

Hobbits debunk the media's latest Francis fantasy

One of the best things we learned from the hobbits in the first Lord of the Rings movie is their brilliant custom of "second breakfast."

Our education in good living continued in *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey*, the first Hobbit movie, which invited us to a delicious dinner party of epic length.

I am pretty sure that Pope Francis would approve of all this. After all, his signature sign-off to the crowds is, "Buon pranzo" ("Have a good lunch").

And have you seen the photos that capture him getting his caffeine fix Argentina-style by sipping with a metal straw on hot *maté* from a gourd? You may have mistaken it for the hobbit art of partaking of pipe-weed.

With the release last month of Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* ("The Joy of the Gospel"), the usual suspects played their favorite game of seizing on select phrases from the Pope. The name of the game is fantasizing papal approval for one's pet ideological project; or, "Fran-tasizing," as I like to call it.



The noisiest cranks crank out commentary on economic matters. They highlighted the Pope's remarks about "trickle-down theories," the "invisible hand," the "idolatry of money," the fact of "inequality," and the state being "charged with vigilance for the common good." Predict-

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ably, they didn't pick up on either the "Gospel" or the "joy."

I imagine that the Francis

fantasists will go see the new Hobbit movie, *The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug*, and think its main lesson is that capitalism is the evil dragon. No doubt they think the mission of young hobbits everywhere is to sneak into the dragon's lair, to redistribute all that wealth. But that would be missing out on the true meaning of the story, wouldn't it?

That would be like seizing on *Evangelii Gaudium* #54 and claiming that its talk about "trickle-down" economics is a killer shot from Francis aimed right at the chest of the capitalist dragon: "some people continue to defend trickle-down theories which assume that economic growth, encouraged by a free market, will inevitably succeed in bringing about greater justice and inclusiveness in the world," Francis allegedly writes.

But it turns out that this passage, which was very quickly amplified and widely propagated by the media, turns out to be a highly tendentious translation. It seems even the Vatican's own translators like playing the "Fran-tasizing" game, because "trickle-down" is a highly loaded jab in English. When you hear that derisive phrase, you should be hearing invisible leftists who want to steal the treasure back from the capitalist dragon.

But the correct translation of Francis' Spanish "derrame" is "spillover"



Paul Haring / CNS

Pope Francis drinks maté, the traditional Argentine herbal tea, as he arrives in St. Peter's Square to lead one of his Wednesday general audiences. The drink was given to him by a person in the crowd.

or "overflow". It carries no connotation of American ideological warfare over Reaganite tricking: "*En este contexto, algunos todavía defienden las teorías del 'derrame', que suponen que todo crecimiento económico, favorecido por la libertad de mercado, logra provocar por sí mismo mayor equidad e inclusión social en el mundo.*"

Note also the English translation mocks the idea that free markets "will inevitably succeed" in establishing a just society, introducing a harsh tone that is strangely unique to the English translation. The Spanish text doesn't say "inevitably." It says "*por sí mismo*," which means "by itself" or "on its own."

Shorn of all feverish "Fran-tasizing," then, here is a more accurate English rendition of Francis on economies that exclude people from prosperity: "In this context, many still defend

the theories of the 'overflow,' which suppose that economic growth favouring the free-market can succeed all by itself in generating higher equality and social inclusion in the world."

I thank Paul Faraone, historian and master of many languages, for collaborating and debating with me about how best to render Pope Francis' Spanish texts. But I thank Francis himself for using the great Catholic writer J.R.R. Tolkien to illustrate exactly what has to be added to free markets in order for them to succeed in bringing about a just equality and greater social inclusion: namely, self-sacrificing, heroic hobbit hearts.

In his Easter 2008 message to teachers in Argentina, as Cardinal Bergoglio, he said: "Tolkien, in contemporary literature, revisits in Bilbo and in Frodo, the image of man, whose vocation

is to find his way. His heroes experience and embody, while on the way, the drama of good and evil. The 'man on the way' carries within him a dimension of hope. He 'enters' into hope. All of human history and mythology stresses the fact that man is not an isolated, stagnant, motionless being who lacks 'a way.' Rather, man is 'on the way,' with a calling, a vocation — this is where our word 'vocation' comes from. And when a man does not enter into this dynamic, he nullifies himself as a person, or wastes away. Even further, when he places himself 'on the way,' this is rooted in an interior restlessness which impels him to 'go beyond himself,' and experience an 'exodus from self.'

There is something both outside and inside us that calls us to take up the way. To depart, to walk on, to carry See HEADLINE — Page 23

Risky journey offers good lunch

Continued from Page 8

out, to accept exposure and to renounce shelter ... this is the way.”

Of course, on this risky but epic journey, we may justly wish for a second

breakfast. But isn't it only a free market, sustained by heroic hobbit hearts, that has the hope of offering us such plenty?

No, there is no free lunch. But we can have a good

lunch.

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