



## Catholic Church – The Amaranthine Enemy of Freedom

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Catholic Church history is filled with an avalanche of incidents that proved useful for a critique of the catholic doctrine. Crusades, inquisitions, witch-hunting, and ever-continuing anti-gay stances are all perfectly molded ammunition for the opponents in the likes of Dawkins, Harris, and Hitchens. Unfortunately, no less apologetics is required to combine laissez-faire with infallible papal announcements, which recently transformed into quite outright anti-capitalist rhetoric, than to dismiss atheist adversaries. Catholic Church throughout its rich history resembled more an enemy of freedom than a liberty-friendly institution. Still many attempt merging freedom and Catholicism. An in-depth dissection of such liberty apologetics proves them quite futile.

One of the most significant Catholic libertarians, Stephanie Slade points out in her article *Both Catholic and Libertarian: Is It Really Possible?* that a distinction must be made between an ethical condemnation and a statement about necessary laws. Though Church tries to frighten homosexuals with hellfire into abstinence, this does not directly entail support for the anti-gay state legislature. She is correct. Yes, you can adhere to such horrendous, life-devastating concepts and remain fully compatible with libertarianism. But though some of the Church's positions such as the one on extramarital sex do not include precise instruction on government intervention, one does not have to look far to find instances where the divinely led Catholic Church is quite vocal on the role of the state itself.

*“There is little appreciation of the fact that the alleged “spillover” does not resolve the inequality that gives rise to new forms of violence threatening the fabric of society. It is imperative to have a proactive economic policy (...) Financial speculation fundamentally aimed at quick profit continues to wreak havoc. Indeed, without internal forms of solidarity and mutual trust, the market cannot completely fulfil its proper economic function. (...) The fragility of world systems in the face of the pandemic has demonstrated that not everything can be resolved by market freedom.”* – Fratelli Tutti, Pope Francis

One could imagine an enjoyable drinking game, where participants would have to guess whether the authorship of a particular anti-capitalist tirade belongs to Jorge Bergoglio or Bernie Sanders. Perhaps the two socialists should cut their ghost-writing costs and just recycle each other's speeches?

Catholics hold a belief that the pope is God's representative on earth chosen by the Holy Ghost during the conclave in Sistine Chapel. He is the best administer of God's will out of not only all the gathered cardinals but all-male Catholics on planet Earth. Even if one successfully dismisses his comments as not ex-cathedra binding teaching, he still remains a shepherd leading his flock onto sharp claws of statist wolves. Is Bergoglio, so deeply mistaken about a vital to our lives economic system, truly the *crème de la crème* of all Catholics? Is there no way to have a vicar of Christ uphold both theological truth and restrain from embarrassing tirades? I consider that unlikely. A mouthpiece of God should be held to a higher standard.

Despite his clearly visible flaws Pope Francis, is not the only black sheep nor the darkest one, in the papal pantheon. In the past Church often had a quite symbiotic relationship with the state. Catholic dogma not only lacks overall skepticism but seems to be devoid of any reluctance towards the state.

If any libertarian Catholic was asked how a divinely led state would look without any knowledge of history, they would propose an institution ranging from a night-watchman to an anarchic non-existent being. This notion must be contrasted with the actual Papal State, which existed for 1114 years under the direct, sovereign rule of the pope. The reality was a severely totalitarian nightmare. Feudal abuse and complete lack of freedom thrived under the papal advisory. Taxes were not abolished as an obvious form of theft but levied into Vatican's treasury. The most rudimentary liberties recognized by libertarians were not upheld, by the pontiff. Even Martin Luther though distant from any libertarian philosophy, was so outraged at the abuse of power in the papal state, that his trip to Rome was a significant milestone to a separation from the Church. If the vicars of Christ century after century could not conceive the quite straightforward notion that taxation is theft, banned under the seventh commandment, then how can we see Church as holding any moral truths compatible with libertarianism?

Along the spacious corridors of dozens of galleries of the Paris Pantheon hangs a marvelous painting with a majestic scene of Charles VII's coronation by the Pope. Statists' most sacred medieval ritual assisted by the only salvation concerned Church. I can hardly imagine a more detestable job for any libertarian. One would need a whole ocean of water to wash his hands after setting a crown on a blood-soaked monarch who violently extorted the gold and jewels for the said crown. Yet the Church whole-heartedly supported the divine right of the kings. They approved coronations of feudal monarchs, who would then go on to use that power to harass their denizens. Is there possibly a more abhorrent thing that one ascribing to the libertarian worldview can do? Render power to a despot, whose dominion is limited only by his lifespan. The Church legitimized with its God-given position kings who used violence to bask in robbed fortunes and guard disgusting feudal systems perpetuating enslavement of the lower classes and quite disastrously devoid of many freedoms societies.

If restraint from supporting vile monarchs in their liberty deprived endeavors is too much to ask from those administering god's will on earth, at least they recognized that taxation is theft, did not they? No, a correct interpretation of the seventh commandment implication for the activity of the state is too much to demand from those who wrote entire apostolic constitutions on such vital topics as freemasonry (Providas Romanorum). Ok perhaps they did not condemn the collection of taxes but, at least they did not levy any taxes themselves did they? Thank God that the Council of Trent summoned to clarify a correct catholic position on such matter. *"tithes are due to God or to religion, and it is sacrilegious to withhold them."* Libertarians with their hate for taxes seem quite sacrilegious, do not they? It was not an odd example of abuse of the Church's power by a minute group of sinful people. Clergy levied quite significant taxes in most European countries for centuries and never showed any regret for the institutionalized theft they committed to incrust their ceremonial robes with gold.

If a Catholic libertarian somehow managed to wash his hands after coronating bloodstained emperors, he would simply have to cut them off after extorting citizens of their hard-earned incomes to fill the treasury of the Church. No amount of water could wash away the shame of such a horrific act. Unfortunately, not a mere human wickedness of particular church leaders is responsible for the incompatible with liberty church actions. Many of the core teachings of Catholicism hold quite disastrous for freedom concepts.

One of the core values of libertarianism is the belief in individual responsibility. As we are vehemently opposed to all forms of collectivism, we recognize that only individuals are moral actors, who should be held ethically accountable. You are not responsible for atrocities committed by leaders of your nation, members of your race, or social class; only for your own actions.

Every Catholic is bound by pope Pius XII in his encyclic *Humani Generis* to adhere to a strict interpretation of the doctrine of the original sin.

*"For the faithful cannot embrace that opinion which maintains that either after Adam there existed on this earth true men who did not take their origin through natural generation from him as from the first parent of all, or that Adam represents a certain number of first parents. (...) with regard to original sin, which proceeds from a sin actually committed by an individual Adam and which, through generation, is passed on to all and is in everyone as his own."*

The belief that we are inherently depraved due to the sin of the first man on earth is so fundamental that Catholics are not even allowed to propose the hypothesis that Adam could symbolize a group of people. How does that pair with libertarian philosophy and its cornerstone of individual responsibility? It stands at absolute odds. Humans are held responsible by God for acts committed by other people. If there is an action one is not responsible for, it must be one that happened before someone was conceived. I can potentially imagine myself accepting the doctrine of immaculate conception or the concept of the final judgment, but the notion of original sin seems too absurd to even ponder. Though Catholics are so certain that life begins at conception, sin seems to transcend any limits posed by existence or logic.

Unfortunately, none of those concerning aspects of the church's doctrine and history are addressed by compatibilism proponents. Rather than that, we receive the following piece of argumentation from Stephanie Slade:

*“Since the Second Vatican Council, the Church has placed a particular emphasis on religious freedom. In 1965, Pope Paul VI wrote that “all men are to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits.” To be clear, this position does not imply that every form of worship is equally valid. To the contrary, conscience protections are necessary so that Christians can freely fulfil the obligations of the “one true religion” subsisting “in the Catholic and Apostolic Church.” But it does imply that the option of rejecting the faith entirely must be kept legally available. Anything less would be a crime against human dignity.”*

One can hardly not roll one's eyes at such a statement. After centuries of stifling religious freedoms, pursuing heretics with death penalties, and book burnings in its prime power, in 1965 Church finally noticed that perhaps they should restrain themselves a bit in their freedom abuse. Christopher Hitchens rightly said: “Many religions now come before us with ingratiating smirks and outspread hands, like an unctuous merchant in a bazaar. They offer consolation and solidarity and uplift, competing as they do in a marketplace. But we have a right to remember how barbarically they behaved when they were strong and were making an offer that people could not refuse.”

Tom Woods in defense of libertarianism to his fellow Catholics likes to mention the more pro free-market papal encyclicals: “The socialists, [pope] Leo explains, “hold that by thus transferring property from private individuals to the community, the present mischievous state of things will be set to rights, inasmuch as each citizen will then get his fair share of whatever there is to enjoy.” Such proposals are “emphatically unjust,” and would “rob the lawful possessor, distort the functions of the State, and create utter confusion in the community.”” Those of course can be countered with writings of Pius IX, Leo XIII, and Francis I. At best the Church is inconsistent on the issue of economic freedom. Fortunately, the question of states' involvement in our lives is only that of life and death or misery and prosperity. I am baffled how anyone can make the case that an institution is not only sound on, but the only earthly guardian of all moral principles sent down by an incarnate absolute, and yet cannot understand the most basic entailments of such doctrine for state violence.

A key piece of argumentation for liberty-friendly Catholicism relies on the concept of free will. The Catechism of the Catholic Church contains some at first glance compatible with liberty social doctrine, based on that notion. “Freedom is the power, rooted in reason and will, to act or not to act, to do this or that, and so to perform deliberate actions on one's own responsibility. Human freedom is a force for growth and maturity in truth and goodness; it attains its perfection when directed toward God, our beatitude.” In this sentence, the Church correctly identifies the importance of freedom, however, the words that follow such wonderful statement pervert beauty of any previous assertions:

“the exercise of freedom does not imply a right to say or do everything. (...) By deviating from the moral law man violates his own freedom. (...) The authority required by the moral order derives from God: “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. (...) The duty of obedience requires all to give due honor to authority and to treat those who are charged to exercise it with respect.” Well, what more can I say? Joe Biden is the god-sent ruler who deserves respect, not Let’s Go Brandon chants and ridicule. After all, God installed him in the White House, so he must know what he is doing.

In the end, free will seems to be of illusory importance to liberty. Whether the world is predetermined or not, government use of force is still yielding severe sorrow. With or without free will, the life of humans in South Korea is preferable to that of their Northern neighbors. More than a century ago Nietzsche rightly diagnosed that: “we have the scandal of free will because religion fails to find a better way to prevent God from being responsible for evil”.

Stephanie Slade further writes: *“Most of the time, when Catholicism and libertarianism appear to be at odds, the conflict disappears the moment you realize it’s possible to accept traditionalist beliefs without seeking to impose those views on other people through legislation. Even St. Thomas Aquinas, a “doctor of the Church,” wrote in his Summa Theologica that human laws forbid “only the more grievous vices...and chiefly those that are to the hurt of others, without the prohibition of which human society could not be maintained.”*

Oh, the hubris of citing Aquinas! The same man who espoused such libertarian views in Summa Theologica: *“As for heretics their sin deserves banishment, not only from the Church by excommunication, but also from this world by death. (...) Since forgers and other malefactors are summarily condemned to death by the civil authorities, with much more reason may heretics as soon as they are convicted of heresy be not only excommunicated, but also justly be put to death.”*

A religion, whose greatest theologian, instructs the death penalty for mere utterance of words, cannot be called compatible with libertarianism. Stephanie Slade’s use of St. Thomas’s seeming support for laws against *“only the more grievous vices”* seems to gamble on the reader’s ignorance of what the wisest Christian philosopher actually considers a grievous vice. If the Thomistic view of the just death penalty was implemented today, the corridors of CATO Institute, Reason offices, or even Mises institute would be quite void of human beings. If one deserves state’s ax slicing through one’s neck for even a consideration that Church might be wrong on some topic then how can an honest case be made that he postulates a restrained government? A libertarian tent large enough to include catholic oppressors of such sort would probably cover the whole political landscape. The inclusion of Catholics in the libertarian movement renders the term libertarian useless. If there is a divine being behind the Catholic Church, he seems to be a separated from reality statist.