

Pope tweets about inequality: Should liberals rejoice?

“Inequality is the root of social evil,” tweeted Pope Francis on April 28. This got a lot of people excited. It sounded like the Pope was siding with modern liberals. But is that really his agenda?

Modern liberalism is all about maximizing individual freedom. (“Liberal” comes from the Latin word meaning “free.”) But the Pope does not share modern liberal attitudes towards marriage and the family. So he can’t be your average liberal, with liberal sexual views.

Yet that doesn’t stop some liberals from hoping the Pope is on their side, as if he secretly cares less about “social” issues and more about “economic” issues, like economic inequality.



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They are heartened to read a tweet they can interpret as having a liberal meaning. As with the Pope’s famous, “Who am I to judge?” comment, liberals like to project a liberal meaning onto anything the Pope says.

But surely anything the Pope says should be interpreted in light of Scripture and not in light of liberal ideology. For example, in that famous press interview, the Pope was obviously alluding to the Bible verse, “Judge not, that you may not be judged” (Matthew 7:1). It was no endorsement

of the liberal sexual agenda. But that didn’t stop liberal media commentators from fantasizing otherwise, even when the Pope made subsequent statements reiterating traditional Church teaching on abortion and marriage.

So too with this recent tweet: liberals rejoiced, because they thought it more evidence that the Pope is secretly one of them. Surely the Pope’s tweet is alluding to 1 Timothy 6:10, “the love of money is the root of all evils.” Yet what does it mean when Francis substitutes the word “inequality” for “love of money” in his tweet?

Is the Pope really more interested in the contemporary liberal political project of “equality,” and less interested in traditional scriptural teaching? Let’s examine his words.

Through his Latin Twit-

Latin version of the scripture verse: “*Radix omnium malorum est cupiditas*” (“the root of all evils is the desire” for money).

That verse speaks of an inordinate “desire” (“*cupiditas*”) for money. The Pope substitutes the term “injustice” (“*iniquitas*”) in his tweet. It is a very rich word in Latin. Note the word “iniquity” in

the Pope to be condemning in his tweet. But the modern liberal worldview, which the Pope does not share is that individual personal freedom in the present must trump any other concerns.

That is why sexual freedom has become symbolic of what liberals prize most. In their ideology, individuals are part of a social contract negotiated with others in order to maximize individual personal freedom. The maximization of individual freedom is taken as what is most “natural,” as what human nature requires most, in order to be happy.

But the conservative political philosopher Roger Scruton explains why this modern liberal view of human nature is false: “Individuals have rights, but only because they also have duties and responsibilities, and none of these things are ‘natural’ – on the contrary, rights and duties form a reciprocal web of obligation that is formed by and in response to history.”

You do not get to choose the family or nation you are born into or to select from only some of your obligations to succeeding generations. In this sense, history is even more important for understanding rights, rather than seeing them solely in terms of what is “natural.”

Classical liberalism, with its appeal to abstract “natural rights,” merely sought to make the state a guardian of individual liberties. Conservatives, however, emphasized the importance of See SOCIETY – Page 8



ter account, Francis simultaneously tweeted: “*Iniquitas radix malorum*” (“Injustice is the root of evils”), in which the phrase “*radix malorum*” (“the root of evils”) directly invokes the

English comes from it. That is one of its meanings; but it also means: “inequality, unevenness; unfavorableness, difficulty; unfairness, injustice, unreasonableness.”

When does a “desire” become an unjust desire? When does “inequality” become an “injustice”? These are the questions I take our polyglot Pope as inviting us to consider in light of Scripture.

With Francis, I answer: Whenever we exalt our individual selves, whenever we claim individual “freedom” at the expense of others. For example, someone can love money so much that their desire for money is indulged as a vast expense offloaded onto others. A person can selfishly enrich themselves in the present, at the expense of future generations that must foot the bill.

The pursuit of present profit, with no regard for others, living or dead, is the injustice that I understand

Society cannot survive without families

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historical duties and obligations as the more significant, concrete social realities: some inequalities are both necessary and just.

For example, we are unequal to both the unborn and the dead. There are more of them than us. What, then, if our love of money is indulged at their expense? What if our present desires are blinding us to our duties and obligations to all the generations transcend-

ing us?

Responding to classical liberalism's emphasis on nature, conservatives showed how nature is inescapably woven into history's web of social obligations. In response, modern liberalism no longer talks of nature but rather simply of "inequality." Divorced from nature, it now seeks only to use the state "as a machine that takes charge of civil society and forces it into some egalitarian mold."

But as Scruton points out, "society cannot survive without families, without enduring commitments, without an endless web of obligation that ties us to the unborn and the dead."

Pope Francis agrees. And that's why he condemns "*iniquitas*."

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