Lion’s roar of four No’s deserves praise

From Prof Yeomin Yoon.

Sir, John Gapper’s comments on Pope Francis’s view regarding economic and financial reality (“In search of balance”, Analysis, December 24) seem misplaced on two counts.

First, in countering Pope Francis’s words on income inequality, Mr Gapper states that “for the world as a whole, the Pope was wrong... not only has income distribution become more equal but capitalism can take the credit”. The Pope never disputed that “the world’ s Gini index of inequality fell between 2002 and 2008” – albeit a minuscule fall. The larger truth is that the Gini index in 2010 remained much higher than it was in the 1970s and most of the 1980s, according to a recent study by The Conference Board of Canada. This is attributable to an inherent winner-take-all tendency of capitalism. The Pope is simply calling for policies to restrain the strong and support the weak, rather than those that favour the wealthy.

Second, on the Pope’s plea for “a return of economics and finance to an ethical approach which favours human beings”, Mr Gapper asks rhetorically: “Which ones?”. The Pope is shining a light on the oft-forgotten principle that economics (and finance) is a dimension of ethics. He is right to point out that the prevailing world financial system “tends to devour everything which stands in the way of increased profits”, and that the common people and their environment have become “defenceless before the interests of a deified market”. The Pope is calling for a more holistic view of human beings irrespective of where they live, rallying against one-sided reductionist orthodoxy where people are reduced to mere “economic animals”.

Mr Gapper should have praised and thanked Pope Francis – not thrown cold water on him – for letting out a lion’s roar of four No’s: “No to an economy of exclusion”; “No to the new idolatry of money”; “No to a financial system which rules rather than serves”; and “No to the inequality which spawns violence”.

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