Review of Pope Francis, *Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future*

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The argument of the book is that a great set back or crisis such as covid-19 provides an opportunity to stop and reflect on whether we wish to proceed in the future as we have in the past. This book argues strongly that we should not. What we should change, it maintains, is neo-liberalism or the market based economy with minimal government controls.

The market state is criticized in the book. For one thing, its weak government institutions are now misplaced, since we need strong institutions to cope with climate change, e.g. fires, which are nearly beyond our power to control.

And the market state de-couples economics and morality, which the Pope ‘decries.’ Such decoupling has the effect of putting the economy in the hands of technocrats who have little interest in morality. In any event, such de-coupling puts too much of the life of society out of the reach of ethics. Moreover, the market state has made some moral enormities acceptable, such as the huge inequalities in wealth, whereby half of the world’s wealth is owned by 1% of the population.

Pope Francis re-couples economics and morality by making the goal of economics the pursuit of the common good, which involves sharing the riches of the world among everyone, and regenerating nature, the source of the riches. The common good also includes obviously moral goods like social solidarity and fraternity.

Pope Francis believes that neo-liberalism has contributed to the appearance of populist politicians like Trump.

We have been told that society is just an amalgam of individual interests each pursuing their own best interests, that the unity of the peoples is mere fable, that we are powerless before the might of the market and the state, and that life’s purpose is profit and power (p.99).

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He comments further that the dominant world view of Western Societies is suspicious of the bonds of community and culture and that ‘hyper-individualism’ has destroyed social solidarity and culture.

The Pope defends the concept of ‘a people.’ He knows that the concept was exploited by fascists in the last century, so makes his own view explicit:

‘The People’ is not a logical concept; it can only be reached by intuition, by entering into its spirit, its heart, its history, and traditions (p.102).

He believes that the methods he recommends to establish the replacement for the market state will help to build solidarity and fraternity within it. The method to which he gives most emphasis is theological-spiritual discernment, which is a way of seeking God’s guidance in conflict resolution. This is seen as a way of forging unity from tension, holding together differences to make them fruitful, rather than letting them lapse into contradiction. It is not a compromise which is being sought but a new position. Francis’ enthusiasm for this is due to his having used it successfully on several large-scale occasions. He writes that it requires prayer, dialogue, listening, and a lot of patience.

The book offers a critique and a vision. The issues it raises are crucial for our times.

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