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### June 1, 2013: The Economy, the Poor and Religion

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Title: The Economy, the Poor and Religion

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6/1/2013—On Thursday, May 16, 2013, Pope Francis delivered remarks to four new ambassadors to the Vatican: from Kyrgyzstan, Antigua, Luxembourg and Botswana. My mentor gave me a copy of these short remarks, no more than 600 words or so. But the words were very profound.

The Pope opened by saying that we are experiencing a turning point in our history concerning many kinds of advances in the world. At the same time, however, most people continue to live in insecurity even in rich countries. “The joy of life is diminishing; indecency and violence are on the rise; poverty is becoming more evident.” Not only must people struggle to live, but frequently, they live in an undignified way.

One cause, presumably not the only cause, of our situation is to be found in our relationship with money and our acceptance of its power over ourselves and our society. Money is a new idol. The worship of the golden calf. This cult of money, this dictatorship of the economy, is faceless and lacking any truly humane goal.

We are operating under a deficient human perspective, which reduces human beings to only one of their needs, consumption. Indeed, in this economy, human beings themselves are considered a good to be consumed and then thrown away. (This sounds like Heidegger).

None of this is an accident: “it is being promoted!” Human solidarity, “which is the treasurer of the poor, is often considered counterproductive, opposed to the logic of finance and the economy.” While the income of a minority is increasing exponentially the income of the majority is crumbling. This imbalance results from ideologies that uphold the absolute autonomy of markets and financial speculation, denying the right of control by governments that are charged with providing for the common good. This is a new tyranny that imposes its own laws and rules. This credit and debt economy distances people from the real economy and real buying power. All of this is done expressly and openly, but there is also corruption and manipulation that make matters worse.

“Concealed behind this attitude [will to power and will to possession] is a rejection of ethics, a rejection of God.” God is situated outside the categories of the market. God is unmanageable by these manipulators. God is dangerous because “he calls man to his full realization and to independence from any kind of slavery.” Ethics makes it possible to create a balanced social order that is more humane.

I feel, reading these words, the way I felt reading the words of Benedict and John Paul II: who else speaks this way? Whose words cut like a knife in this way? This is not simply left-wing, it is completely outside the pale of normal political/economic discourse. It is a powerful witness on behalf of the poor and a powerful condemnation of greed.

What does a Chris Hitchens or a Richard Dawkins say to this? What do we atheists bring to our cultures that can compare to this?

I'm sorry that the dogma of the Catholic Church includes so much unnecessary stuff, mostly related to sex. I'm sorry that the same eye that can see so clearly with regard to economic and social life, is so blind to the reality of love among same-sex couples. But we must learn to be more discerning. It makes no sense to give up this witness on behalf of the poor and dispossessed, this challenge to the powerful and the wealthy that can be put by no one else as well as by the Pope. Thank God for Francis. He says so well what needs to be said.