

Lessons from Europe's Beer-Brewing, Liquor-Distilling Catholic Monks

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Didn't Jesus say that it's easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to make it to heaven? And doesn't the Catholic Catechism say that a person should regard his belongings "not merely as exclusive to himself but common to others also"? Indeed—but don't make the mistake of assuming the Church's social doctrine stands opposed to private property and free enterprise. As Europe's beer-brewing, liquor-distilling monks demonstrate, blending capitalism and Catholicism can be rewarding in more than one way.

I. History of the Carthusian Order

Stat crux dum volvitur orbis = "The Cross is steady while the world turns."

"The monks' major work is Night Office, the most intense time of Carthusian life ... the **special responsibility of being awake when everyone else was asleep** ... of being on duty, on call, keeping watch ... The Carthusians prize this time as their signature contribution to other men ... the biggest and most difficult task of the day and the toughest penance."

—Nancy Klein Maguire, *An Infinity of Little Hours*

II. History of Chartreuse, "the Only Liqueur So Good They Named a Color After It"

"The monks at Chimay, Chartreuse, and many other places in the world are **capitalists in the literal sense**. In many cases, they're only tangentially involved in the actual brewing or distilling process, and even less so when it comes to marketing and sales. They employ wage laborers to do most of the work. But because **the religious communities own the means of production** of their wares—the stills and barrels, the secret list of ingredients, the right to use the "Authentic Trappist Product" logo—the proceeds ultimately belong to them."

—Stephanie Slade, "Booze, Profit, and Prayer," *Reason* magazine, January 2019

III. History of Catholic Teaching on Capitalism, Socialism, and Private Property

“The right to private property, acquired or received in a just way, does not do away with the original gift of the earth to the whole of mankind. The **universal destination of goods** remains primordial, even if the promotion of the common good requires respect for the right to private property and its exercise.

‘In his use of things **man should regard the external goods he legitimately owns not merely as exclusive to himself but common to others also**, in the sense that they can benefit others as well as himself.’”

—*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2403–04

“**The sources of wealth themselves would run dry, for no one would have any interest in exerting his talents or his industry**; and that ideal equality about which they entertain pleasant dreams would be in reality the levelling down of all to a like condition of misery and degradation. **Hence, it is clear that the main tenet of socialism, community of goods, must be utterly rejected**, since it only injures those whom it would seem meant to benefit, is directly contrary to the natural rights of mankind, and would introduce confusion and disorder into the commonweal. **The first and most fundamental principle, therefore, if one would undertake to alleviate the condition of the masses, must be the inviolability of private property.**”

—Pope Leo XIII, “*Rerum Novarum*,” 1891

“**Those who are engaged in producing goods, therefore, are not forbidden to increase their fortune in a just and lawful manner**; for it is only fair that he who renders service to the community and makes it richer should also, through the increased wealth of the community, be made richer himself according to his position, **provided that all these things be sought with due respect for the laws of God and without impairing the rights of others and that they be employed in accordance with faith and right reason.**”

—Pope Pius XI, “*Quadragesimo Anno*,” 1931

“The right ordering of economic life cannot be left to a free competition of forces. For from this source, as from a poisoned spring, have originated and spread all the errors of individualist economic teaching. ... **Loftier and nobler principles — social justice and social charity — must, therefore, be sought whereby this dictatorship may be governed firmly and fully.** ... Social charity, moreover, ought to be as the soul of this order, an order which public authority ought to be ever ready effectively to protect and defend.”

—Pope Pius XI, “*Quadragesimo Anno*,” 1931