

Pope Francis, Economists, and the Excluded



In several passages of *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis focused on the excluded. He states, “It is no longer simply about exploitation and oppression, but something new. Exclusion ultimately has to do with what it means to be a part of the society in which we live; those excluded are no longer society’s underside or its fringes or its disenfranchised – they are no longer even a part of it. The excluded are not the ‘exploited’ but the outcast, the ‘leftovers.’” Jean–Yves Naudet, the director of the Center for Economic Ethics and Research, and president of the Association of Catholic Economists, wrote that it falls to the economists, “to explain that the market economy is the one that includes and the Welfare State the one that excludes, especially given its bureaucratic character: ‘it is better to get your job from the market, than to receive an impersonal assistance that marginalizes.’”...

Pope Francis will not engage in class struggle, and will not endorse an “irresponsible populism.” The tone of his message seems directed to Christians around the globe who also feel that they have been excluded. Finally, they have their man at the top, someone who understands their plight. The mystical charisma of John Paul II, honed through decades of spiritual and pastoral life under the dark dominance of communism, and the intellectual and disciplined gifts of Benedict, the great German essayist and theologian, contributed to a new, extremely rich intellectual period in the Catholic Church. Pope Francis’ charisma comes from his identification with a culture in crisis, like the one he experienced in Argentina, with a weak rule of law, with pervasive corruption, crony capitalism and infatuated with populism. He knew and despised the hypocrisy of politicians, but despite his surrounding he was able to remain honest, clean, and principled. Pope Francis is hopeful, not only for the “people,” but for politicians and governments as well....

Over 95 percent of *Evangelii Gaudium* is devoted to spiritual liberation. The Roman Catholic Church will continue to be a much–admired teacher in this realm. However, on issues of economic liberation, the recent statements by the Pope, in addition to his determination to give more voice to the Vatican commissions and the episcopal conferences, will likely expand and democratize the debate about how to build a Christian and humane economy. As the Church is not an economic academy, the role of the laity will be crucial, and divergent opinions will not only be tolerated but welcomed by the Vatican.

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