

This is your host, Malcolm Schluenderfritz, and joining me today is Philip. I'm glad to have him back. How are you doing Philip?

Philip:00:23 I'm doing well, thanks Malcolm. How about yourself?

Malcolm:00:29 I'm doing OK. Before we get started, I'd like to remind you that this is part two of a two part podcast, so if you haven't listened to podcast four on economics yet it would be better to listen to that one first so you can get a background for where we're starting today.

In our last podcast, we talked about our economy from the standpoint of living a Christian life, and we tried to figure out what was wrong with our economy. And we came up with a bunch of different reasons: they centered around such things as commodification, that everything is produced for the purpose of buying and selling, even human labor becomes a commodity, and therefore human life becomes a commodity, which feeds into the culture of death in our society. We talked about consumerism, about the fundamental injustices to the poor, especially in the third world, of our economic habits, and where we left off was a discussion of "what should we do?" We're faced with this difficult economic situation that is inculcating false principles into us instead of the principles of the Gospel. How do we react to this attack on our principles from the economic order? And I'll turn it over here to Philip. Philip, what do you think Christians should do when faced with this current economic situation?

Philip: 01:58 I'll give a short answer, and then I'll give a slightly longer one. The short answer is that Christian should be socialists, and that socialism refers both to an economic order that's more rational than that of capitalism and more just, but it also refers to a process by which we escape the clutches of capitalism. And that's the way out of capitalism, through it. Through exploiting its own internal contradictions and through intentional action aimed at creating that more just society. Now some Catholics are alarmed when they hear that word, and for whatever reason that alarm has caused them to come up with some ostensible alternatives. So oftentimes you hear in Catholic circles about something called Distributism, an ostensible economic system that was invented by G. K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc. And you also hear about different kinds of, "common good capitalism." The reason I think that you should just be a Christian socialist is that each time someone tries to come up with some alternative system, each time someone tries to find a "Third Way" between Capitalism and

Socialism, it always resolves, it always reduces, to one other other, and more often than not to Capitalism. So instead of trying fruitlessly to beat around the bush and figure out something else, and come up with some unique thing that's our own third Catholic way, the better option is to just look at the matter more objectively, see what exactly is going on in Capitalism, and how to use that knowledge of what's going on to get rid of it.

Malcolm: 04:02 Philip, thanks for your perspective. I'd say that for the record I'm one of those Catholics who get nervous when the word "socialism" is mentioned. Even though I see very clearly the problems in our current, largely capitalist economy, I'm still not sold on the idea that socialism is an alternative. At the same time I've explored the alternatives such as Distributism that Philip brought up and I can see that they are also somewhat flawed. I'd like to ask, Philip, to clarify your position: what, in a short, concise, statement, is the core of socialism that you're referring to? And also, what would be your take on what a commitment to socialism would entail, facing this economic problem, in the context of trying to live out the Christian life as fully as we can in all areas of life?

Philip: 05:02 Just a nice, simple question, huh! [Laughs] OK, well the first question is a good one, because you basically asked me "what is socialism" And that's probably the first thing we want to establish. I think we cleverly avoided using polemical language in our last podcast. You've made this point to me off mic, that when people use certain words, like capitalism and socialism, other people sometimes turn their brains off. Or their brains just turn off automatically because those words are so charged. And the worst part of it all is that the words get abused. So we did a fairly decent job of defining the central attributes of capitalism last time; we talked about who owns what, we talked about the means of production, a special kind of property that is owned by a few private individuals, and how everyone else has to work for them for a wage. And that the primary commandment of this system is "Grow Grow Grow," and pursue profit. Socialism is a way out of that. Socialism is a system in which *workers* own the means of production, not a special class of people who buy and sell human labor as a commodity, and more than that, socialism is a system in which we don't have to prioritize the private good over the common good and we don't have to exploit the poor for the sake of profit. Socialism ultimately is the abolition of classes, of economic classes as we know them today. And that abolition of classes allows an economy of cooperation

rather than competition.

Malcolm: [06:58](#) Thanks Philip, that is helpful. Still, we could be a little clearer. When we're talking about classes, when either Distributists or socialist attack the current capitalist order, they're not so much talking about inequality of wealth, though that comes into it, but even more fundamental I think is the point that the classes that a distributist or a socialist would want to see removed are the division of society into those who own the means of production, which we defined and talked about in the last podcast, and those who do not own the means of production and so have to sell their labor for a wage. So it's really the destruction of the system of wage earning. And then Philip, what then, concretely, as concretely as we can get here, what *concretely* would a commitment to socialism demand from Christian individuals in the here and now, in the context of the United States in the 21st Century?

Philip: [08:07](#) That's another good question. First I just want to say that, maybe this is a little quixotic, but I'll try to turn down the polemical temperature around that word, "socialism." So I'd to point to a few really important writings from Catholics and these writings are going to answer a lot of your questions better than I ever could. So the first is I want to just quickly point listeners to a really interesting essay by Pope Benedict XVI that he wrote in 2006 for a Catholic journal call *First Things*, in which he makes a distinction between Democratic Socialism and Totalitarian Socialism. I imagine that many listeners have only ever associated socialism with totalitarian and despotic regimes. I don't know if that hits home for you, Malcolm.

Malcolm: [09:14](#) In a certain way. I mean I think by looking carefully at the historical record, we can see that just because a particular regime that called itself socialist behaved badly is no reason to scrap the term. At the same time I tend to feel that because of the amount of baggage the word has accumulated it might be time to retire it. But of course that's my preference. And of course I have some more philosophic objections to socialism as a scheme that I'll get into when I propose my idea of how we should escape the current crisis, but I'll leave those for later.

Philip: [09:52](#) OK. Awesome, I appreciate that. Pope Benedict writes (I'm just going to quote a little from the essay "Europe and Its Discontents": "*In Europe in the nineteenth century the two models were joined by a third,*

*socialism, which quickly split into two branches, one totalitarian and the other democratic. Democratic socialism managed to fit within the two existing models as a welcome counterweight to radical liberal positions which it developed and corrected. It also managed to appeal to various denominations. In England it became the political party of the Catholics, who never felt at home either with the Protestant Conservatives or the Liberals. In Germany too, Catholic groups felt closer to Democratic Socialism than to the rigidly Prussian and Protestant Conservative forces. In many respects, Democratic Socialism was and is close to Catholic social teaching and has in any case made a remarkable contribution to the formation of social consciousness."* And this distinction is important because it mirrors a distinction that's long been accepted on the Left. There's an excellent essay by an American Leftist and labor movement leader and Trotskyist Philosopher Hal Draper; the essay is called "The Two Souls of Socialism" in which Draper contrasts "Socialism from Above" to "Socialism from Below." And the attempts to impose socialism through almost like a "trickle down" system, through state power first, and in particular through the power of the already existing state; those attempts have all remained exactly that: they've remained state power. The "Socialism from Below" that Draper talks about and the Democratic Socialism that Pope Benedict talked about refer to a kind of socialism that's bottom up, ground up, grass-roots, much like the kind of community that you and Peter talked about in parts one and two of your community podcast. So the first answer to your question, "What do Catholics need to do in the here and now?" is that Catholics need to get involved with grass-roots radical politics, grass roots socialist movements. The kinds of movements that have been praised and championed by the popes. I also have one more quote here that's really interesting. This one's from a letter by Pope John Paul the 1st, where he writes: *"The workers who were once like scattered separate grains of sand, have become a cloud, united by the Trade Unions, and the various forms of socialism, which can undeniably claim to have been the main means of promoting their welfare almost everywhere."* So socialism is principally about workers taking control over what's been kept from them for too long. The first step would be getting involved with various kinds of labor movements and really supporting the rights of workers. In particular the rights of workers to organize, and also supporting institutions that function like socialism writ small. And by that I mean organizations like business co-ops. In a co-op the means of production are owned by all the workers, all the employees. There are also version of this in other institutions like cooperative banks or credit unions.

And the more Catholics can support institutions that support democratic control over the means of production, the better. So that would be a first step into socialism.

Malcolm: [13:37](#) I think here I will briefly outline what I think Catholics should do when faced with our current Capitalist and anti-Christian system. And first, I would like to point out that I do think an authentic spirituality can be found under social regimes that do not support it. So we can't blame all of our personal or societal or ecclesial failures on an oppressive society around us. We can't lose sight of our personal responsibility for what we make of the conditions. Obviously the conditions in, say, Nazi concentration camps were not conducive to the Christian life, and no one in their right minds would try to replicate those conditions, and yet in them, some individuals managed to live lives of heroic virtue, in what could be arguably the most flawed system imaginable. At the same time, if they'd been given a choice, they would have tried to live under other conditions, conditions that as Peter Maurin would have said make it easier to be good. We want a society that makes it easier to be good, but that said, when we have a society that makes it hard, we're still responsible for our actions and ultimately God gives sufficient grace to all. So just to clarify that for listeners.

My response to the current economic order is in *some* ways similar to Philip's. I support the idea of workers owning the means of production that they work with, by and large. I don't think every worker necessarily needs to own them, but what Hilaire Belloc would call a "determining number" of workers. Hilaire Belloc had concept that a state took its tone when a determining number of individuals in it fell into certain categories. So a state might have the tone, say, of a peasant society even if say ten percent of the people in in were not working as peasants. So I would certainly support a society in which the determining number of workers owned their own means of production, whether as groups or as individuals. The way that I see that we could get there is through the kind of community building that we discussed in past podcasts. I think that the goal of Christians right now, as far as economics is concerned, is to form the kind of community that could rightfully pursue a *kind* of socialism. So for Christians, one of the exemplars of the Christian life is the monastic unit, the monastery, which is a socialist, planned, democratic economy. In fact, the monastery is almost everything that a socialist could wish, any socialist dreamer of the past, and it is actually existing, unlike socialism which doesn't have too many actual successes on the ground. The difference, I would hold, is that the monk is

motivated by love. And because he has a community, when that community acquires the means of producing wealth, say land or some sort of industry, it is naturally shared in what could be called a socialist manner. And similarly in Acts, the first Christian believers had something that would approximate socialism, because they again were a community cemented by love. I've recently been reading a very interesting book by the first president of Tanzania; he was a socialist, a Christian, Catholic socialist, and he talked about how socialism is in one sense a frame of mind. Socialism is a certain attitude toward the world. And so I would hold that the only way to advance a Christian economy, whether we're going to call it socialism or not, (even though I would prefer not to use that word simply because I think it acts as too much of a lightning rod, even if it would accurately describe a monastic community, I would prefer . . . as a matter of fact, I would prefer to use as few words as possible to describe what we are doing.) But that aside, if we're to do it, I think the first step has to be creating the kinds of communities that could do it well. Without a community, one can't have social ownership. If there's only a mass of isolated individuals, as there currently is in the USA, one can't use, one can't develop socialism, because if those individuals suddenly collectively came into the possession of the means of production, they would still behave as isolated, autonomous individuals. There would not be that community bond of love.

And then, to bring up another quote from the same book, this man posited that the only way that one could involve the government in socialism is if that government was already the right sort of government. A truly democratic government. And because I have many doubts as to the goodness of our current political system, with its parties and polarization, I would oppose any attempt to use our current governmental structure to advance *anything* like socialism. As a matter of fact, I'm getting to the point where I would if not oppose, at least be non-committal about any attempts to get much of anything done with our current governmental infrastructure, because it seems that our current system thrives on making enemies. As soon as an issue becomes enmeshed in our current political system, half the country decides it is something to be opposed. So to take an example, I think it would be great if everyone in the country raised a significant share of their own vegetables in a backyard. And, apart from some people who have really finicky HOA ideas, most people would at least think that was perfectly nice for other people to do, you know I doubt you could mobilize much sentiment against people raising vegetables so long as it didn't infringe on other people's lives too much. But let's say that one of our

political parties, or even let's imagine a brand new political party, took as a plank in its platform to increase backyard vegetable production by 50 percent. Immediately you'd have millions of people, who, just because one party or one group said it, were attacking this idea altogether. And suddenly the very fact that you had a vegetable garden in your backyard—even if you didn't belong to the "vegetable garden party"—suddenly the fact that you had a vegetable garden would antagonize certain neighbors. The harmless vegetable garden would suddenly have become yet another flashpoint in an ongoing cultural war. So as long as we have a fairly dysfunctional political scene dominated by a cultural war, I think it behoves Christians, no matter what they're doing, whether economics or anything else, to find the least political ways of advancing it. And I do also want to say, when I say "political": there's a famous quote by Aristotle that says that human beings are naturally political animals. And I would agree with that. I think part of our current problem is that we are not political *enough*; and yet the kind of thing that an American thinks of when he hears "politics" is only one small subset of a larger political whole. Politics in the Aristotelian sense means a life together, a social life together. And I would argue that right now we need much less of what the average American calls "politics" and much more of all the other things that an Aristotelean would mean by politics. So that's a very short presentation of my idea of a route forward and some of the key differences from what Philip at least seems to be advocating.

Philip: [21:48](#) Alright, let's get into it! Thanks Malcolm. I want to respond to a few specific points, because in responding to them I think I'll clarify my own position a bit more. First things first; we know from the Church teaching, the writings of the Popes, ultimately from the Scriptures, (I'm thinking of Matthew 25) we know that society has to provide certain things for the flourishing of people. We talked last podcast about how we're both body and soul, and while there are exceptional cases where the absence of the physical means of subsistence still allow people to achieve those higher goods (for instance, there are saints who have subsisted on the Eucharist alone) most of us need things like food. Most of us need things like medical care. And in fact, a great list of the things we need are outlined in an encyclical called *Pacem in Terris* by Pope St. John the 23rd, in which he writes that Man has the right to live, the right to bodily integrity, the right to the means necessary for the proper development of life, to food, clothing, shelter, medical care, rest, and necessary social services, and the right to be looked after in cases of illness or disability. So how do we have a

society that provides for those basic needs? How do we get there? That's maybe the disagreement. And I'll make a concession, Malcolm, I think you're right about virtue, I think you're right about looking to the monasteries as an example, not that monasteries were uniformly examples of virtue, there's plenty of cases of corrupt monasteries, but . . . there's a Christian socialist poet and writer named Charles Peguy who said that the revolution will be moral or not at all. The revolution will be moral, or not at all. So the revolution has to be moral, there has to be an *interior* revolution, in our hearts, we have to be ready to detach ourselves from the goods of this world and attach ourselves to the plight of the oppressed. And a lot of that has to be moral, and ultimately Christian, has to be rooted in Grace. With that said, there is a really good quote by a Jesuit priest named Alfred O'Rahilly; he wrote a series of essays comparing some of the economic theories of Carl Marx to those of Thomas Aquinas. And he's criticizing Carl Marx; I want to make that clear, also (and this is a contentious point, I don't know if I'll lose any fans on this one, but in certain circles this will render you persona non grata; I *don't* think you have to be a Marxist to be a socialist, I think you can be a non-Marxist socialist.) O'Rahilly is criticizing Carl Marx, but he makes this one little concession, which I think is actually a pretty big concession; he writes that the mistake of the medieval theologians was to think that you could achieve this economic prosperity and security, that it could be "kept alive solely by moral and religious persuasion." And this is where I think Malcolm we disagree about how we get to that society that provides for the needs of all, that provides those basic needs and brings justice and equity and ensures the basic human flourishing of all members of society, not just the rich. The Church can preach how usury is wrong until it is blue in the face, but until you make it impossible or difficult for usurers to commit usury, not much is going to change. The same thing happened during the slave trade. There were many bishops who were preaching about the absolute evil that was slavery. And maybe there were some converts made. It would be a beautiful thing if someone realized that they were participating in a dehumanizing and brutally evil, sinful, exploitative system and changed their ways. I don't think most people did! I think most people kept owning slaves. In England, Christian reformers like William Wilberforce found ways to make the slave trade unprofitable and in the United States we fought a civil war that ended in the abolition of slavery. It is illegal now! And that's what needed to happen. So there is a certain sense in which one of the things we can learn from the Marxists is that you need to understand how systems work; if you understand how systems work scientifically, then you can find ways to



undermine them. You can find ways to restructure them. When you restructure them in certain ways, you make certain kinds of behavior more difficult or impossible. That's really what I'm interested in. I'm interested in: how do we make it more difficult or impossible for the kinds of exploitation that we denounced in the first podcast, how do we make that impossible in our world.

Malcolm:27:26 Yeah, Philip, thanks. Those were all really good questions to bring up. I guess, this is a very tricky topic, and I want to tread very lightly, because I could easily be seen as saying something almost the opposite of what I am saying. So the Christian individual is always called to solidarity with the poor. The Catechism of the Catholic Church talks about a fundamental orientation towards the poor. And the message of the Gospel is that "good news is preached to the poor", as Christ quotes Isaiah as prophesying about His ministry. And yet, I think that for one thing there can be legitimate disagreement about the best ways to go about helping the poor. There can't be any disagreement that we have to *do* so; that's clear cut. But where the virtue of prudence comes in is when you take a good, in this case aiding the oppressed or poor, the virtue of prudence helps one to discern the best means to that end. And the virtue of prudence is not as clear cut as some of the other virtues. What is prudent in one situation may be imprudent in another, and that's sort of the genius of prudence, you can't take a particular action and say "this action is not prudent" without knowing all about the context. Unlike some other virtues; some things are always right or always wrong, but prudence above all the virtues demands that attention be paid to context. And this is one of the areas where good people who all agree that the poor should be helped (and I would argue that by and large most people agree that the poor should be helped, that there shouldn't be poverty, and yet, as an example of what I talked about a few minutes ago, the only way you can get a large group of people to say that the poor should NOT be helped, is when it gets politicized. Once something becomes politicized, people will oppose even the most seemingly harmless situations imaginable.) But aside from that I would argue that in our solidarity with the oppressed, the Christian way, at least in the first centuries, is to join the oppressed. We talked in an earlier podcast about the importance of solidarity, and how Christ came in solidarity with us. We were oppressed . . . you know, there is a certain imagery that Christ came primarily to fight the devil, or fight the forces of evil; but if that's true, and there's at least a certain grain of truth to it, He chose a very funny way of fighting. It's a way that ended up with Him nailed to a cross. And yet that

act of coming to *be with*, that act of radical identification with the oppressed, in this case the both physically and spiritually oppressed, of those doomed to die by sin, by the forces of evil, *that was our salvation*. And then similarly, in the early Church, the bulk of people in Christ's world were poor already, so they didn't have to get in solidarity with the poor, they *were* the poor. But for the few rich men, the call was pretty clear; they were to join the poor by giving away their money, and giving it away to the benefit of the poor. And of course Christ's world was a very exploitative world, it was based on slavery, it was more exploitative than anything going on today. And not only was it a slave world, but in Christ's part of the world, it was also a colonial world. The nation of Israel was under foreign occupation, and a really brutal foreign occupation. And yet Christ and the early Christians did not take certain means that would seem to have been possible. And even if they weren't humanly possible, in a certain sense in Christ's life anything could have been possible because he could choose how he came into the world, unlike all the rest of us. We could argue about any saints and say, "they would have done something different if they had lived in our times, or if they had had different opportunities available to them" and that's very true, and should be kept in mind. But with Christ it doesn't work because He chose how, where, when He was going to come into the world to achieve His purpose, to found His Church. And His life is supposed to be a pattern, an exemplar. So in my opinion the Christian is one who himself does everything in his power, and everything in his group's power, since we're social, political beings, to aid the poor, but I'm not so sure that the Christian is the one who attempts to take hold of the levers of earthly power to improve things for the poor. And to look at that from a different slant, I would argue to that the way of love is always superior to the way of force; all earthly politics is somewhat based on force. If a law isn't enforced, it is not worth it. In one sense an election is a sort of war, a struggle over who gets to control the guns for the next four years, the guns that will be used to enforce the law. And Christ didn't come with any kind of force, even spiritual force against the devil, it seems; the devil attacked Him, and got Him killed, and that was in a sense the strategy, that was the tactic. So to look at this, sure, you know worldly means have been used to wipe out slavery. And that's a good thing. And yet because *only* earthly means were used, racism is *still* a running sore on the body of our nation. The old animosities and angers that are left from both slavery and from the civil war to end slavery, have been a constant weakening force on our nation ever since. And at a certain point, we could I guess pass laws and we have tried with some success to pass laws banning certain kind of

hate speech, but in the end you can't legislate love. And without love evil continues to multiply even with the application of worldly power to uproot it, the evil will simply emerge in a new form, in a new way, with a new set of damage unless we do the thing that only Christians in the name of Christ can do, and bring love to this broken world.

Philip:34:10 That was very moving, that was beautiful, Malcolm. Sometimes it is hard to even tell where we agree and where we disagree. I think one ingredient missing from your analysis is that people grow . . . love, charity is a theological virtue. It is a virtue that we have infused in our souls through grace. It's also an emotion or a passion of the soul, and generally the virtues are acquired through practice. Practice, worldly practice. Encounters with real people. So there's a little bit . . . here's what's missing, Malcolm, you make this point, we banned slavery through "worldly means" but because the means were worldly we didn't solve the spiritual problem which is racism. I don't think that's quite right. I mean, of course we haven't solved the problem of racism! But I remember years ago when I had a completely different . . . was a young freewheeling libertarian guy, thinking about the Civil Rights act; and I was asking that same question: can you legislate morality? And it's so simple to think that one of the great things about the civil rights legislation in this country is that it just brought black and white people into the same rooms together, and that has a certain effect. If you spend time with people, you will see them in more human and nuanced ways. You won't be as likely to demonize them. And I think something similar happens when we use "worldly means" to achieve a more democratic economy or more justice for workers. When workers get together to organize or they form cooperatives, when people are parts of institutions that are more democratic and more cooperative, they grow in virtue just by virtue of those experiences. You grow in virtue by exposing yourself to alternate ways of life and by practicing alternate ways of life. So in that sense, worldly means can have spiritual outcomes. That's what I mean to say. And sometimes, you know, Christians have set up such a strong division between worldly means and spiritual means that at various points in time there have been groups of Christians who had an attitude of complete and total resignation to the world, to the problems of the world, where any participation in politics or even any material support for the poor and for the hungry was considered an inappropriate use of worldly means, even thought that directly violates the commandment of Christ, when He tells us who goes to heaven and who goes to hell in the judgement of the nations. So "worldly means" is said in many ways, and we need to decide

*which* worldly means are better than others, using the virtue of prudence, and we also need to sanctify those worldly means, through our Christian love, but not exclude them on the grounds they're "worldly."

Malcolm:37:58 Yeah, Philip that's a fair criticism. And I certainly don't want to look like I'm saying that for instance the Civil Rights act was a bad thing. It was a Great thing! You can't have a workable nation in which two groups of people are not allowed the same public privileges. That isn't just a moral wrong, that is a wrong that a society can't stand up under. And I think that's where I would make a certain critique. That insofar as one's trying to make a workable state, obviously worldly means are what is going to be used. Imagine an unbiased outsider from some totally alien environment coming and saying "what this nation needs is a Civil Rights act, so that these tensions can begin to be resolved and don't tear the place apart." And that's a great thing and in the worldly sphere, if we were voting right now on the Civil Rights act I would certainly be voting in favor of it. I think though that there can be a danger in confusing two different projects. One is the worldly project of developing a reasonable, livable state, and the other is the project of living as a Christian. And of course those two projects are not totally separate; there are no airtight compartments in life; but there are distinct. You know, it does bother me somewhat when Conservatives say that Christ didn't come to form a better state, because usually what they mean by it is that they can oppress the poor as much as they like. But it's true enough; every error has at least a grain of truth in it, and it is true enough that Christ did not come to found a better kind of state. He left that to . . . because there are these different components to us, He respected our ability to figure out how to run a better state, from earthly principles. Just like some Christians think that the Bible was written to teach them science, and nothing could be further from the truth. God let us figure out science by ourselves, and He lets us figure out political science by ourselves. Largely. Now that's not to say that if everyone was Christians it wouldn't be a lot easier to have a just state, and it is also not to say that it wouldn't be easier to live as Christians if we had a just state, but still the primary data point remains that the Early Christians lived in a flagrantly unjust state and lived as Christians better than you and I could probably ever hope to do; and not just as individuals, as a group. As a group the Church lived out its mission, (not that there weren't problems) but it lived that mission out perhaps better at that point where it had no social influence, no influence on earthly power and lived in a perfectly horrendous state, then it has ever since—then it did say in the High Middle Ages,

where the Church had a large role in shaping the social order. But in that age, the Church did not provide the witness that the Early Church did. Now, does that mean that societal change was a bad thing? No! By all means no! Still, as far as . . . once we talk about [41:28](#) how we should do politics, we're getting into a situation where there isn't a lot of clear guidance in the revelation of Christ. Whereas if we are talking about how we individually lead the Christian life, there is a *lot* of guidance. I think Thomas Aquinas said somewhere that Revelation does not hold that one form of government is superior to another. Revelation does teach that we Christians must live justly and with love for all. So just that there is a distinction between living the Christian life and an ideal state; there is an overlap, but there is a distinction. And this is a wider point that I've been making through the podcast. I believe that in the Christian life, we should be looking for solutions that are multifunctional. And that might sound kind of odd. But we talked about it with preppers. Preppers are worried about the collapse of society. So they try and solve the problem from their point of view by stocking a bunker with tons of goods that will allow them to survive, and that *might* solve a certain problem, if indeed society does collapse. But it is a very narrow problem, and a very narrow solution. And it is only targeted at solving one particular problem. The Christian would be better served by focusing on those multipurpose solutions that create social renewal as a by-product. The Early Christians did not *attempt* social renewal. The Early Christians *were* social renewal! And that's a very critical difference. Or say in the war-torn society of Medieval Italy, all these petty little states constantly fighting one another, and they were all Christians! This was a crying shame. St. Francis of Assisi put a large check to this; his third order became so popular in the years after his death (and one of the requirements of his third order was that the men who joined it could not carry any weapons and could not fight any war not ordered by the Pope.) Well, that really put a damper on all this feudal violence. Even if the local lord of the manor hadn't become a third order Franciscan, the likelihood was that a significant percentage of his men had. But Francis wasn't setting out to solve the problem of political violence, (which he himself had suffered from in his youth; he'd ended up in the dungeons of a rival neighboring town) but he wasn't even thinking about the problem of political violence. He was in love with the Lord! And he was trying to spread that love to others. And his society that continues on today not only helped to solve the problem of political violence, probably more than any earthly political solution could have done, it solved so many other problems, but it solved them because they weren't focusing on those problems. So similarly

that prepper with his huge stockpile of food, if he got to know his neighbors and spent the money and time he spent prepping on getting to know his neighbors, he'd probably survive a disaster better than he would with just that isolated bunker. But the survival benefit is about 258th on the list of benefits that would come, the spiritual, practical, emotion, physical benefits that would come from him putting his efforts into getting to know his neighbors.

Philip:45:05 On the note of multifunctional solutions why don't I throw out my idea of a multi-functional solution that I hope is at least a little bit conciliatory. I want to be a little bit irenic because I really appreciate that you've had me on for two episodes and that you had me on knowing full well that I was going to talk about socialism! So let me take a step back and say a few things that hopefully you'll like. The first is that after our first podcast I was really thinking about: what is the tension? I really like everything you say about community, and I think it is one of the most beautiful things that Christians can do in the world, is to form intentional communities, and you have a good, sober perspective on it, Malcolm, because you also know that there are dangers there and you have criticized attempts at community formation that are closed and insular and paranoid. But you ultimately believe very strongly in community. And after that first podcast I thought about the last chapter of this great book by Alasdair MacIntyre, another Catholic with an interest in radical politics. It is called "*After Virtue*." And in the last chapter, Alasdair MacIntyre talks about what is to be done to reclaim virtue, and he says that you have two choices philosophically: you have Aristotle or Nietzsche. You have nihilism or something like an Aristotilian virtue ethics. And the way to achieve that is through looking to two historical figures. One is St. Benedict, and the other is Trotsky. It is "Trotsky and St. Benedict." And although he doesn't spell it out very clearly in that last chapter, there's something about that phrase, "Trotsky and St. Benedict" that really appeals to me, because it targets both aspects of this political and moral revolution. On the one hand, let's start with St. Benedict. On the one hand, forming intentional communities in which people can share goods together, and deliberate about the common good, and grow in virtue and practice growing in holiness and the spiritual life, according to the height of Christian spiritual tradition, is excellent. On the other hand, local communities need to be connected internationally. And that's I think the Trotsky piece. Trotsky opposed the Soviet Union on the grounds that socialism in one country is not socialism at all. Unless you have solidarity with people all around the world, then you will become

insular, and worse you might become nationalist. And the way this looks in practice: all my examples so far I feel like I've been citing these European theologians; so I think one of the best examples of that would be something like the Base Ecclesial Communities in Latin America that were inspired by the Liberation Theologians, where you have local people living together, sharing goods materially, but also sharing meaning and also kind of connected to each other in a broader network because local communities can be attacked and destroyed, in fact many of the base Ecclesial communities *were* attacked with military violence by various dictators. Even your example of monasteries was telling; you said that monasteries are a great example of successful Christian socialism; well, how successful? Many monasteries are now closing down. Many monasteries that used to produce things on their own that now have to hire laborers, and actually sell goods on the market, like some monasteries will brew their own beer. Because Capitalism is global, because the economic order that we're in is global, resistance to that economic order has to be global. So I'm kind of willing to accept everything you say about community with the caveat that we also need solidarity that is international and solidarity even with those who don't share our Faith in Christ.

Malcolm: [49:42](#) That's a very beautiful thought, because one of the aspects that I want to emphasize, that I've been emphasizing on this podcast, is community *for* evangelization. If a community is for itself, it will die. It will become a stagnant, inward-looking thing. (Of course, this is my opinion; I know others disagree.) And one of the the best ways to evangelize is through friendship. In fact, I would say that the only way to evangelize is through friendship. Pope Francis has talked about the difference between proselytizing and evangelizing. A proselytizer has an idea, and they walk up to another person and try to cudgel the idea into their heads through argument. The evangelizer evangelizes through friendship. You can't evangelize well to people that you don't know. And so I wish that our community building would be oriented to evangelization, oriented to the wider world. In such a way that those outside will be drawn to what we are doing. That again is like the early Church; the early Church drew people in by the witness of life. Even in a very hostile environment, the early Church had that kind of global solidarity; you see St. Paul taking up a collection for the community in Jerusalem that was going through hard times; or to take that multipurpose solution of St. Francis, his order went all over the world, creating solidarity. And now I get a mailing from some Franciscans in the Philippines; they've just had a disaster, they need help. We can have

solidarity with these people we've never met because of this community of love that spans the world in the order of St. Francis, or in the wider Church. In the Church that spans the world. So I would agree that if we are only interested in our own families, in our own communities, we have not taken up the love of Christ. So often (we brought this up in an earlier podcast) so often we modern western-world Christians have fallen so far below the level of natural virtue that we take the resumption of the level of natural virtue as for Christianity. We imagine that if we just love our families and our neighbors (and that's a pretty far piece for most of us) we imagine that if we shared community with our neighbors such that we would feed them when they were hungry, that would surely be the kingdom of God. But Christ would say, "Don't even the good pagans do as much?" Because the good pagans did. Community of the sort that would share resources locally, that would take care of one another, is to be found in many non-Christian cultures. Only in Christ, though, can we really feel that connection, that mystical body that joins us to those across the world who speak a different language, who don't share our customs or ways. And that we will never see, and that will never affect us; only in the Church can we feel for those people as if we were all connected in one body. So I think that quite far from proposing some sort of isolated solution in which we check out from the problems of the world, our communities should make us *more* aware, and *more* sympathetic and more eager to help others, for those who are suffering, no matter who they are, or where they are for the love of Christ.

Philip: [53:22](#) That's beautiful, Malcolm. It's so easy to turn in on ourselves, and Christianity is a religion that looks outwards. It is following the example of Jesus Christ, who went to the peripheries, as Pope Francis is so fond of reminding us. That we are not called to be primarily living in our comfort zone, and it is on those peripheries where I think we encounter those fellow travelers who might even be better at natural justice than we are. I like that distinction you made, in the community podcast, where you said that we haven't even reached the level of natural community that pre-Christian pagans had, and then we talk this big talk about communities of love, and imitating Acts; that's the next level up! I think there are many people out there who know about the problems with our economic system, who have a certain level of natural community and natural justice that Christians could learn from. This is an important point about humility. So often, there's a temptation for the Christian to go into any situation thinking that he or she is there to teach, when so often we're actually there to learn. And no community is perfect, and no political movement is perfect; I think



Christians could do well to learn even from those outside the boundaries, the formal boundaries of the Church, learn about some of these principles, like justice and solidarity, learn about different ways of living, different ways of being, and ultimately bring that Christian love to those encounters that could be fruit for evangelization. Maybe I'm a little too optimistic, but I'd like to see a little of that, instead of us vs. them mentality.

Malcolm:55:28 Philip, what you said reminds me of what Fr. Michael Gaitley said in his book *The One Thing is Three*. He talked about his early experience, and how he knew this Mormon family who exemplified family love and family virtues better than any Christian, or any Catholic family he'd ever met. And he was explaining how this could be, since they don't have the fullness of the Faith. We Catholics believe that we have the fullness of the Faith. How then could we learn from outsiders, like this Mormon family? And the answer is that while we may have the whole of the truth, any particular outsider may live some aspect of the truth better than many Christians, or many Catholics do. We can't blind ourselves to the fact that having the truth is a relatively insignificant thing. Embodying the truth is the important thing. And on any given topic you want to choose, from social justice to family love, a particular outsider might be doing a better job of embodying the truth of the matter than any particular Catholic, or even the majority of Catholics. And so that might be a good transition to our next podcast, because the motivation of things is so important. An action can be good or bad, there are some actions in given circumstances that are always wrong, and others that are always right, but with the wrong motivation even a good action can be a dangerous thing. For the Christian, the motivation is so important. Christ doesn't expect perfection from us, he doesn't expect success, he expects actions that are aimed at the proper goal. Actions that are done for the right motivation. And so in our next podcast we will be discussing Fr. Gaitley's other book, *Consoling the Heart of Jesus*, which provides a ground for anything we do, whether it is reforming the economy, or just having a meal with our neighbor, his book provides us with a spirituality which can ground our attempts. So thanks so much Philip for coming and joining us, this was a very insightful conversation.

Philip: 58:03 Yeah, thank you Malcolm! I really appreciate it, and I hope I haven't scared too many listeners, but again anything I say does not reflect the opinions of the Happy Are You Poor podcast!

Malcolm: [58:20](#) And to reiterate my caveat, economics is almost certain to produce disagreements, if you don't like our positions, or anything in this podcast; we want to hear about it. Disagreements are more valuable for the mission of this website than agreements. If you think we are wrong, please exercise Christian charity and correct us, to help us find the Truth. We're not absolutely certain that we have the full truth, so you can help us in our search. You could come on the podcast, or write comments on our website, or write a guest blog post. In these difficult times, we need more conversation, not less.

Thanks and look for our next podcast in two weeks!