

blasphemy against the Providence of God that He would allow the Mother of His Son to suffer such indignity.

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## CLASSICAL LIBERALISM IS THE ISSUE

In the January NOR, Fr. Robert Sirico responded to my October NOR article in which I criticized him and the Acton Institute, of which he is President. I would like to reply to his letter.

Fr. Sirico objects that I took my quotations from his popular newsletter, *Acton Notes*. However, in the issues at the end of 1997 and the beginning of 1998, Fr. Sirico addressed the foundations of economic thinking, and therefore this seemed to me appropriate to use for examining his basic viewpoint. Moreover, in the numerous other publications of the Acton Institute, the same basic view is espoused. And this brings us to the heart of the matter. For the differences between us do not concern interpretations of arcane aspects of Catholic social teaching but rather our basic outlooks on society and the state. Fr. Sirico is (in European terms) a liberal, or, in American terms, a classical liberal, and this he openly acknowledges. But classical liberalism, which promotes the free market and the rule of competition in economic affairs, is incompatible with Catholic doctrine. One could find dozens of papal statements to that effect. In *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931) Pope Pius XI wrote, "With regard to the civil power, Leo XIII boldly passed beyond the

restrictions imposed by liberalism, and fearlessly proclaimed the doctrine that the civil power is more than the mere guardian of law and order...." Pope Paul VI, in *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971), stated that "at the very root of philosophical liberalism is an erroneous affirmation of the autonomy of the individual in his activity, his motivation and the exercise of his liberty."

Although I have no doubt but that Fr. Sirico values many of the same spiritual and cultural goods that I do, classical liberalism does not understand the necessary role of the state in preserving and fostering these goods. It exalts freedom as its highest political good, whereas St. Thomas taught that the purpose of the state is to lead men to virtue. And the popes have not been at all shy about proclaiming the crucial role of the state in bringing about and guaranteeing just wages, moderating market competition, and generally supervising the economy to bring about justice. Nor, contrary to what some have imagined, does the encyclical *Centesimus Annus* (1991) change Catholic teaching on these points. The means for achieving a just social order, as proposed by St. Thomas and papal social teaching, are very different from those desired by classical liberalism and the Acton Institute.

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## MORE ANNULMENTS THAN CONFESSIONS

As a non-Catholic subscriber, I found Gregory Roden's

article (Dec.) on *sola Scriptura* and *sola Fides* interesting. If my church took the approach he describes, I would not believe those principles either.

According to Calvin in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Book I, Chap. VII), Scripture, as the Word of God, is not subject to the judgment of the church. In other words, the canon of Scripture was not voted into existence by a church council in a manner similar to that of the Jesus Seminar today. The church councils of Hippo and Carthage, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, received into the canon the books that had already made their marks on the church. The Protestant view of Scripture is similar to that found in #101-104 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

To the Protestant, Scripture is God's Word and is the standard by which everything must be tested. In Matthew 16:18-20 the church is given a grave responsibility to determine what is acceptable behavior by her members. My church (Baptist), for example, includes abstinence from alcohol and tithing of one's income among what is expected of her members. While support can be found in Scripture, these things are not explicitly commanded. However, there are certain things clearly stated in Scripture that cannot be overruled by the church.

For example, Roden's illustration of divorce is particularly intriguing. He is correct that Scripture teaches against divorce. According to the doctrine of *sola Scriptura*, separation and remarriage is wrong no matter what name you give it. His assertion