

LENTENOMICS/4

Hope: in ourselves and in our exchanges with others and God

ECONOMY

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As I bring these Lentenomics reflections to a close, I cannot do so without addressing the virtue of hope and its positive ramifications on a free, trusting and cooperative human economy.

Hope is the most ethereal of all virtues. Few of us understand it well. We instinctually have “some feeling” about what hope means. In our spontaneous expressions of “I hope so, I really hope that, hoping for the best...” we express some form of confidence and wish for happy outcomes. But we often don’t know why we hope.

To complicate matters, hope is really two virtues rolled into one. Hope is partly *supernatural* (theological) and partly *natural* (human). In brief, we hope in God and his supernatural capacity interact with and save us *and* we hope in man and his natural capacity to help himself and others.

During Lent we might say that all of our actions and expressions of natural hope – the many personal sacrifices, deepened spiritual disciplines, developed talents, and free acts charity – are geared toward are intertwined with theological hope in Christ’s promise of our deliverance from damnation through his supernatural resurrection from the dead.

Without theological hope, our expressions of human hope have no long-term fuel and eternal motivation. Without theological hope, human hope in itself has absolutely no solid justification. Human hope is based on a firm belief that *man is naturally empowered by God with individual talents and gifts for freely doing marvellous and magnanimous deeds*. No supernatural God means no natural God-given abilities, and thus no human hope. Without either forms of hope we live in a godless world defined by imperfection, isolation and brokenness. It is a dark existence without a generous God who gives us everything we need to live well on earth.

To be clear, God doesn’t want us hoping in Him alone. He doesn’t want to do everything for us, like some sugar daddy who spoils us rotten. God also wants us to help ourselves, otherwise we don’t praise and affirm his gifts to us. These gifts grant us natural hope to do immense good freely by our own will. So, God wants us to have some merit and responsibility for our salvation. He encourages us to cooperate personally with Him to help deliver ourselves and our fellow men from malice.

Ideally, if at the end of Lent all men and women have spent 40 days increasing in human goodness, holiness and devotion to God, their natural hope grows

proportionately with theological hope on a collective level. This is exactly why Lent is not just about forming holier *single persons* but potentially about renewing *an entire civilization* reborn from individuals working together toward the common good in cooperation with others.

This free cooperation individuals persons, trusting in themselves, in their neighbour, and in their God, is what now leads us to speak about economics.

Firstly, this triune of trust and cooperation is a reflection of what theologians call the **Economic Trinity**. The Economic Trinity is the union of absolute hope and mutual cooperation between three Godheads who interrelate perfectly with one another and positively for the salvation of the world. Therefore, any Christian economic society on earth should be anchored in this inspiring symbiotic and organically cooperative divine economy.

Secondly, what we can then conclude about the Economic Trinity is that it is in no way a top-down or centralized chain of command. This leads us to reject command-and-control human economic models (e.g. Cuba, Venezuela, China, and the former U.S.S.R.) that are not based on the mutual free cooperation of divinely gifted persons. We understand how they lead to the opposite of hope: the despair that is painfully evident in these destitute and self-destructive regimes that cannot even take care of themselves.

Such communist economies bring about despair, because they purposely eradicate natural and theological hope. Communist economies have always promoted atheism because God is the archenemy of the "Almighty State" which "already gives everyone everything they need." There's simply no need for God. So logically there are only "State-given gifts". Hence, natural hope and theological disappear completely from such State-run economies. Communist economic participants can only "hope in hopelessly corrupt" political leaders and their untenable ideological agendas. These are the same few political-economic bosses who assign citizens their professions, who force labor, and who fix prices and supply to guarantee distribution and access to products and services that are always in extremely short supply in such non creative economies.

Free markets, on the other hands, count on our intuition of the mutual cooperation that should exist between free persons who trust in their God-given gifts to help themselves and others. Free markets advocate dreams, creativity and vocations, thus hoping and trusting in God's noble plan for each of us.

In conclusion, free markets are economies of hope and not desperation, where economic actors are naturally confident in themselves and God's Providential Plan for

individuals. They are economies that naturally risk, create, expect persons to invest, and naturally set up cooperatives and corporations of thousands of persons. They are the same economies that are capable of trusting and hoping in stakeholders from all over the world to form multinational companies. Market-based economic societies promote freedom, trust, cooperation and above all the self-confidence and creativity of God's creatures. Such economies personify what we read in the Book of Ecclesiastes: "As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, He has also empowered him ... to receive his reward and rejoice in his labour; this is the gift of God." (Eccl. 15: 19).