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## **SOBRE CHRISTOPHER FERRARA, DISTRIBUTISTA Y CRÍTICO DE LAS IDEAS DE LIBRE MERCADO COMO NO CONTRADICTORIAS CON EL PENSAMIENTO CRISTIANO**

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Fuente: *Página personal de Tom Woods*

<http://tomwoods.com/on-chris-ferrara/>

Con motivo de la reciente traducción al castellano/español del libro de Christopher Ferrara (*The Church & the Libertarian. A Defense of the Catholic Church's Teaching on Man, Economy, and State*, Remnant Press, 2010), en el que se vuelve a presentar la tesis según la cual “el liberalismo, tanto político como económico” como “destructores de la civilización Occidental y responsable de sumir al mundo Occidental en el borde de la ruina” (traducción del editorial review en Amazon.com), resulta oportuno leer el comentario de Tom Woods, al hilo de un debate que tuvo con Christopher Ferrara hace ya algún tiempo.

### **ON CHRIS FERRARA**

Most of the time I ignore my critics and continue pumping out articles, books, and speeches. This, wise friends have long told me, is the best reply of all.

I am making an exception here, simply because I have never in my career encountered anyone as obsessed with me and my work as traditional Catholic writer and lawyer Christopher A. Ferrara. He has written many tens of thousands of words denouncing my work, condemning my views on economics and politics, and suggesting that I do not promote the Catholic faith as robustly as I ought.

Well, there's always room for improvement, but I've been doing my best. A mere six months after the *motu proprio Summorum Pontificum* was released, my book *Sacred Then and Sacred Now: The Return of the Old Latin Mass* (2008) appeared. It is a layman's guide to the traditional Latin Mass, that stupendous liturgical treasure of such great beauty that non-Catholics joined their voices with Catholic ones in bitter protest in 1971 when it looked as if it might be abolished forever. The book has been enthusiastically reviewed in a wide variety of outlets.

*Sacred Then and Sacred Now* explains the Pope's decision to restore the traditional liturgy, discusses his liturgical thought, walks people through the old Mass, and replies to common objections. When the *motu proprio* came out, I must have written seven or eight articles, for Catholic and secular periodicals alike, explaining the significance of what the Pope had done. I became a regular on this topic on Catholic radio, defending the old Mass against critics. Ferrara himself, meanwhile, spent this time not preparing a layman's guide to the old Mass, but writing a book criticizing the Catholic television network EWTN for its liberalism.



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I might mention two other major Catholic projects by the wicked Tom Woods over the past several years. In 2007, Columbia University Press published a paperback edition of my book *The Church Confronts Modernity*, which may be the most sympathetic Catholic book ever published by an Ivy League university press. I published *How the Catholic Church Built Western Civilization* in 2005. That's gone through half a dozen foreign-language translations, with another half dozen on the way. It's also been the subject of a 13-episode television series. The foreword to the Spanish translation was written by the current Prefect of the Congregation for Worship. Where is Ferrara's comparable opus?

It could never and will never exist. When I wrote that book, Ferrara dismissed it in a telephone conversation on the grounds that any Catholic could have written it. A *traditional* Catholic, presumably, should confine himself only to tirades and vitriol. (Where could the caricature of traditionalist crankishness ever have come from?)

But let's turn now to economics, where Ferrara is at his angriest. In the one or two times in the past that I have allowed myself to respond to Ferrara, I have been astonishingly restrained. I can restrain myself no longer. Discussing economics with Ferrara is like explaining secondary causation to a shaman. As Richard Tawney said of Martin Luther, "Confronted with the complexities of foreign trade and financial organizations, he is like a savage introduced to a dynamo or a steam engine. He is too frightened and angry even to feel curiosity. Attempts to explain the mechanism merely enrage him; he can only repeat that there is a devil in it, and that good Christians will not meddle with the mystery of iniquity."

Mercifully unavailable online, Ferrara's critique of Murray Rothbard's *Man, Economy, and State* – yes, Ferrara has taken it upon himself to refute a one-thousand-page economic treatise – was excruciating. I shall detain you with only one example. In his discussion of costs, Rothbard explains that when a cartel destroys a portion of its product – coffee, say – the waste involved is to be found not in the destruction itself, but in having allocated too many scarce factors of production to coffee in the first place. Once the decision is made to produce what later turns out to be too much coffee, the damage is done, and the alternative products we might have enjoyed instead are forever unavailable to us. This is the locus of the waste. Ferrara's uncomprehending reply to this analysis castigates Rothbard for not suggesting that the excess coffee be donated to the poor – a remark so far removed from the meaning and purpose of the passage as to make definitively clear just how far in over his head Ferrara is. Luckily for him, Ferrara's intended audience knows nothing of any of this material, so embarrassing and laughable errors, coming from the lips of an articulate lawyer, can sound like the sober analysis of a wise man.

This level of ignorance is by no means unusual; reams of examples might be cited. In fact, I wanted to cite a YouTube exchange in which commenters embarrassed the maker of a pro-Ferrara, anti-Austrian video, showing that — as usual — the poor guy didn't know the first thing about the Austrian School. It was one of the most decisive demolitions of anyone, on any topic, I have ever seen. I wanted to cite that exchange, but the author has (understandably) pulled the video. I can't blame him for that — the guy was made to look like a fool, and his feeble responses only made his position worse. I blame him for embarrassing Catholics by taking dogmatic positions on subjects he is too filled with prejudice and hate to take the time to understand.



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I once asked Ferrara what, in the entire corpus of Austrian work he had supposedly studied in such depth, he found of value. (The Austrians are a school of economic thought, most of whom are not today Austrian by nationality.) He said he agreed with the Austrians on taxes and regulation. This superficial reply was by that time par for the course; what exactly Ferrara could have read on those subjects that was distinctly Austrian I cannot imagine. What, on the other hand, did he think of Austrian price theory? Did he know what it was, and how it differed from, say, Marshallian price theory? What did he think of imputation in factor pricing? How about monopoly theory? Did he understand the significance of the Austrians' capital theory? Did he know what capital theory was? Did he know anything about the history of economic thought at all, such that he could properly evaluate the Austrian School's contribution, or was he in fact a mere propagandist who was not entitled to an opinion? (I leave the answer to this question to the reader as an exercise.)

It is insufferably condescending to claim to feel sorry for your adversary, but that is in fact how I feel about Chris Ferrara. He can pick up a work of genius like *Man, Economy, and State*, and instead of wondering what he might learn from it, combs it for wickedness with the determination of a fanatic. I find it so exasperating to debate Ferrara in part because I can't even understand him. I cannot make sense of a person of good will who picks up that treatise, 99 percent of which is purely descriptive, and seeks to find unrelenting iniquity, all while barely possessing enough knowledge to understand the position it occupies in economic thought and therefore the purposes of its various chapters and arguments. What a drab and dreary world that must be. That world is a universe removed from Catholicism, thank goodness.

In much of my work I have tried to persuade the world that its caricatures of Catholicism are reprehensible and absurd. It has not helped to be constantly confronted by the example of Chris Ferrara, who thinks the usual caricature of Catholicism is in fact not a grotesque distortion to protest against but a model to live by. I can only wonder at his thoughts about the debates on usury in the Late Scholastic period, in which people freely discussed this contentious topic. I can only wonder because I dare not ask, since I am sure the answer involves the squishiness of popes who allowed intellectual debate to occur unhampered.

Ferrara still pretends to think my position is that the Church may not make pronouncements on economic matters. His acolytes, who have never read a sentence I have written, have repeated this inane mantra for eight years. Anyone who wishes to know my actual views may consult the Catholic Social Teaching section of the [Articles page](#) of this website, or my book *The Church and the Market: A Catholic Defense of the Free Economy*.

In political philosophy, Ferrara treats the state like a Platonic form. It is sullied by none of the imperfections of the human beings who occupy its offices. It is the glorious guarantor of "social order" and of the spiritual well-being of the population. (Modest goals, these.) When I tried to explain to Ferrara that (for example) the extension of royal power over the adjudication of disputes in medieval England had nothing to do with the king's pristine devotion to justice and everything to do with his desire to centralize power and collect revenues from having all cases heard in his courts, Ferrara refused to believe me, and dogmatically insisted on his Platonic state without so much as cracking open a book about any of this.



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Left out of the Ferrara equation is the fact that such states have nearly always sought to control the Church, often going so far as to appoint Catholic bishops in defiance of the eleventh-century Gregorian reform. The state, moreover, was practically invisible during the centuries Ferrara cites as Christendom's most glorious. Ireland spent two millennia without anything we would recognize as a state today. The same state that can build up your faith and provide "social order" can also dismantle the structures of that faith and undermine the principles you associate with social order. (One might think the French Revolution would have taught us something.) Far more sensible to slash and burn this haven of sociopaths that Ferrara would entrust with the preservation of "social order," and permit Edmund Burke's "little platoons" of civil society to manage their affairs as they once did. At least then there might be a remote chance that here and there we might be able to enjoy the features of civilized life.

Now Ferrara, you understand, devotes himself to the exclusive contemplation of Big Ideas, so those of us who involve ourselves in the issues of the day instead of debating the merits of imprisoning heretics are contemptible wretches who don't see the big picture. The "audit the Fed" movement was stupid, according to a recent Ferrara article, because it didn't address all the moral problems besetting society. It's likewise stupid to want to get rid of the Federal Reserve; this, too, is a frivolous concern. State nullification of unconstitutional laws is also foolish; Ferrara never learned about *this* in law school.

(In order to be sure to disagree with as many Austrian positions as possible, Ferrara once said he couldn't find anything to object to in the proposal that, instead of a precious-metal standard, we should have a paper money whose supply would be increased on the basis of the country's growing productive capacity, as measured in estimated national wealth. The fatal flaw in this approach is that this estimate of the nation's wealth is itself denominated in money. As soon as the money bureaucracy that Ferrara would establish issues money on the basis of this estimate, the result will be higher prices, and therefore a higher nominal value of the nation's wealth. This higher figure will then be used to justify another infusion of money, and so on until the currency is destroyed.)

Incidentally, the reader may have noticed a link between these three issues. I testified before the House Financial Services Committee on behalf of auditing the Fed. I have written a great deal about abolishing the Fed, as indeed I called for in my 2009 *New York Times* bestseller *Meltdown*. And I just happen to have a new book called *Nullification: How to Resist Federal Tyranny in the 21st Century*. Yet even though I have written more books building up the Church than Ferrara apparently ever intends to, content as he seems to be in devoting his life to unremitting condemnation, I am to be ridiculed and dismissed for writing and speaking on other topics as well, and not spending my every waking moment on Ferrara's Platonic mountaintop.

Would Ferrara and the newspaper he writes for actually be condemning nullification — a topic on which Ferrara graces us with every pat law school response — had Ferrara and I not had our falling out? The question answers itself. This is obviously about personalities and — some insist — envy.

Of course, Ferrara faces the slightly awkward problem that nearly all traditional Catholics who are politically aware agree with me on auditing and abolishing the Fed, and likely agree on nullification as well. Thus in putatively defending traditional Catholicism from my wily liberalism,



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Ferrara finds himself trying to defend these good people from themselves. Good luck with that one, Chris.

On January 27, 2012, Ferrara sent an email to friends making fun of my musical tastes in light of a recent blog post of mine. The guy will not let go. This is deranged.

Why is he so obsessed with me? It's his unquenchable thirst for justice and truth, Ferrara will tell us. Maybe so. On the other hand, perhaps it's a dangerous and transparent indulgence in one of the seven deadly sins. No one can know for certain but Ferrara himself.

On a personal level, Ferrara is upset that I elected not to set forth a ringing defense of him and of the newspaper he writes for when they came under attack from the thought police several years ago. Left out of this tale of Woodsian treachery is the fact that this paper had by that point refused to publish me for years and had devoted, by a factor of ten, more column inches to attacks on me than any editor in his right mind would have tolerated. So I am to be shunned and condemned, but I must come running to testify on their behalf whenever they need me. That sounds fair.

Over the years I've been the subject of occasional attacks by people across the spectrum: leftists, neoconservatives, pretend libertarians, and paleoconservatives. I can handle it; and indeed I think I have usually gotten the better of my critics. But worse than any of them, in terms of intellectual laziness, dishonesty, lack of charity, and outright nastiness have been Chris Ferrara and the sliver – and it is only a sliver, thank goodness – of traditional Catholics who follow in his footsteps.

Ferrara can devote the rest of his life to ponderous tomes to be read by an echo chamber that insists on living down to the worst caricatures of traditional Catholicism, and I have no doubt he will. But I remind him that as Catholics we have an obligation to attend to our own households, and to the souls and well-being of our own children, over and above the pursuit of any self-indulgent avocation. There can be no excuse for neglecting those things in order to embark on self-important, melodramatic crusades to defend civilization against the perversities of Tom Woods. I mean, really.

—Tom Woods

**Addendum, January 2011:** *It has been brought to my attention that Ferrara now denies all of the conversations I attribute to him here. Every one of them occurred, I can assure the reader, either on the telephone or in long-deleted email threads. For instance, when Ferrara was trying to determine what non-Austrian view on money he would adopt for himself, he did indeed entertain, because he said he could find nothing wrong with it, the proposal I note above. The reader must decide for himself which of us to believe. I thought it only fair to mention this.*

**Addendum, January 2012:** *The debate seems to be more or less over now. In August 2011 Ferrara urged Catholics to vote for Ron Paul, who personifies Austrian economics in American politics. Were it truly wicked, sinful, or disobedient to study and learn from the Austrians, he could not have urged Catholics to vote for such a man. He therefore implicitly concedes that Catholics are indeed free to conclude that capital is heterogeneous, that artificial credit creation causes the business cycle, and that indifference curves are methodologically suspect.*