

POPE FRANCIS AND THE POOR

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Here's a thought experiment.

There are two teachers. One is known for his compassion for struggling students, but he is not a gifted teacher, and as a result his students do poorly in school. The other is known as lacking in compassion, but he is a gifted teacher, and as a result his students do well in school.

There are two doctors. One is known for his compassionate bedside manners, but he is not a gifted doctor, and as a result his patients suffer. The other lacks bedside manners, but is regarded as a gifted doctor, and as a result his patients thrive.

Ideally, we would all like to be served by compassionate and competent teachers and doctors, but when given the choices afforded by the thought experiment, who would really choose the compassionate yet incompetent teacher or doctor over their insensitive yet competent counterparts?

No one doubts that Pope Francis showed great compassion for the poor. Indeed, that is one of the most heralded aspects of his legacy. But his harsh criticisms of capitalism, and his affinity for socialism, must be taken into account.

It is undeniably true that capitalism has done more to induce upward social mobility and alleviate poverty than any economic system in history. It is also undeniably true that socialism has proven to be the greatest generator of poverty in the world.

In capitalist countries, the leaders may talk more about economic efficiency than the interests of the poor, yet their free market policies invariably prove beneficial to them. The

leaders in socialist countries talk a great deal about the interests of the poor, yet their statist policies invariably prove harmful to the poor.

In short, rhetoric means little in the end if the policies that are pursued result in failure.

When Mao took over in 1949, he dressed like a peasant and talked incessantly about the plight of the poor. Meanwhile, he owned 50 villas, and devastated the economy with his socialist policies.

When Fidel Castro, an affluent lawyer, took over in Cuba in 1959, he dressed down and talked incessantly about the plight of the poor. Meanwhile, he lived the high life and devastated the economy with his socialist policies.

When the Sandinistas took over in Nicaragua in 1979, they donned fatigues and talked incessantly about the plight of the poor. Meanwhile, they live in palaces and have devastated the economy with their socialist policies.

When Nicolás Maduro took over in Venezuela in 2019, he talked incessantly about the plight of the poor. Meanwhile, he is living a luxurious lifestyle and has devastated the economy with his socialist policies.

Pope Francis meant well in showing compassion for the poor. But his understanding of economics was not his strong suit, and the economic policies he championed did more to punish the poor than help them. On that score, the next pope has to do better.