



Pope Francis and the Catholic World Order

The Roman Catholic Church worldwide and in the United States is slowly being transformed by Pope Francis. Traditional Catholics are expressing dismay over his third encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti* or “Brothers All,” which denounces populist politics and economic interests allegedly subverting the democratic process. In addition, traditional Catholics are concerned by the Pope’s support of progressive policies regarding climate change and redistribution of wealth, and his minimization of private property as a natural right.

Francis has steadily institutionalized a progressive agenda. Thus far in the United States, he has appointed 63 bishops. Most of these appointments have been liberal clergy. At the same time, many Catholic progressives feel that Pope Francis is letting them down by not proceeding fast enough with promoting a social justice agenda.

His critics within the hierarchy and the laity, whether traditionalist or progressive, agree that Pope Francis is changing the Church. They can see that Francis is closer to the progressive forces in the Vatican, although he is constrained from proceeding full blast with revolutionary changes. The Church changes slowly no matter who is the pope.

Nobody defends Pope Francis as a traditionalist, other than pointing to his genuine commitment to the poor. Serving the poor is a mission that all Catholics believe is one of the central messages that Christ brought to this world. Good works alone will not secure our salvation but do manifest our faith and acceptance of Jesus’s message that we are our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers. There is no disagreement on this within the Church.

This *Mindszenty Report* examines the controversy Pope Francis has created and offers an assessment of his papacy thus far, including the impact of his most recent encyclical, the underreported *Fratelli Tutti*. The *Mindszenty Report* has covered Francis and his progressive statements on previous occasions. (See, e.g., issues dated November 2015 and April 2017.) It is worth recalling these past reports.

We have noted that Pope Francis is not a Marxist or a proponent of “liberation theology.” He told the Italian newspaper *La Stampa* in December 2013 that “Marxist ideology is wrong.” He added, “But I have met many Marxists in my life who are good people, so I don’t feel offended.”¹ Pope Francis’s apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, issued in 2013, condemned neo-liberal economics and “trickle down” economics. “There is nothing in the exhortation that cannot be found in the social doctrine of the Church,” he said in an interview. He later explained, “The promise was that the glass was full, it would overflow, benefitting the poor. But what happens, instead, is that when the glass is full, it magically gets bigger, nothing ever comes out for the poor.”²

Committed to Social Justice

Born in 1936 into an Italian immigrant family in Buenos Aires, the future pontiff decided to become a priest when he was 16, entered a seminary in 1955 and became a novice in the Jesuit order in 1958. Ordained in 1969, he eventually became provincial superior of the Society of Jesus and rector of the Philosophical and Theological Faculty of San Miguel. He experienced differences with the Jesuit order over his rejection of liberation theology and emphasis on educating young Jesuits in pastoral work and popular religiosity. He opposed liberation theology’s call for direct political action. He was forced to resign from the rectorship, and in 1992 he was directed by Jesuit authorities not to reside in Jesuit houses.

He continued to rise, however, in the Argentina hierarchy, becoming the archbishop of Buenos Aires. In this capacity, he emphasized the church’s mission in working in the urban slums of the city. In 2001, Pope John Paul II appointed him a cardinal. He served in a number of capacities in Rome and drew admiration from other cardinals for his personal humility and his commitment to Catholic social justice.

As pope since March 2013, Francis continued to emphasize social justice, which now included a call for sustainable

growth and warnings about climate change. His rhetoric has tended to demonize capitalism. Inequality of wealth, he contends, is caused by free markets and the idolatry of money by greedy capitalists.³ While Pope Francis attempts to qualify his critique of capitalism by using modifiers such as “unbridled,” his language describing free markets as “the dung of the devil” lacks qualification for average listeners. He calls for income redistribution through government action, greater government regulation of markets, and higher minimum wages for all workers.

Often Sounding Anti-Capitalist

In his 2013 letter *Evangelii Gaudium*, Francis wrote that the economy “can no longer turn to remedies that are a new poison, such as attempting to increase profits by reducing the work force and thereby adding to the ranks of the excluded.” In 2015 he proclaimed that the poor have “sacred rights” to labor, lodging and land. Just to ensure his views were not misunderstood, he referred to global austerity measures by the European Union and the World Bank as a form of “new colonialism.”⁴ Pope Francis continues to translate Catholic social justice teachings into a message that often sounds anti-capitalist.⁵

His other political or doctrinal statements have aroused further opposition. He has declared that atheists can go to heaven because “The Lord has redeemed all of us. . . . Even the atheists.” He said of homosexuality, “Who am I to judge?” He lambasts consumer culture and corporate greed as based on an “economy of exclusion and inequality.” He entered into the climate change debate, stating that pollution is a sin and that a binding international agreement to combat global warming is a moral obligation. In September 2015 he insisted that the clergy keep the door open to Catholics who remarry without an annulment following a divorce, and called for the Church to accelerate the annulment procedure for divorced Catholics.⁶

Pope Francis’s encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, issued in late 2020 amid the Covid-19 pandemic, pushed many of his critics over the edge. More than 300 pages long, the encyclical, which received little media attention in the avalanche of competing news stories, warrants a short summary in order to understand his critics.⁷ The encyclical proposes tangible ways to advance Catholic social justice teaching. It declares that the time has truly come to “dream” as a single human family in which we are all brothers and sisters. That sentiment encountered no dissent. It is what he wrote afterwards that drew criticism.

In Chapter One, he warns of selfishness and indifference toward the common good reflected in the prevalence of a market logic based on profit and a culture of racism. The next chapter exhorts people of faith to be like the Good Samaritan by overcoming prejudices, personal interest,

and historic and cultural barriers. In Chapter Three he expresses a view of international relations holding that every country also belongs to foreigners, and goods of the territory may not be denied to those who are in need and come from another place. Rights have no boundaries, so nobody should be excluded from enjoying these rights and sharing in the bounty of a nation.

In Chapter Four, “Heart Open to the World”, Francis writes that migrants fleeing from war, persecution, natural catastrophes or unscrupulous trafficking should be welcomed, supported and integrated into countries receiving them. He believes that unnecessary migration should be avoided, but countries should recognize and respect the right to seek a better life elsewhere. He calls for increasing and simplifying the granting of visas, opening humanitarian corridors, offering opportunities for employment and training, favoring family reunification, and guaranteeing religious freedom.

In following chapters he warns that “the marketplace, by itself, cannot resolve every problem” and advocates strengthening the United Nations’ ability to pursue projects to eradicate poverty and protect human rights. Chapter Seven rejects the concept of a “just war” in a nuclear age and demands that nations affirm “Never Again War.” He calls for the total elimination of nuclear arms and condemns the death penalty. He concludes by asserting that terrorism is due not to religion, but to erroneous interpretations of texts, and also reflects “policies linked to hunger, poverty, injustice, and oppression.”

Criticism of *Fratelli Tutti*

Pope Francis’s exhortation to share the wealth reflects good intentions. *Fratelli Tutti* expresses deep spirituality and concern for the poor. Christians have an obligation to alleviate the sufferings of the poor, the infirm and the disadvantaged. His criticisms of corporate greed and shallow consumer culture should not be dismissed out of hand. Whether the Vatican should present itself as a think tank issuing economic policy recommendations is another matter altogether. The encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* expresses political views and implicit ideological *assumptions about how wealth is created, the nature of private property, immigration policy and environmental policy that go beyond the expertise of a Jesuit-trained theologian.*

Pope Francis heads an organization, the Vatican, worth an estimated \$10 to \$15 billion dollars.⁸ This makes the Vatican one of the wealthiest organizations in the world. Perhaps Francis should have announced that the Vatican is creating a fund to provide clean water to African villagers, or to clean up sewer systems in polluted Latin American cities, or to educate disadvantaged children in underdeveloped countries, or to promote better opportunities for

the mass of unemployed in Italy or Spain. Instead, Pope Francis entered political and policy debates, endorsing left-wing goals.

Fratelli Tutti opened the door to a theological debate on private property. Interestingly, a similar debate has been going on in Iran between traditionalist clerics who argue, correctly, that the Quran explicitly allows for private property, while statist in the government want to nationalize land and industry. Progressive theologians in the Church, including Meghan Clark at St. John's University, the Dominican Fr. Aquinas Guilbeau at Dominican House of Studies and others, welcomed Pope Francis's admonition that the right to property is secondary to the universal distribution of goods.

These progressive theologians were especially enthusiastic about Paragraph 120 of the encyclical, which proclaims in a section entitled "Re-Envisaging the Social Role of Property" that "the Christian tradition has never recognized the right to private property as absolute or inviolable." These theologians noted that Pope Francis had argued in his 2015 encyclical that "the right to private property can only be considered a secondary natural right."⁹

Theological critics of *Fratelli Tutti* were quick to point out that Pope Francis's language was clearly inconsistent with Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, issued in 1883, which states that "the principle of private ownership must be held sacred and inviolable," and that this principle was "first and most fundamental" in addressing the crisis of the modern age and the threat of communism and socialism.

Hostility Toward Private Property

Phil Lawler, a Catholic journalist, took issue with Pope Francis's defenders by commenting, "Throughout *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis shows a clear hostility toward private property, the market economy, and capitalism." He accused Francis of neglecting to stress the significance of strong families for a healthy society as a key corrective of excessive market tendencies, a hallmark of previous social teaching.¹⁰

Lawler was joined by John Horvart, a longstanding defender of tradition and the family who wrote, "He [Pope Francis] assumes that the universal destination of created goods and the private use of property are in constant tension." He added, "For Pope Francis, property owners must provide the destitute with an array of undefined and open-ended needs."¹¹ Horvart sees Pope Francis's call for the wider distribution of goods as having socialist, even communist, undertones.

Catholic author Eric Sammons came closest to capturing the general thrust of *Fratelli Tutti* when he wrote, "This is *not a religious document, but instead a political doc-*

ument with a religious veneer." He points out that Pope Francis's encyclical is not the first to affirm political views, but *Fratelli Tutti* asserts political views under the guise of "religious language to support these views."¹² There is truth in this observation. Pope Francis relies on the biblical story of the Good Samaritan. He draws wide-ranging conclusions from this parable about climate control, immigration, private property and capitalism. The lessons of the Good Samaritan are open for discussion, but specific policy advice is best left to experts and laity, not theologians.

Changing the Church

Pope Francis is changing the church institutionally, including in his appointments of American bishops. So far progressive prelates do not control the leadership of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, with a membership of 441 members, including 273 bishops eligible to vote. The Conference still leans traditional and won't be undone overnight. As the author and long-time Church watcher Tom Reese observed, "It takes a long time to change, but if Pope Francis gets his way, we will see a dramatic change."¹³

Reese believes that the U.S. bishops are generally ideologically and pastorally conservative. About 17 percent of the bishops in the conference may be considered progressive. Some bishops are cultural warriors coming from a traditional perspective while others embrace the "culture of encounter," adopting Francis's image of the Church as a "field hospital."¹⁴

If institutional change is slow, the direction is clear. Pope Francis is filling the American hierarchy with bishops who reflect his views.¹⁵ For example, when Pope Francis accepted the resignation of Philadelphia Archbishop Charles Chaput, he replaced him with Nelson Perez, a liberal who supports changes in church teaching on the ordination of women, gay marriage, and birth control.

Traditionalists are not opposed, and indeed, are committed to caring for the poor. But the Church stands above all else for faith and eternal questions. The Church offers a means for personal conversation with God and spiritual growth. There are deep divisions within the hierarchy and the laity over doctrine, formation and how the Gospel should be spread.

Pope Francis's focus on social justice is admirable, but his pointed policy prescriptions, often expressing more impractical sentiment than theological foundation, have created more division within the Church. Those of the faith need to remain united to defend religious liberty, the sanctity of life and the dignity of each individual, whether it be in Communist China or in Western democracies. †

Call for 'Nuremberg Trials' for Communism

The Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation recently joined an international petition calling for a cultural reckoning for the crimes of Communism. Created by the late brave Soviet dissident Vladimir Bukovsky and the Italian philosophy professor Renato Cristin in honor of the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1919, the petition is found at <https://appeal.nurembergforcommunism.org>. **We invite our readers to join it as individuals to promote worldwide denunciation of the crimes of socialist-communist ideology** and to limit the ideology's spread among future generations, much as the post-World War II Nuremberg trials accomplished for Nazism.

Professor Cristin recently contacted CMF about this project because our organization is dedicated to Venerable Cardinal Mindszenty, whom the University of Trieste professor describes as "one of the great defenders of freedom, of Christianity and its cultural tradition against Communist ideology." The unexpected death of Vladimir Bukovsky in 2019 slowed the project, but since then the petition has attracted thousands of eminent signatories from all over the world. See <https://appeal.nurembergforcommunism.org/signatures/> for a list of signatories. The organizers plan to use the petition to ask the European Parliament and some national parliaments to endorse the project.

An excerpt of the petition follows:

"Since 1917, communist or socialist dictatorships around the world have caused more than 100 million deaths. Not only are they responsible for widespread suppression of individual liberties and incitement of class hatred, but also for the genocide and mass killings inevitable under communist regimes. . . .

"Today, after the catastrophic results of so-called 'real socialism' and of all the other dictatorships over time rooted in communist ideology (as today in places like Venezuela or Cuba), both historic and current events beg for. . . a political and moral judgment on the inevitable results of this ideology. Communism's crimes against humanity must be broadcast and punished.

"Communism did not fall with the Berlin Wall. This ideology is still alive in the world, in states and parties that are openly communist and in political and cultural thought that minimizes and tries to erase the crimes of communism, as if it were a good idea which only happened to coincide with the rise of one brutal regime after another across decades and continents.

"To push back against these apologist influences, we urge the creation of Nuremberg Trials for Communism, a global trial that scrutinizes the very real crimes of this ideology . . . and makes clear to all communism's intrinsic inhumanity and incompatibility with free societies."

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- 1 Philip Pullella, "'I'm No Marxist,' Pope Francis Tells Conservative Critics," *Reuters*, December 15, 2013.
 - 2 Jonathan Capehart, "Pope Francis Turns Other Cheek," *Washington Post*, December 16, 2013; also, "The 'Trickle-Down' Theory the Pope Frowns Upon," *La Stampa*, July 16, 2015.
 - 3 Nick Squires, "Pope Blames Tyranny of Capitalism for Making People Miserable," *The Age*, May 18, 2013; Lizzy Davies, "Pope Blames Tyranny of Capitalism for Making People Miserable," *The Guardian*, May 17, 2013; and "Unbridled Capitalism Is the 'Dung of the Devil,' Says Pope Francis," *The Guardian*, July 9, 2015.
 - 4 http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html; Lizzy Davies, "Pope Says He is Not a Marxist, but Defends Criticism of Capitalism," *The Guardian*, December 15, 2013.
 - 5 Joshua Holland, "Pope Francis Calls Unfettered Capitalism 'Tyranny,'" *Moyers and Company*, November 26, 2013.
 - 6 Anthony Faiola, "'8 of Pope Francis's Most Liberal Statements," *Washington Post*, September 7, 2015; and Michael Day, "Pope Francis Assures Atheists: You Don't Have to Believe in God to Go To Heaven," *The Independent*, October 5, 2015.
 - 7 <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2020-10/fratelli-tutti-pope-fraternity-social-friendship-short-summary.html>.
 - 8 <http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,833509,00.html>.
 - 9 Jonathan Liedl, "Theologians Say Tradition Backs Pope's Teaching on Private Property in *Fratelli Tutti*, Others Express Concerns," *National Catholic Register*, October 20, 2020.
 - 10 Ibid.
 - 11 Ibid.
 - 12 Bryan Foley, "Catholics Criticize Pope Francis's Latest Encyclical as 'political document with a religious veneer,'" *The Christian Post*, January 15, 2021.
 - 13 <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/conservatives-still-rule-us-bishops-conference>.
 - 14 Ibid.
 - 15 Thomas Reese, "Pope Francis Remakes the American Hierarchy, One Bishop at a Time," *National Catholic Reporter*, January 29, 2020.
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The Mindszenty Report is published monthly by

Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation
7800 Bonhomme Ave.
St. Louis, MO 63105
Phone 314-727-6279 Fax 314-727-5897

Subscription rate: \$25 per year
Outside the U.S.A. \$35

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Contributions to the Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

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