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CATHOLIC SOCIALISM: CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT GOD, SOCIETY WITHOUT MAN

ANTOINE CLARKE

I stopped going to church regularly in about 1982. My decision to leave was not theological but blatantly political. I can remember the sermon, given in the French Catholic Notre Dame Church in Central London, which persuaded me to go. It was a call for prayer on behalf of the people of Nicaragua in their heroic struggle against foreign imperialist oppression.

I didn't then know all that much about Nicaragua. I knew the name of its capital city, the colour of its flag, its rough position on a globe and guessed that Spanish was its dominant language. I had heard of someone called Somoza. One other thing I knew: that in Nicaragua, a pro-Moscow government had closed down a Catholic newspaper, and was persecuting independent movements such as the Catholic Church.

The sermon was given by a priest who I believe to have been a May 1968 student protester. I did not then use the term libertarian to refer to a property favouring anarchist. I did not then believe that capitalism was morally justifiable. But I sure as hell knew that the Soviet Empire was the worst mass murderer in history.¹ I knew that according to Soviet definitions that I was both a "class enemy" and a "fascist reactionary" by virtue of believing that Stalin was worse than Trotsky.² I knew that most of the congregation consisted of people who would not be allowed or able to survive under Soviet Socialism. I also knew what a basket case the Soviet economy was: one of the big international issues of the day was how much subsidized grain would be exported by the USA and Canada to the Soviets.³ I remembered from history lessons that Russia was the world's biggest exporter of wheat in 1900.

In my mind the priest who prayed for victory to the Sandinistas was effectively a fifth-columnist. He was almost certainly not intentionally supporting the victory of the Soviet Union's brand of socialism, yet his actions were indistinguishable from those of a KGB agitator. Since then I have examined the writings of and listened to literally hundreds of liberation theologians, Socialists who pretend to be Christians and Christians who deduce from the New Testament that a radical and Socialist movement should challenge the morality of the "cash nexus".

USEFUL IDIOTS AND ATHEISTS

In this paper I am going to consider the position of Roman Catholics who believe in Socialism. I restrict myself in this way because of three factors: the first is that different Christian traditions vary to such an extent that it is not realistic to provide an exhaus-

sive analysis here. To give but one example, there are Protestant denominations which insist that individual free will is an illusion. There are other Protestant sects which claim the redeemability of Man from Original Sin. The Catholic tradition is that predestination is false, that each person has the individual freedom to choose between different courses of action (free will), and that it is this power to discriminate which is the foundation for moral behaviour. The second factor is that I do not consider myself to be competent to write about some of the Protestant creeds. The third reason is that within the Catholic Church, there is an ideological struggle underway, which it is by no means certain that the Socialists are winning.⁴

I consider that Catholic Socialists fall into one of two categories. There are those who are really Atheists, whose objective is to destroy religion from within. They believe that the New Testament is a useful fiction to be subverted to the cause of creating a Marxist state: total control of the economy, total power to the state to enforce "social justice". "Render unto Caesar that which belongs to Caesar" is the favourite biblical quote of such people. The parable of the talents on the other hand is purged from their minds.⁵

Then there are those who don't recognise the significance of a distinction between voluntary action and the coercive apparatus of taxation. For the most part, Catholics who believe in Socialism tend to have a very blurred image of what Socialism actually involves practically. They appear to believe that every moral person is "obviously" a Socialist and that their opponents are either evil, devoid of compassion, insane, ignorant or amoral.

This an extremely dangerous assumption for Christians to make. From my contact with such people I could easily imagine them demanding that the British government should give money to people who are "fighting poverty" without inquiring whether these people are in fact Marxists intent on establishing the "dictatorship of the Proletariat" in such countries as Peru, Namibia, Nicaragua, and Ireland. When I point out that Sendero Luminoso is the most vicious guerrilla movement in the world, I am confronted with a blank expression which indicates that the goodness of the intention: giving money to combat poverty, is the extent to which the Christian Socialist is prepared to think. The same thing happens when I mention the homophobic attitudes of the SWAPO, the anti-clerical violence of the Sandinistas, the consistent evil of the IRA (taking money in succession from the Kaiser, Hitler, Brezhnev, and Gaddafi).⁶

The Atheists believe that the New Testament is a useful fiction to be subverted to the cause of creating a Marxist state: total control of the economy, total power to the state to enforce "social justice". Such people should be regarded as implacable enemies of liberty. There is no point whatsoever in exchanging ideas in private with such people.⁷ It is only worthwhile debating with them to expose in public their imposture and the nature of their values to other Christians who might otherwise assume that the closet Ath-eists were in fact of sound faith. Examples of such people can be found in the Communist terror groups of Colombia, where a former Jesuit priest became the leader of a particularly nasty gang which tortures, rapes, pillages and murders in the name of historical necessity. Incidentally, "historical necessity" is regarded as false teaching in the Catholic Church and was historically the main intellectual criticism

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FOR LIFE, LIBERTY AND PROPERTY

made by successive Popes against Marxism.⁸ In Columbia there is the additional temptation to make fortunes out of both extortion rackets and drug smuggling. An odd way to spread the Gospel I would have thought.

In Europe these people can generally be exposed by simply discussing the relative or absolute nature of morality. A Catholic believes that morality isn't relative and that responsibility for our individual actions resides at the level of each of us as individuals. A Socialist pretending to be a Catholic is likely to slip up in a discussion of free-will.

THE BELIEF THAT THE STATE IS BENIGN, AND THAT INTENTIONS MATTER MORE THAN COSTS OR RESULTS

The basic fallacy of Catholics who call themselves Socialist is that they seem to be convinced that the only thing wrong with the British state is that it is often run by the "evil" or "misguided" Tories. Because they tend to be extremely poorly informed about world affairs and the history of Europe over the past four centuries, they seem to assume that the problems involving tyranny in other countries are purely the result of evil or misguided foreign equivalents of the Tories. I suspect that the image of the enabling state is based on a view of the benign British State which was romanticised in the late Victorian period. It is no surprise that the appearance of Christian socialism coincided with the existence in this country of the least oppressive national governments (Conservative or Liberal, but *not* Labour) that the world has ever known.

Among those people who believe in Socialism because "every normal person does" it is generally the case that doubts about the viability of Socialism in practice do exist. In fact, a debate with a Christian Socialist has some similarities with a debate with a Socialist Party of Great Britain (SPGB) activist. You the libertarian are portrayed as an advocate of every single instance of injustice and personal misery in the world. Ever. We the Socialists are defenders of the pure, the untried, which would make everything wonderful if only *you* weren't such heartless beasts. The libertarian is selectively portrayed as the defender of the evil status quo and the subverter of all that is decent, whilst the Socialist refuses to endorse anything that is wrong today, but claims that there are no risks whatsoever in trashing the present system for utopia.

But Catholics are supposed to accept an element of the conservative tradition: utopia is unattainable on Earth, including a Socialist utopia. Paradise is lost on Earth, at least until Judgment Day. (The SPGB doesn't share such a healthy skepticism.) To persuade a Catholic Socialist that Socialism is not the right way to go about creating a just society, it is possible to take each aspect of the Socialist agenda and examine its flawed purposes and its disastrous results. One can take a particular Socialist welfare programme, ask the Christian Socialist what it is supposed to accomplish, and then do a Charles Murray exercise in pointing out the actual disastrous effects of these policies.⁹ One can start by pointing out the moral cost of taxation: it is a violation of moral behaviour precisely because taxation is involuntary. Therefore taxation robs the taxpayer of the opportunity for moral choice by reducing his or her power to make moral judgments. But a Catholic is supposed to believe that only choices that are made freely can be considered to have a moral context. Therefore to reduce someone's power to make moral choices is to undermine morality, albeit by possibly reducing the capacity of individuals to do evil things also. To engage in a political programme of preventing people from making free choices, either through the application of secular legislation, or by the economic expedient of reducing the individual's spending power via taxation, is to usurp God's position (something a Marxist understands very well), it is to reduce adults to the moral status of unreasoning and dependent children. The purpose of condemning taxation as undermining the potential of the individual to make morally meaningful choices is to persuade a Christian that taxation is a morally dubious activity justified only by the emergency nature of welfare relief. It is also a useful way of reminding someone that public spending isn't free.

The way that taxation or state regulation is often justified is, first, to claim a deficit in the level of "necessary" welfare provision by

voluntary means. Such a situation allows the Christian Socialist to invoke a "lifeboat scenario": mere ownership of a lifeboat does not justify someone imposing death by drowning on those people who find themselves in the lifeboat and are unable to pay for their rescue. The argument goes that the person who has more than enough is obliged to contribute to the welfare of others in an emergency.

Our problem as libertarians is that a little more state intervention or welfare provision might always be helpful, even if it wasn't an effective use of capital. An example of capital misapplication is the animal quarantine system in the UK since the Second World War. There has not been a single household pet screened in quarantine for six months which has ever been found to carry rabies. Every year, however, hundreds of pets die in quarantine. This isn't deliberate; they are just less well looked after than they would have been by their owners. There is no prospect of a rabies epidemic in this country caused by people bringing pets across the English Channel, rabies having virtually disappeared from France without quarantine restrictions existing there. Millions of pounds of public money are spent to negative effect. But, the cause is good, so it has to be done, according to those people who believe that mere costs or mere results don't matter.

The key elements of the "do-gooder" approach are the beliefs that we are in an "emergency", that the state is the only organisation able to cope with it, and that the violation of a taxpayer's right to dispose of his or her possessions is *not* justified but mitigated by the intended outcome of a state welfare programme.

A Socialist may take a Kantian ethical view of such expenditure: it is sufficient that the purpose is good: making poor people live in nicer housing. If a block of flats built by a state quango collapses, killing several supposed beneficiaries, this doesn't cause a reassessment of the housing programme's aims. A good definition of Socialism is that "it is sufficient that our cause is just, we are entitled to do evil things even if they don't actually achieve anything worthwhile". But a Catholic cannot justify the abrogation of somebody's freedom to make moral decisions merely for another's welfare plan, if the welfare plan turns out not merely to be ineffective, but to have created a worse situation. If a taxpayer's money is used to carry out compulsory euthanasia of handicapped people (a German welfare programme of the early 1940s), is the taxpayer responsible for the evil of the programme? Without his money, the evil could not have occurred. According to Ayn Rand, to comply with government regulations is *not* a moral sanction. The people who are responsible are the people who organised the gassing of handicapped patients. To claim that someone who was compelled to pay taxes is responsible for the use to which those taxes were put is to ignore the difference between voluntary actions and coercion. Hence the taxation was itself evil, because it compelled people to contribute towards an evil political objective, by removing the power of individuals to make a moral choice about compulsory euthanasia programmes. It is this confusion which Socialists exploit to justify their methods.

To coerce somebody into participating in a moral endeavour is to deny that person the opportunity for making a moral decision of his own. This is to usurp the individual's ownership of his own person. To put it simply — it is a presumption of powers which rightly only belong to God (see my LA Paper¹⁰ on John Locke), yet which even the Almighty has seen fit to delegate to us as individuals. A Socialist (especially a Marxist-Leninist) will of course not care — he wishes precisely to usurp the ownership of the individual — to play God.

SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS AND BLISSFUL IGNORANCE

On the one hand a Christian is often persuaded that his views are perfect and that no amount of cynical manipulation (what we call "debate") will cause the serene certainty of righteousness to be disturbed. This happens to be the mortal sin of self-righteousness, but it will do you no good to point this out to your Christian Socialist interlocutor.

One the other hand a Roman Catholic who doesn't believe in free will is a fraud or plain ignorant. A Roman Catholic (as the Reverend Ian Paisley so rightly says) also does not have an undivided

belief in nationhood: the Universal Church transcends national boundaries. The motive, therefore, of a genuine Roman Catholic for demanding redistributive taxation and state intervention is not to make the state more powerful for the sake of power. “Render unto Caesar that which belongs to Caesar” can not only be taken to signify a multinational authority, but also seems to imply that there are things that do *not* belong to the State.

A Catholic who believes in Socialism because of concern for the poor will not be happy to discover that the combination of VAT on housing repairs, planning permission legislation and local taxation combine to encourage the dilapidation of poor neighbourhoods. This will not be sufficient to persuade a Christian Socialist that the Welfare State must be scrapped asap. After all he knows that we’re either evil, devoid of compassion, insane, ignorant or amoral. But free will implies that we have some responsibility for the outcome of our actions as well as for our intentions, and a Catholic is supposed to believe that he possesses free will.

WHY MANY CATHOLICS WOULDN’T ACCEPT A LIBERTARIAN UTOPIA

Therefore an intelligent critic of Socialism will — in practice — always have a chance of a hearing from a Catholic, provided that the critic is prepared to demonstrate that a capitalist economy is both materially effective and also morally superior by virtue of its permitting and rewarding the exercise of moral choices by the individual. Such a line of reasoning would tend to reduce a Catholic to two arguments. The first would be to question whether the quantity of charity would be sufficient to supplant the existing welfare state (a reasonable query in my opinion). The second is to ask if anarcho-capitalism doesn’t presuppose an excessively optimistic view of human nature. Both of these arguments tend to be either ignored or glossed over by libertarians.

It is simply not good enough for libertarians to point to pre-welfare state provision of hospitals and assume that the immediate abolition of the National Health Service would cause no problems. For a start, the cost of treatments bears virtually no comparison between then and now. I’m certain that a better arrangement would eventually emerge from the liquidation of the NHS, but that is a long way from my having no doubts as to the hardship which would arise in individual cases for what could be several years. I sometimes wonder how the minds of some Murray Rothbard fans work when they glibly write off thousands or millions of lives in the name of “true freedom”. I’m not surprised that some people regard libertarianism as just as much of a menace as the Marxist theory of historical necessity.¹¹

If there is a reasonable doubt that the immediate and total dismantling of the welfare state would lead to misery for thousands of individuals in the short term, and that we have no real idea how long things would remain as bad or worse than the current situation, it is surely the case that a libertarian is either evil, devoid of compassion, insane, ignorant or amoral. Any attempt to counter this by reference to an “Austrian model” or the “Micklethwait’s Hockey Sticks diagram” is hilarious: to the “unenlightened” observer, this looks incredibly like a woolly version of a Soviet five year plan.¹² Gosplan without the figures!

On the subject of human nature, it is pertinent to ask if the libertarians aren’t being naive, especially given that our analysis as to why Socialism cannot work is based to no small degree on the claim that people aren’t naturally good (or bad) and that any system designed to function only with good people will fail.

A Catholic criticism of libertarians is that we are the starry eyed idealists. We’re the people who say that an armed society is a polite society. We say that monopoly does not need to be countered by legislation. We claim that modern expensive medical treatment will be supplied by the charitable works of the wealthy for the benefit of the poor ... or that it doesn’t matter! Some libertarians even claim that no armed forces should be maintained by the state as of this moment. That to default on the national debt would be A Good Thing!¹³ That murder is a tort not a crime.¹⁴ And all because Murray Rothbard said so.

Who are the now superstitious victims of irrational credulity?

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. The total dead for the Second World War is estimated at 55 million. This includes civilians of all participant states. A tally of victims of Soviet Communism must include at least some of the Second World War figure, if only (i) the “liquidated” bourgeoisie of Eastern Europe, (ii) the Polish officers and troops massacred at Katyn, (iii) British prisoners of war “rescued” from the Nazis and sent to labour camps, (iv) Soviet civilians and troops purged for “treason”, (v) ethnic Germans resettled into Siberia, (vi) people denied food because of the war priority, (vii) “punishment troops” who would have been fired at from behind to persuade them to advance in human wave attacks on the German lines. In addition to these figures a number in excess of 70 million is generally accepted as the peacetime casualties of Soviet Communism. The most extreme figures that I have seen for victims of Nazism suggest about 12 million (which probably includes quite a few which have been switched from the Soviet account). All the other big massacres this century have been tribal (Rwanda, Nigeria/Biafra) or the result of a pro-communist government: China 100 million, Cambodia 1 million (a quarter of the population), Vietnam 3 million, Afghanistan 4 million.

By way of contrast the widely abhorred Chilean counter-revolution of 1973 resulted in the widely publicised “football stadium massacre”. After that the military dictatorship was accused of carrying out about 70 extra-judicial killings per year. This figure includes armed guerrillas. Life expectancy was higher in Chile than in Soviet Russia too.

In giving vague figures I am aware that regarding the Katyn massacre the official Soviet position was successively: (i) it didn’t happen, (ii) it was the Germans that did it, (iii) we might have done it, but it was a misunderstanding, (iv) there weren’t that many bodies, (v) it was an irresponsible act by a paranoid leader. The current Russian Communist line is that it was justified and that the previous “apology” was itself an act of treason. Under the circumstances, I’m not prepared to offer precise figures.

2. All right. I might have been mistaken about Trotsky being nicer than Stalin.
3. In the late 1970s US President Carter seemed to be involved in annual negotiations with the Soviet regime over how much subsidized grain would be exported to the USSR.
4. I have two reasons for optimism. (i) The present Pope has taken a more than neutral view about the relative merits of the liberal democratic order versus socialism. (ii) Opus Dei — a wealthy and much feared enemy of liberation theology — now includes the works of Ludwig von Mises in its reading lists.
5. The Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25 14-30):

It will be as when a man who was going on a journey called in his servants and entrusted his possessions to them. To one he gave five talents; to another, two; to a third, one — to each according to his ability. Then he went away. Immediately the one who had five talents went and traded with them, and made another five. Likewise, the one who received two made another two. But the man who received one went off and dug a hole in the ground and buried his master’s money. After a long time the master of those servants came back and settled accounts with them. The one who had received five talents came forward bringing the additional five. He said, “Master, you gave me five talents. See, I have made five more.” His master said to him, “Well done, my good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities. Come, share your master’s joy.” [Then] the one who had received two talents also came forward and said, “Master, you gave me two talents. See, I have made two more.” His master said to him, “Well done, my good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities. Come, share your master’s joy.” Then the one who had received one talent came forward and said, “Master, I knew you were a demanding person, harvesting where you did not plant and gathering where you did not scatter; so out of fear I went off and buried your talent in the ground. Here it is back.” His master said to him in reply, “You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I did not plant and gather where I did not scatter? Should you not then have put my money in the bank so that I could have got it back with interest on my return? Now then! Take the talent from him and give it to the one with ten. For to everyone who has, more will be given and he will grow rich; but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And throw this useless servant into the darkness outside, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth.”

It is worth noting that “to each according to his ability” is the method of determining the distribution of venture capital. Note also the injunction to use a bank and collect interest. The same parable as recounted by St Luke is even less socialist.

6. It is worth noting in defence of such “useful idiots” (a Leninist expression to describe well-meaning supporters of the Soviet Union abroad) that the British government has allowed both SWAPO and Sendero Luminoso to operate in London, at a time when both were engaged in a terrorist war against “western imperialism” and that the IRA is allowed to enter talks with the British government whilst its weapons and expertise were being used to engineer the bloodiest terrorist outrage in British history. I can’t readily think of any country which has ever handled terrorism as badly. I haven’t the space to mention the details of Islamic fundamentalist terrorist

networks based in the UK, the Kurdish PKK, the Tamil Tigers or the IRA's drug trafficking and extortion rackets in London. Given such a terrible example by the British government, we should perhaps be patient with Christians whose actions inadvertently support terror, poverty and mass-murder. The response of the "Catholic" Irish Republic government was to consider the internment of terrorist suspects whilst the instinct of the "Christian Socialist" British government was to destroy another fragment of Constitutional freedom by allowing a "criminal" to be convicted on the unsupported statement of a police officer.

7. I realise that this comes across as the sort of intolerant behaviour which is ascribed to Ayn Rand disciples in their dealings with libertarians, but there is a difference: an Atheist pretending to be a Christian is of necessity a liar. It is difficult to imagine how any statement could be made by such a person and taken at face value. The scope for any discussion is made difficult by the intrinsic dishonesty of the atheist-pseudo-Christian-socialist's position.
8. As if on cue! Between the writing of the first draft of this paper and the final edit, His Holiness Pope John Paul II has just published a pamphlet (*Faith and Reason*) discussing the importance of philosophy. He lists "historicism" as an intellectual fallacy with particularly nasty consequences. Historicism notes the apparent existence of a chain of causation in history and deduces that there is an automatically determined outcome, which can be discovered by a "scientific analysis" (which isn't scientific) and manipulated by a government élite of experts (not experts, doubtful about the élite). The willingness to sacrifice the individual to some utopia is particularly nasty when it turns out that the cure is far worse than the alleged disease. Referring to the slogan: "No omelette without breaking eggs!", Professor Kenneth Minogue famously asked: "Where's the bloody omelette then?"
9. Novak M. and Preston R., *Christian Capitalism or Christian Socialism?*, IEA Health and Welfare Unit, London, 1994. Although Richard Preston never quotes Murray's *Losing Ground*, the very titles of his socialist defences of welfare e.g. "Reclaiming the Ground", proves that some doubts were sown. Also it is worth reading Michael Novak's account of his conversion from "liberalism" (in the American sense of socialism) to "neo-conservatism".
10. *Private Ownership Versus Common Ownership: The Problems of Locke's Proviso*, Philosophical Notes No. 33, Libertarian Alliance, London, 1995.
11. We tend to associate critics of libertarianism with either collectivists (who object to our philosophical and economic premises), conservatives (who oppose our confidence in technology, who believe that we are libertines) or moderate state interventionists (who believe that a little bit of state oppression isn't bad). A perhaps more unexpected attack on libertarianism comes from Professor Maurice Flamand, in his highly informative booklet in the *Que sais-je?* series published in France. 1. *Si «libertaire» signifiait, à l'origine: anarchiste, certains libéraux méritent ce qualificatif péjoratif par les excès irresponsables de leurs revendications incontrôlées de liberté. Il est piquant qu'ils aient revendiqué d'être ainsi appelés ... Rappelons qu'«anarchie» signifie par son étymologie, «absence de gouvernement»*. Footnote 1, page 15 in: Flamand, M., *Le libéralisme contemporain*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, France, 2nd revised edition, 1993. Translated into English, the passage reads: "1. If 'libertarian' meant originally: anarchist, certain liberals earn this pejorative qualification by the irresponsible excesses of their uncontrolled demands for liberty ... Lets us remind ourselves that 'an-archy' means by its etymology, 'absence of government'."
12. Micklethwait's Hockey Sticks theory of state intervention and state deregulation is a useful way to picture the problem of arguing for state deregulation and against state regulation. Without the benefit of a diagram the following description of the short and long term effects of state intervention and state deregulation will have to do: If the state intervenes in an activity which it has previously not regulated, the short term effect will tend to be beneficial: the sudden investment of large sums of money and the time of thousands of broadly educated people will often result in swift, dramatic results. An example of this in the USA was the Apollo programme. There is no likely scenario in which a totally private sector effort by the US space and aeronautical industry would have landed a man on the moon before 1970. In the short term, the creation of the National Air and Space Administration (NASA) was beneficial to the advancement of space exploration. However, once the political objective was seen to have been achieved: "We beat the Russkies to the Moon!", there was no longer a political will to pump more capital into large scale space projects in the 1970s, and the private sector had been crowded out by the massive distortions to space research caused by the very existence of NASA. A private sector approach might not have resulted in manned space vehicles until the 1980s, but inhabitable space stations with some economic functions would probably already be in operation, which would speed up the next fifty years of space exploration. (For more details on this example see *Boom and Slump in Space: What the American Space Effort Has Been and What It Could Have Been* by James P. Hogan, Economic Notes 29, Libertarian Alliance, London, 1990.) Although there has not been a complete deregulation of the telecommunications industry in the United Kingdom since 1980, a comparison between what it was legal to do in 1979 and what is legal in 1999 shows that a considerable degree of market activity is now possible. The initial consequences of the preparation of British Telecommunications for privatisation and the subsequent creeping competition policy were that thousands of tele-

phone booths were out of order, prices shot up (especially line rentals), and incredibly gaudy telephone sets appeared. A secondary consequence was that until about 1993 BT lost market share every month in telephone and fax machine equipment. By 1993 however, the UK had the highest proportion of mobile telephone users in the world. BT started selling a better cheap fax machine than any Japanese model. I can't remember the last time I saw a public telephone out of order. In at least one case BT was prevented from introducing a price cut by the state regulator on the grounds that it was an excessive price reduction.

The privatisation of the British Railways would almost certainly fit into this pattern if: (a) the sale of franchises hadn't been distorted by the then threat by the Labour party to renationalize the lot at punitive rates, and (b) if the present Labour administration hadn't effectively announced that certain franchises will not be renewed. This has had the effect on the franchise holders of slashing long term investment plans. Even with Railtrack, the track and station owners, the short term chaos is a reflection of pent-up problems caused by lack of investment in maintenance. I understand that some of the current disruptions are caused by a simultaneous large increase in railway use: up more than one fifth since privatisation and the need to rewire large portions of the safety signalling network.

13. My paper *The Micropolitics of Free Market Money: A Proposal*, (Economic Notes No. 39, Libertarian Alliance, London, 1992) has been quoted in an MIT paper written by John M. M. Dykes (*Digital Cash and the Development of the Apolitical Currency*, 1995, published the World Wide Web), because it addressed some of the commonsense objections to the privatisation of money. None of the academic writers on the subject have offered what I would consider a plausible answer to the two questions which would determine the likelihood of private currencies: (1) What problem is solved by introducing hundreds of initially unstable currencies? (2) How do these theoretical benefits weigh up to the convenience of a single standard currency, even though it is a state imposed standard? I note that it is convenient that most light bulb fittings are standard, that IBM compatible PCs are all broadly interchangeable.

I would also like to know, given that most National Savings bonds are privately held, how the defaulting of national debt (in the name of ending the oppression of taxation) at the cost of robbing thrifty individuals' savings (the victims of the defaulting) can be considered a libertarian approach. I have on my wall Russian bonds dating from the last time a group of demagogues tried defaulting in 1917. It doesn't seem to have helped Russia become a libertarian Paradise on Earth. The disastrous effect of this theft of private capital on the French rentier class in particular, between the World Wars is also glossed over.

14. It is a principle of law that the dead cannot be the victims of a libel. I think the tort argument runs that a dead person isn't a person. Therefore a corpse can't claim. Therefore the only actual victims of a murder are the relatives (if any). This is a very bizarre way of recognising individual rights. In a way, this lunacy (murder as tort) does a wonderful job of illustrating the significance of the natural rights (life, liberty and property) as opposed to other "libertarian" tendencies which rely on collective utility or a purely self-centred subjective hedonism. I am often disappointed by the official Objectivist position of refusing to debate with libertarians. It's not so surprising when one sees the calibre of some of the supposed "leading lights" in the libertarian movement.

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A Moral Basis for Liberty, by Rev Robert A. Sirico, CSP, with commentaries by Rt Hon The Lord Lawson of Blaby and William Oddie, IEA, London, 1994. William Oddie is a convert from Anglicanism to Roman Catholicism and is currently the editor of the *Catholic Herald* newspaper.

Also interesting are the following writings of the present Pope.

Encyclical Letter Centesimus Annus of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II on the Hundredth Anniversary of Rerum Novarum, published in 1991.

Encyclical Letter Fides et Ratio of the Supreme Pontiff to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Relationship Between Faith and Reason, published in 1998.

Numerous editions exist worldwide of both texts. they are also available on the World Wide Web at www.vatican.va (click on "Holy Father" icon, then "John Paul II", then "Encyclicals").

TANSTAAFL *Times* now follows and *The Norlonto Review* will follow developments in the ideological struggle within the Catholic Church. Both can be obtained (will be obtainable) through the Libertarian Alliance.

For an overview of the British debate in the Catholic media, see Melanie McDonagh's article in the *Evening Standard*, London, Wednesday 23 December 1998, page 61.

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