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The Paradox in the Simultaneous Existence of Catholicism and Capitalism

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Is it considered a paradox to identify as a Catholic Purist and simultaneously practice Capitalism?

Jin Tae Kim

What is Catholicism?

Catholicism is a branch of Christianity that focuses on teachings in the Holy Trinity, the seven sacraments, the commandments of God, the resurrection of the dead, and the immortality of the soul of each human being.

Free will in Catholicism vs Capitalism

In Catholicism, God does not control us, nor tell us what to do. Whatever we choose to do with our lives is determined by our own free will.

Capitalism, similarly, also seems like it promotes the idea of “free will” for all: a free market society, where individuals are free to make their own economic choices, whether that be to save, invest, consume, or spend.

However, it is impossible to have complete freedom and be Catholic, because to be free in a capitalistic society is to be at the top, to get to the top you must compete, trade, consume, and exploit capital and labor which is clearly against fundamental Catholic principles.

Capitalism contradicts Commandments:

6) You shall not commit adultery.

True adultery is not to copulate outside marriage, but to copulate in marriage without love: simple adultery just violates the Law from outside, while marriage without love destroys it from within, turning the letter of the Law against its spirit. So, to paraphrase Brecht yet again: what is simple adultery compared to (the adultery that is a loveless) marriage.” Zizek and Milbank, *The Monstrosity of Christ*, 50-82 (Page 70)

7) The seventh commandment states that “You shall not steal” (Exodus 20:15) Capitalism solely promotes profit, and large businesses and corporations will do anything to achieve that because they value profit over the good of their own workers.

9-10) You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife/goods.

Greed and envy can only develop in a consumerist society because you cannot become rich in a society in which nobody is poor. Economic inequality must exist in order for people to be greedy, feel envy, and covet. The so-called “freedom” that capitalism gives to people is filled with greed and envy of surpassing others and possessing wealth. No matter what class you are in, in capitalism, everyone is capable of coveting.



Real-World Examples

-The church hosts “offerings” during mass to convince people that they are fighting “destructive consumerism” when in reality, the offerings are funds to expand the church and to buy more materials for the church.

-When Trump was at his business stages before his presidency, “he perfected the art of using bankruptcy to shield himself from the consequences of bad decisions while leaving employees twisting in the wind. Now, all throughout the United States, executives who manage their companies into the ground are getting gold-plated exit packages while their workers get pink slips.” (Reich 2019) During his presidency, he passed tax cuts, which took away money from governmental and social programs and gave more purchasing power to large corporations. Ironically, in June 2020, Trump decided to visit the National Shrine of John Paul II which is located in the largest Catholic Church in North America to show his supporters that he respects Catholic values.

-The literal materials used for mass and rituals (albs, candles, ciborium, chalices, tabernacles, crosses, etc) are bought at stores for money. The communion wafers that are given out to the people during mass can literally be bought off Walmart by a regular person. The fact that institutions try to make a profit off selling unconsecrated eucharist reflects back to the Renaissance era when the clergy sold indulgences: a donation to the church that came with a promise from the pope to reduce a sinner’s time in purgatory.