoint. Waterman, for example, leaves the reader pondering how the highly discredited Malthusian doctrine is nevertheless valid. And to simply assert that “environmental degradation will worsen as the human population increases” (145) is to beg the question.

In turn, Carlson’s assertions that Francis’s “primary emphasis on the differences between men and women” are “distinctions that carry over to into the world of work” (189) and that a “useful corrective” to Francis’s misunderstanding of the role of private property is to be found “in the arguments of the Distributists” are unsettling to say the least (195). Both arguments not only divert attention from his thesis and the value of the entire collection but are rather unconvincing in the process. The latter, for example, ignores the inescapability of an authoritarian—if not dictatorial—state that necessarily follows from the principles of the Distributist and Neo-Distributist schools alike, while the former denies, in a seeming attachment to a romanticized past, the reality of a world where wives and mothers do, and often must, work.

Disappointments notwithstanding, *Pope Francis and the Caring Society* is a much welcomed and refreshing publication that arrives at a critical interval. And if human flourishing is truly the end goal, it is a work that should be widely read, discussed, and developed.

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