Written by **Ralph R. Reiland** on October 13, 2015

Papalnomics — Not So Infallible

Here's a quick question I received via email from a reader who said I was too negative in one of my columns about President Obama's economic record: "Does the economics of Pope Francis better match the economic ideology of Barack Obama or Donald Trump?"

Well, regarding a life of work and spending, let's start with Jorge Mario Bergoglio, the former nightclub bouncer ("Pope Francis has revealed that he once worked as a bouncer at a nightclub in Buenos Aires," *USA Today*, December 3, 2013) who became a cardinal and then the compelling and charismatic Pope Francis, a powerful world leader who appears to stay in tune with the average person and be unswervingly supportive of those who are truly down on their luck.

Cardinal Bergoglio, elected to the top job in the Roman Catholic Church on March 13, 2013, breaking Europe's millennium-long lock on the papacy, issued his initial Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, on November 26, 2013.

In the 224-page manuscript, the first major document of his pontificate, Pope Francis spoke of his vision of social justice, economics and politics.

Making the case for bringing about a "revolution of tenderness," he focused on the dangers of consumerism, covetousness, frivolous pleasures, and excessive self-interest and individualism, i.e. the peril of an "interior life" that "becomes caught up in its own interests."

Less than two years later, in July 2015, Pope Francis took things up a notch about economics in a speech in Sana Cruz, Bolivia.

Denouncing the "new colonialism" by rich countries that imposed policies of austerity on those who are struggling, Pope Francis called for the poor to have "sacred rights" to lodging, jobs and land and urged the downtrodden to transform the world economic order.

"Quoting a fourth century bishop, the pope called the unfettered pursuit of money 'the dung of the devil,' and said poor countries should not be reduced to being providers of raw material and cheap labor for developed countries," reported the *Guardian*. Additionally, "Francis said time was running out to save the planet from perhaps irreversible harm to the ecosystem."

These comments in Santa Cruz were "made to participants of the second world meeting of popular movements, an international body that brings together organizations of people on the margins of society," explained the *Guardian*. "His speech was preceded by lengthy remarks from the left-wing Bolivian president Evo Morales, who wore a jacket adorned with the face of Argentine revolutionary

Ernesto 'Che' Guevara."

Proclaiming that current economic practices are "intolerable" — "farm workers find it intolerable, laborers find it intolerable, communities find it intolerable, peoples find it intolerable, the earth itself finds it intolerable" — Francis issued a call for the fundamental transformation of the world economy: "Let us not be afraid to say it. We want change, real change, structural change," change from a system that "has imposed the mentality of profit at any price, with no concern for social exclusion or the destruction of nature."

President Morales, reported the *Guardian*, presented Pope Francis with an unusual gift during his trip to Bolivia — "a sculpted wooden hammer and sickle — the symbol of communism — with a figure of a crucified Christ on the hammer."

To put Morales' incongruous gift into some context, and to provide more balance in his pontificating about which economic systems are "intolerable," and to be more straightforward about which economic system has time and again engaged in the most lethal forms of "social exclusion," and to be more accurate about which economic system inspires its followers and leaders to achieve their goals "at any price," Pope Francis could deliver a valuable and cautionary lesson to the world by speaking of the approximately 100 million people who lost their lives to the huge and systemic crimes that became the defining characteristic of the Communist system throughout its existence: torture, executions, terror, engineered famines, mass deportations, forced labor, and massacres.

The international bestseller, *The Black Book of Communism*, by a team of renowned European scholars — Stephane Courtois, Nicolas Werth, Jean-Louis Panne, Andrzej Paczkowski, Karel Bartosek, and Jean-Louis Margolin — documents and analyzes the crimes of Communism over a period of seventy years.

Writing the book's introductory chapter, "The Crimes of Communism," Stephane Courtois, a director of research at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifque in Paris and editor of the journal Communisme, lists the approximate deaths by region due to the multitude of crimes committed by Communist regimes and parties and their policies:

• U.S.S.R.: 20 million deaths

• China: 65 million deaths

• Vietnam: 1 million deaths

• North Korea: 2 million deaths

• Cambodia: 2 million deaths

• Eastern Europe: 1 million deaths

• Latin America: 150,000 deaths

• Africa: 1.7 million deaths

• Afghanistan: 1.5 million deaths

• The international Communist movement and Communist parties not in power: about 10,000 deaths

In his commentary on *The Black Book of Communism* in the *New York Times*, Tony R. Judt (1948-2010), British historian, essayist and university professor — and a Marxist until the 1980s — wrote: "The facts and figures, some of them well known, others newly confirmed in hitherto inaccessible archives, are irrefutable. The myth of the well-intentioned founders — the good czar Lenin betrayed by his evil heirs

— has been laid to rest for good. No one will any longer be able to claim ignorance or uncertainty about the criminal nature of Communism, and those who had begun to forget will be forced to remember anew."

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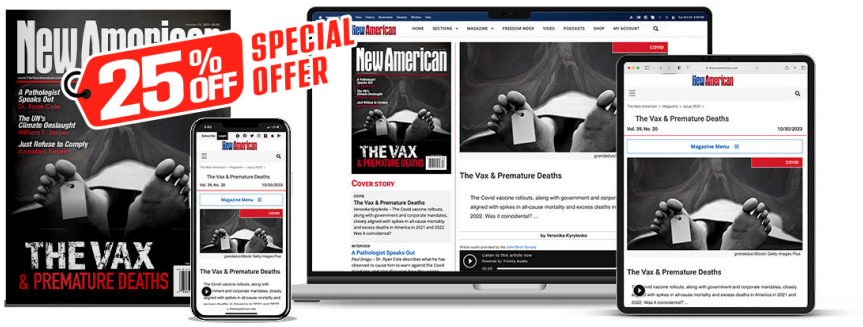

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