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Father Sirico's Heresy

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Distinctly Catholic

So, Father Robert Sirico has come to the defense of Ayn Rand. I confess that I did not think that anything Fr. Sirico might write could shock me, but his little epistle shocked. Not only does he try and disentangle Rand's foolishness from what he esteems in her thought, but he holds up her hero, John Galt, as a Christ-figure. Like a moth to a flame, like a ship to the Lodestone Rock, like Anthony Weiner with his blackberry, Sirico just cannot help himself.

First, let us confront a charge Sirico makes that is simply false. "It is especially off-putting to see the left employ images of her to tar and feather political opponents in a dishonest way very much reminiscent of the McCarthyism they so frequently denounce," he writes. "They do not argue with [Congressman Paul] Ryan for their own ulterior motives, they merely associate him with an admittedly flawed and mean woman, and think they have done society a service." Sirico does not name any neo-McCarthyites, but I suppose he means me and others like me. But, the crime of "guilt by association" occurs when someone links one person with another and claims the link is significant when, in fact, the link is tenuous, or casual, or incidental, or from childhood. No one I know has so linked Congressman Paul Ryan with Ayn Rand. It is Ryan himself who has stated the linkage and done so repeatedly. It is Ryan who has cited Rand's influence on his thought. It is Ryan who has instructed his staff to read her works. It is not like someone went in to an interview with Ryan, noticed a copy of "Atlas Shrugged" on his bookshelf, and made an otherwise unsubstantiated linkage. That would be reprehensible. That is not what has occurred here.

Second, Sirico argues that while much of what Rand wrote was foolish, much remains pure and unsullied. "That there are problems with Rand's anthropology, aesthetics, epistemology, and egoism, no Christian would deny. What is needed, even more than a point-by-point analysis of each of Rand's contradictions, is a hermeneutical key to her whole approach," Sirico writes. Funny, is it not, that he sounds precisely like the defenders of Liberation Theology here, who argued that you can disentangle the insights of Marxism

from its anthropology and epistemology. But, they couldn't and he can't. Nowhere is it more important for Christian theology to be vigilant against strains of thought that are antithetical to it than in the area of anthropology. *Gaudium et Spes*, 22, states, "The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. For Adam, the first man, was a figure of Him Who was to come, namely Christ the Lord. Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear." Christian anthropology is rooted in Christology and, last time I checked, Ms. Rand was, shall we say, unconvinced that Jesus of Nazareth was the hermeneutic that unlocked the mystery of man.

Ah, but Sirico sees something in Rand's thought that even she missed. Her hero, John Galt, is really a Christ-figure. Sirico writes, "One of the most famous opening lines in literature is the question she poses and uses as a device throughout *Atlas*, a question now on display at Tea Party rallies: "Who is John Galt?" The answer is not immediately given in the book; it (he) remains mysterious throughout much of the novel. Yet it inexorably emerges: Galt is for Rand the ideal man—the Man of the Mind (the logos); the One upon whom the world and its creative capacity depend. He is, in a real sense for Rand, the God-Man." Of course, the real God-Man came to preach good news to the poor, and Mr. Galt did not evidence much in the way of compassion for the poor. The real God-Man is indeed the Logos, the Word of God made flesh, but that word was a word of love, not selfishness, not a "Man of the Mind" as Sirico sees Galt but a man of God, of a loving God, a merciful God, a God who embodied the truth of human dependence on God. It has been a long time since I read Rand, but I don't recall Mr. Galt preaching the virtues of forbearance, of mercy, of unconditional love, of self-abnegation. I suspect Mr. Galt stands a bit closer to an uber-man than to a God-Man.

This is all so appalling. Did Sirico blush when he noted Galt's drawing "Sign of the Dollar" as a "benediction" over the world as it implodes? Does he not see that he is erecting a false god, and that, in the final analysis, is precisely what is wrong with Rand's thought, that she creates a false god of the Self? Ah, but all is saved because Rand was seeking Truth. Sirico quotes Chesterton: "Every man who knocks on the door of a brothel is looking for God." True enough. I suppose many Christian Marxists opened their books with a similar desire burning in their breasts. And, wouldn't it be nice if Sirico were to impart a similarly generous understanding of the myriad and confusing ways we humans often search for truth to, say, Nancy Pelosi or President Obama.

Sirico admits to an early fascination with Rand, that her writings served as a portal to the life of the mind that he has since pursued. I wish he had chosen a different door. This path has led him to heresy.

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