

Sirico Against the Bishops

Michael Sean Winters | Jun. 3, 2011 | Distinctly Catholic

In [his article at Crisis magazine](#) [1], Father Sirico does not mention the fact that the position he takes in support of cutting government programs that assist the poor is opposed by the USCCB. He is entitled to think that government anti-poverty programs do not work, but he should at least acknowledge that the bishops who oversee so much of the Church's work on behalf of the poor have concluded that those programs do help. And, there are many reasons - social, economic and cultural - to explain why the Great Society programs have not been as effective as we might have hoped. That said, I fail to see Sirico and his allies proposing alternative efforts to help the poor and the vulnerable, or are we to just throw everyone into this budding "Opportunity Society" and hope they flourish? Alas, no matter what the government does or does not do, there will be some people who do not succeed, people who do not flourish, people whose skills are limited and, consequently, are unable to exploit the opportunities Sirico's laissez-faire vision holds out to them. But, those people are still children of God, seized with profound human dignity. Will Sirico at least admit that there will always be a need for programs to help these people? The very people, I might add, whom Ms. Ayn Rand despised but whom the Church is called to treasure.

Sirico repeats the claim that some issues, like abortion, are "non-negotiable" while others are not, but he is playing a shell game. Of course, helping the poor and protecting the unborn are "non-negotiable." The political question is how to help the poor and how to protect the unborn. The belief that overturning Roe is enough to protect the unborn is both wrong and lazy. I want to protect the unborn, and have reached the conclusion that only by taking the pro-life case to the culture, and avoiding political remedies, will we create a true culture of life in which we both end legal abortion and end illegal abortion. I do not believe returning to the days of back alley abortions is an adequate response to the horror of abortion. But, of course, Father Sirico supports a budget that cuts funding for programs that help poor pregnant women, so it should not surprise that he fails to see how these budget cuts are not just anti-social justice, but anti-life.

But, that is not Sirico's biggest difficulty. He may think that unbridled capitalism is the best way to help the poor advance their economic well-being. I think he is wrong, but for the sake of argument let us stipulate that he is correct in this. As Professor David Schindler wrote in his masterful book, "Heart of the World, Center of the Church: *Communio* Ecclesiology, Liberalism, and Liberation": "The question rather is twofold: a) whether we recognize that a selfishness become mutual is not yet mutual generosity; and b) whether we recognize that our primary 'exigence' or dynamic remains for the latter, however much we may fail to realize it...A mutual selfishness which produces material wealth will, by virtue of its intrinsic dynamic, create a spiritual poverty which is exactly coincident with the production of material wealth." We are called to charity and generosity, not just in our personal dealings, but in the way we structure our society. I hope our efforts at charity and generosity, individually and socially, will help the poor improve their lot, but even if they do not, we are still obligated to try.

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[1] <http://www.crisismagazine.com/2011/not-whether-to-help-the-poor-but-how>