

**Between Novak and Maritain:
The discussion on the capitalist economy in Catholic thought**

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Abstract

Although Novak recognizes himself as a disciple of Maritain, especially in his thesis on the Christian origins of democracy, the differences between the two in their views on the capitalist economy are evident. However, in his famous book, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, and in other previous works, Novak tries to show some possible bridges between Maritain’s thought and the virtues of American capitalism. This attempt is actually part of a larger project by Novak: that of showing the essential compatibility of Catholicism with capitalism. The purpose of this article is to show, based on Novak’s thought in relation to Maritain, the possibilities and difficulties of this attempt.

Keywords: capitalism, Catholicism, America, Maritain, democracy

1) Novak’s approach to the conflict between capitalism and Catholicism

Michael Novak devotes much of his work to the study of the conflict between Catholicism and the capitalist economy that he considers the product of a series of historical misunderstandings. His career as a theologian, philosopher, and student of the relationship between economic systems, culture, and religion will undoubtedly be marked by the vicissitudes of this conflict. Novak tries to overcome it by reflecting in depth on what he considers the type of capitalism most compatible with Catholicism: American capitalism. Unlike other forms that the capitalist economy has taken throughout history, the American economy is for Novak a democratic form of capitalism. His labeling of American capitalism as “democratic” has many implications for Catholicism. Perhaps the main one would be the fact that American capitalism would not be a purely individualistic capitalism based exclusively on self-interest, but a social capitalism. Novak understands American capitalism as social capitalism, because in his opinion it does not destroy but rather supposes and even encourages a selfless empowerment of human action through work and forms of association based on community social ties. In this sense, American capitalism would include characteristics such as the creative value of the person and the dignity of work, the search for the common good and the crucial role of intermediate associations, which are fundamental within the Catholic vision of society.

However, and despite his deep conviction about the compatibility between the American form of capitalism and Catholicism, Novak admits that there are, as we said, a series of important historical and conceptual confusions and prejudices that prevent many people from seeing and accepting the aforementioned compatibility. Novak develops a critique of these prejudices. But Novak does not stop at this criticism alone: he tries to demonstrate that American capitalism is compatible with Catholicism by appealing to one of the central figures of 20th century Catholic thought, Jacques Maritain. Novak argues that Maritain, despite having been harshly critical of capitalism in much of his writing, actually changed his position after his long stay in the United States. From this important Maritainian turn, Novak sees the possibility of a new path of gradual acceptance of capitalism in Catholic social thought. This acceptance finds its peak, according to Novak, in the social teaching of Pope John Paul II.

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In this article we intend to investigate Novak's proposal about the possibility of including capitalism within Catholicism, placing special emphasis on the use he makes of the figure of Maritain to achieve this aim. To develop this research we will analyze, firstly, Novak's argument against Max Weber's historical thesis on the relations between Catholicism, Protestantism and capitalism. Secondly, we will investigate Novak's criticism of the authors who within Catholic thought defended the essential incompatibility between Catholicism and capitalism, especially the influential Italian thinker and politician, Amintore Fanfani. Thirdly, we will show how Novak sees the history of Catholic social thought, including the teaching of the Popes themselves, as an oscillating process of acceptance and rejection of the capitalist economic system. Fourthly, we will seek to show why Novak resorts to the thought of Jacques Maritain to try to show the possibilities of opening Catholic thought to capitalism. Fifthly, we will present possible objections that can be made to Novak's statement about Maritain's favorable turn regarding capitalism. Finally, as a conclusion, we will seek to summarize what in our opinion are the main contributions and limitations of Novak's proposal for a possible assimilation of capitalism within Catholicism.

2) Virtues and limitations of Weber's thesis

In the judgments that are usually made about the relations between capitalism and Catholicism, the interpretative framework that Max Weber's thesis has bequeathed to us undoubtedly weighs heavily. In it, capitalism is fundamentally linked to Protestantism, and the image remains that Catholicism would not be very apt to provide the cultural bases of a capitalist economy. This impression has become commonplace to the point that another, much more extreme idea is derived from it: namely, that Catholicism is even hostile to capitalism.

Novak certainly values Weber's thinking for several reasons, most fundamentally, because this true founding genius of sociology considers economic systems as parts of a larger whole that is culture. In contrast with materialist positions such as Marxism, Novak thinks, Weber correctly places the human spirit and religion, in their ability to shape the economy, in a central place (Novak, 1993, p. 9).

However, in Novak's opinion, Weber's thesis also has serious limitations. On the one hand, his description of the characteristics of the spirit of capitalism that would derive from Protestantism is wanting. For Novak, Weber errs in describing capitalism as an economic organization based almost exclusively on a narrow work ethic, fueled by an ascetic discipline, driven by an insatiable greed, focused on the accumulation of money as an end in itself. When one carefully studies the history of the economic systems referred to as 'capitalist', one will not see, according to Novak, solely or mainly a spirit of greed – supposedly derived from the ascetic sense of Protestantism (and in particular Calvinism). As we will see later, in Novak's opinion – and in this he follows authors such as Schumpeter, Hayek and Kirzner, whom he sees as surpassing Weber's thesis – the capacity for innovation, vision, and the discovery of opportunities are much more important for the formation of the spirit of capitalism than the desire for money (Novak, 1993, p. 4).

On the other hand, although Novak in principle admits Weber's empirical thesis that capitalism would have expanded historically more in Protestant countries than in Catholic countries, he questions the fact that this expansion occurred as a result of Protestantism or Catholicism as a such. Today many historians agree with Novak (Delacroix & Nielsen, 2001; Gregg, 2003). In any case, Weber's argument becomes further weakened, according to Novak, once it is confirmed that central elements for the formation of capitalism have had antecedents in the Christian medieval, pre-capitalist culture long before the advent of Protestantism – as for instance in monasteries where a non-slave work culture first developed.

To these arguments of Novak that serve to call Weber's thesis into question, we should add the fact that the beginning of the market economy—as found especially in banks and financial

activity in general – took place not in modern Protestant cities, but in small medieval communes of Catholic Italy, which would later spread such practices throughout Europe. Furthermore, in recent decades, important historians have uncovered (Todeschini, 2009) – although at first sight it might seem counter-intuitive – the strong influence of the Franciscan order, almost the epitome of the ideal of Catholic poverty and fraternity, in the emergence of the market economy and finance. These discoveries support more strongly the affinities that Novak seeks to identify between Catholicism and capitalism.

Novak concedes that this interpretation of the Weberian thesis that simplistically identifies capitalism with a supposed individualistic and greedy spirit of Protestantism will continue to be very difficult to defeat. This interpretation has penetrated not only public opinion in general, but even Catholicism itself, and it feeds a powerful current that has been and continues to be uncompromisingly critical of capitalism. At the same time adherence to the thesis tends to disqualify Catholicism as the basis of a capitalist economy, since Catholicism appears much more communitarian and fraternal in character.

3) The questioning of capitalism in Catholic social thought: Criticism of Fanfani's approach

Novak sees, as we have said, especially in the 19th and 20th centuries, a strong penetration of a negative vision of capitalism within Catholicism. The figure he chooses to represent this negative conception with crystal clear clarity is that of the Italian Christian-Democratic political and economic historian, Amintore Fanfani, who was also Prime Minister of Italy several times. Novak develops a presentation and critique of Fanfani, which focuses on the latter's well-known book, *Catholicism, Protestantism and Capitalism*. According to Novak, Fanfani presents capitalism as an economic system whose "spirit" promotes selfishness, materialism and individualism and in which the only alternative option to pursuit of unlimited gain is hedonistic enjoyment.

In summary ... the capitalist spirit is that attitude adopted by a man towards the problems of wealth, its acquisition and use, when he holds that wealth is simply a means for the unlimited, individualistic and utilitarian satisfaction of all possible human needs. A man governed by this spirit will, in acquiring wealth, choose the most effectual means among such as are lawful, and will use them without any anxiety to keep the result within certain limits. In the use of wealth he will seek individualistic enjoyment; to the acquisition and enjoyment of goods he will recognize one limit only—hedonistic satiety (Fanfani, 1984, pp. 28–29 in Novak, 1993, p. 18).

From the historical point of view, according to Fanfani, capitalism would not have arisen directly from the Protestant ethic, as Max Weber maintained, but only from a degradation of the pre-capitalist Catholic social and ethical order of the medieval era. Only later, the irruption of Protestantism – assisted by the action of the absolutist State – accelerated the expansion of capitalism and the deepening of its intrinsic tendency towards individualism and materialism. In this sense, for Fanfani, even though he does not share Weber's thesis of the Protestant origin of capitalism, he affirms a certain affinity and mutual feedback between capitalism and Protestantism. This affinity and feedback would come from the fact that, in the same way that Protestantism tends to separate the natural dimension from the supernatural, faith from reason, the Church from the State, and grace from works, so in capitalism there would be a similar tendency to the same separation: between efficiency and ethics, means and ends, individual interest and general interest, etc. On the contrary, given that in Catholicism the unity of all reality in Christ is essential – of faith with nature, of the Church with the State, of the economy with ethics – so there would be an intrinsic incompatibility between capitalism and Catholicism.

Novak subjects Fanfani's position to several harsh criticisms. But most importantly he maintains that Fanfani's description of the characteristics of capitalism corresponds more to a mental construction elaborated to caricature it, than to its actual historical reality. According to Novak, Fanfani was influenced by an Italian experience of crony capitalism, closely linked to the discretionary management of powerful, corrupt and uncontrolled individuals. He therefore ignored the reality of the most authentic form of capitalism. If Fanfani had known American "democratic" capitalism, Novak thinks, he would have realized that the motor of true capitalism is not the unlimited appetite for profit and pleasure, but creative work, within a framework of moral and associative virtues oriented to the common good.

In particular Fanfani, like Max Weber before him, tried to grasp the spirit of capitalism without seeing it as an aspect of political economy. That is, he tried to abstract the economic system from its lived incarnation within the political system of democracy, as well as within cultures that highly value common law, the principle of association, and social cooperation. This abstraction enabled him to treat the capitalist spirit in a denuded way, quite false to its lived reality. To argue, as he does, that the capitalist spirit sees material wealth, and only material wealth, as the highest aim of humankind; that the capitalist self is entirely atomic and individualistic; and that self-interest is limited to strictly monetary measures, is to remain far outside the lived reality of Christian, Jewish, and humanistic life within such nations as the United States (Novak, 1993, p. 21–22).

Undoubtedly, in his eagerness to win over his intellectual adversary, Novak leaves very little space to analyze the possible true aspects of Fanfani's ideas. As other authors argue (Clark, 2003, pp. 25–36), it may even have been a bit extreme on his part to maintain that the Italian scholar and politician does not develop any of his critiques of the ethical problems of capitalism from the observation of reality, to concentrate on overthrowing an idea of capitalism that would be the fruit only of his intellectual imagination. For the rest, it is not by chance that most economic thinkers have resorted to individual interest, the desire for profit, and the maximization of utility, to describe the main motive for acting by the agents of the capitalist economy (Clark, 2003, p. 34). Notwithstanding this, Novak seems to be correct when he affirms that Fanfani has perhaps exaggerated too much this individualist-chrematistic aspect of capitalism, disregarding other motives, perhaps more moral and socially elevated, that also have their place in that economic system, something that Novak seeks, I think legitimately, to rescue.

Novak sees not only in Fanfani, but also in Catholic social thought in general, this tendency to exaggerate the defects of capitalism, wrongly converting them into its essential features. This will result, in his opinion, in a wrong interpretation of the principles and criteria for action of many important Christian thinkers, with repercussions even in the Pontifical social texts themselves. These shortcomings constitute, according to Novak, not simply a problem of a theoretical or doctrinal nature, but also a serious practical impediment to escape from the evils of poverty and underdevelopment in many countries, insofar as they are under the influence of this mistaken vision.

4) The oscillating path of the social doctrine of the Church in relation to liberal capitalism

Novak attempts to show how, amidst various fluctuations and nuances, Catholic social thought has generally been inclined to see something negative in capitalism, an inclination that will only have a clear interruption, in his opinion, with the social teaching of John Paul II. Among the most positive exceptions, a very prominent one was for Novak that of Leo XIII. According to Novak, Leo's encyclical *Rerum novarum*, which marks the official start of the Church's social doctrine, is full of ideas and reflections on principles compatible with capitalism: it includes a

strong appreciation of private property and personal initiative and a very sharp criticism of statism and socialism (Novak, 1993, p. 47). However, inspired by authors such as Giuseppe Toniolo – Fanfani’s teacher – Leo XIII also supports the traditional Catholic criticism of liberal-capitalism.

Nevertheless, the true intensification of the criticism of capitalism comes especially with Pope Pius XI who, according to Novak, also installs within the social doctrine of the Church an idea of social justice interpreted in a particular anti-liberal version. In fact, it will be especially the Jesuit, Oswald von Nell-Breuning, a true intellectual and author in the shadows of Pius XI’s encyclical *Quadragesimo anno*, who specifies, according to Novak, the transition from an idea of social justice understood as a personal virtue, to an idea of this same justice understood as a result of social structures. In line with Hayek’s critique, Novak considers von Nell-Breuning’s interpretation of the concept of social justice as the result of Rousseau’s influence on Catholic social thought. Indeed, in his opinion, “what really laid the groundwork for this new concept of social justice was Rousseau’s view that society corrupts the pure individual” (Novak, 1993, p. 68). In this sense, Rousseau’s conception, which places the origin of evil in the social structure and not in original sin, when transposed to Christian social thought, leads to an increasingly “structuralist” idea of social justice. This leads, according to Novak, to a tendency within ecclesiastical doctrine to propose structural changes in the economy, and finally, even to favor the total replacement of capitalism by some new system, such as corporatism or solidarism, as proposed by Pius XI, as guided by his intellectual adviser, von Nell-Breuning (Novak, 1993, p. 75).

In this oscillating development of the social doctrine of the Church, Novak sees a certain opening towards liberal-capitalism in the pontificates of Pius XII and John XXIII. After the experiences of fascism and Nazism and their destructive consequences in World War II, both Popes will promote the Church’s support for Christian democracy and with it, for the first time, a clear recognition of human rights that form the core of political liberalism and to some extent also of a social form of capitalism. In economic matters, Novak accordingly collects valuable passages from the encyclicals *Mater et magistra* (1961) and *Pacem in terris* (1963), in which John XXIII establishes some principles that in the opinion of the American theologian are very compatible with liberal-capitalism (Novak, 1984, pp. 126–131).

And yet the following Pontificate, that of Pope Paul VI, will constitute for Novak a new moment of conflict between the social doctrine of the Church and liberal-capitalism, especially in the encyclical *Populorum progressio* (1967). Novak sees there practically the maximum expression of the prejudices of the Church’s social doctrine against the market, individual initiative, business, capitalism, and economic liberalism in general (Novak, 1984, pp. 133–140).

Only with the arrival of John Paul II, the great Pope who defeated socialism and promoted freedom and creativity, would a Pontiff openly defend a moral and legally framed form of capitalism for the first time. Thus, according to Novak, especially starting with the encyclical *Centesimus annus* (1991), there is a surprising and positively promising new turn in the relations between Catholicism and capitalism.

However, Novak’s aim was not only to elaborate a history of the oscillating moments of Catholic social thought in relation to capitalism. Nor did he only exalt the work of the Polish Pope in having opened the doors to a positive appreciation of capitalism within the social doctrine of the Church – despite his enormous admiration and appreciation for John Paul II. Rather, his main purpose seems to have been to provide a new interpretative framework for capitalism, which would obviate the misunderstandings that have occurred in the past and allow for its definitive incorporation into Catholicism in the future.

This interpretative framework is marked by three central ideas that he set out to demonstrate throughout his life: 1) that capitalism is not a mere “economic system”, but a complete regime – moral, political and social – of life (Novak, 1991, p. 182); 2) that this complete regime of

capitalist life cannot be understood only or primarily in a theoretical way, but must be studied as it has existed for centuries in reality, although most compellingly in the form of American democratic capitalism, and 3) that since the criticisms of capitalism by many Catholic authors – including the Popes – are strongly influenced by their experiences of incomplete or defective forms of capitalism in European or Latin American countries, it is necessary to appeal to the testimony of those who, having undisputed authority within Catholic social thought, have seen with their own eyes and appreciated American democratic capitalism. In this last regard, Novak appeals not only to his own experience, but also to a personalized theoretical elaboration, to defend American democratic capitalism. He also resorts to the testimony of a key author in the history of Catholic social thought to bring this complex intellectual operation to a successful conclusion, namely, Jacques Maritain.

5) A reformulation of the relations between capitalism and Catholicism:

The recourse to Maritain's thought

Although Novak does not systematically develop a complete vision of Maritain's thought, this great Christian thinker is always in the background of his intellectual project. Novak is undoubtedly a Maritainian thinker from the moment he is aware that Maritain is the author who has most influenced the shift towards the acceptance of democracy and political liberalism within Catholic social thought in general and in the social doctrine of the Popes in particular. However, there is a fundamental stumbling block in Novak's full adherence to this Maritainian wave that will engulf almost the entire Church: Maritain's anti-capitalist stance. In effect, Novak will face the problem, very complex but crucial for him, of finding a way to reconcile his own positive vision of democratic capitalism, which would make it compatible with Catholicism, with the apparent rejection of this economic system by the highest Catholic democratic and social thinker of the 20th century.

Indeed, when going through Maritain's work, it is possible to recognize clearly from the beginning his basic rejection of the principles of the capitalist system almost at the same level as those of Marxism, considering them completely incompatible with Catholicism. Already in his 1931 book *Religion and culture*, he expresses the view that capitalism is founded on the false and falsifying principle of the fertility of money, "a fertility which, like everything that transgresses the conditions laid down by nature, knows no limits", which would show "to what an extent the materialist or capitalist or Marxian conception of culture is at variance with the mind of the Common Doctor of the Church" (Maritain, 1931, pp. 22–31 quoted by Doering, 1985, p. 65).

Even in the new path that Maritain began to follow with *Integral humanism* in 1936 –in which he broke with his previous integralist position in the political field, becoming a staunch defender of democracy – the French thinker will continue with the same critique of the capitalist system. Just by going through a few chapters of *Integral humanism* it is possible to verify the way in which Maritain qualifies capitalism as a regime "not of men but of money and paper, of symbols of wealth, a society whose soul is the desire to produce more titles of possession" (Maritain, 1973, p. 164–165). Also in that same book, he warns that his critique of capitalism is not merely theoretical, but points to its replacement by a new economic regime based on the primacy of the person and work over capital, which "presupposes the preliminary liquidation of modern capitalism and of the regime of the primacy of money-profit" (Maritain, 1973, p. 190). Indeed,

In order to avoid any misunderstanding, I must insist on this point that the different considerations proposed here concern in our view a state consecutive to the liquidation of capitalism and have no meaning except with regard to such a state. They presuppose a radical change not only in the material but also in the moral structure and in the

spiritual principles of the economy: for capitalism itself is fully understandable only through the spirit which informs it (Maritain, 1973, pp. 190–191).

This last observation by Maritain, in which he expresses his conviction that the capitalist system is expressed not only in its material dimension, but above all in its moral structure and “in the spirit that informs it”, will be the dangling thread from which Novak will attempt to place Maritain on the side of the pro-capitalist Catholic authors. In fact, the idea that capitalism is not only a structure but also a “spirit” will coincide, as we know, with the very core of Novak’s proposal, although with the difference that while for Maritain (or at least for the Maritain of *Integral humanism*) said spirit should be “liquidated”, for Novak it should be rightly recognized and rescued. The curious and interesting thing about the case is that Novak will seek to carry out this rescue by resorting precisely to Maritain himself, apparently an adversary completely opposed to his own proposal. But how?

The answer will lie in Novak’s interpretation of what for him constitutes the key text to understand Maritain’s final evolution in his thinking on capitalism: his *Reflections on America* of 1958. This small text is the result of the long stay of Maritain in the United States that covers, with just a few interruptions, from 1939 to 1960, and was presented by him in three seminars held in 1956 at the University of Chicago.

Whoever reads this text for the first time will surely get the same surprise that Novak experienced: that Maritain appears there in general as a great fan of the United States, despite being, presumably, the most capitalist country in the world. Furthermore, a large part of the positive descriptions in the book turn out to be, in addition to those referring to that country’s democracy, specifically related to its economy. And what is even more astonishing is the way in which Maritain affirms there that, despite the United States’s being, like Europe, an “enormous industrial civilization”, it has a “spirit” very different from what until then he had negatively identified with capitalism.

Indeed, unlike Europe, where capitalism is marked, according to Maritain, by the “bourgeois spirit” – which the French thinker will always identify with the excessive desire for profit, individualism and materialism – American capitalism, despite having an internal logic which tends toward individual gain, is increasingly permeated, according to Maritain, by a “humanist” (Maritain, 1958, p. 113) and “associative” spirit, among many other virtues that make up a healthy “middle-class spirit”, very different from that of the selfish bourgeoisie.

This industrial civilization, which I had learned to know in Europe, appeared to me, here, both as gigantically developed (like many things transplanted from Europe over here) and as a kind of ritual dedicated to some foreign goddess. Its inner logic, as I knew it—originally grounded as it was on the principle of the fecundity of money and the absolute primacy of the individual profit—was, everywhere in the world, inhuman and materialist. But, by a strange paradox, the people who lived and toiled under this structure or ritual of civilization were keeping their own souls apart from it. At least as regards the essentials, their souls and vital energy, their dreams, their everyday effort, their idealism and generosity, were running against the grain of the inner logic of the superimposed structure. They were freedom-loving and mankind-loving people, people clinging to the importance of ethical standards, anxious to save the world, the most [...]” (Maritain, 1958, pp. 21–22 quoted in Novak, 1991, p. 199).

In other words, “philosophically speaking, I would say that individual profit still remains, as it ever will, an indispensable human incentive, but that it is now definitely losing absolute primacy; and that the principle of the fecundity of money is definitely superseded now by the principle of profit-sharing in a contractual association” (Maritain, 1958, p. 115). Maritain finally wonders in the same text what name should be given to this “new economic system” that he sees unfolding so clearly before his eyes in the United States. To this question he

suggests, quoting an author who considers various denominations, that a possible name could be “democratic capitalism” (Maritain, 1958, p. 113). Reading this quote we finally end up realizing where Novak gets the idea to rename capitalism and also the reason why this text by Maritain is so important to him in his fight for the acceptance of capitalism within Catholicism.

6) Objections and Questions: was Maritain really an admirer of American capitalism?

But did Maritain really become, as Novak argues, an admirer of American capitalism? And, on the other hand, did he change his critical vision of capitalism because of this admiration? To answer these two questions in a well-grounded way, one must obviously go beyond the quotes that Novak takes from Maritain, and directly consult his texts. And precisely when one goes through them, no longer through Novak’s lens but in themselves, many doubts quickly arise.

Let’s look at the first point: Maritain’s supposed admiration for American capitalism. Rereading the *Reflections* in full, one is certainly struck by the virtues Maritain sees in American economic life. But one needs to be careful: is what he describes and praises really the spirit of American capitalism or American democratic capitalism as Novak understands it, that is, a capitalism characterized by free markets and the free initiative of creative individuals imbued with virtues? My opinion is no. If one reads carefully, what becomes clear is that Maritain is describing and praising something very different, that is, an American economy marked by the New Deal, that is, by massive State intervention and regulation and by the action of the unions placing strong limits on the intrinsic logic of capitalism that Maritain continues to see as something dangerous and harmful. In fact, what Maritain wanted to see in the years he was there, during and immediately after the war, was American capitalism *in retreat*. Certainly, in the wake of Tocqueville, Maritain praises the influence of the religious and associative virtues of the Americans on the economy, but what he sees in these virtues is the fuel that feeds a great movement of “social justice” understood as a strong state, and the union of business and social planning that will end up liquidating the type of liberal and individualist capitalism that he most rejects: “There is a great deal of planning, both spontaneous (thanks to the staff of economists employed by each big corporation) and connected and intermingled with State and Federal legislation, and government regulations and proddings” (Maritain, 1958, pp. 108–109).

Regarding the second question, whether Maritain made a turn in his conception of capitalism based on his experience in the United States, as Novak suggests, my answer is also negative. In fact, if we read it correctly, the truth is that the text clearly shows that what Maritain really hopes is that the growing planning and social intervention that he sees before his eyes (let’s remember that he writes in 1958) will lead to the United States not certainly to a planned economy of the socialist type that he also rejects, but to a system that he imagines to be very different and superior to both socialism and capitalism.

This new social and economic regime is still in a state of full becoming, but it has already brought human history beyond both capitalism and socialism...Here we have a decisive fact in modern history; and this fact is a considerable success of the experiential approach dear to the American mind... ; for the truth is that America is taking leave of capitalism, not through any sudden, violent and destructive revolution, but through steady, constructive—and unsystematic— transmutation (Maritain, 1958, pp. 115–116).

In other words, Maritain never changed his opinion regarding capitalism, not even in the face of American “democratic” capitalism. Rather, it seems that, in fact, he expected the United States to gradually abandon capitalism to adopt a different economic regime, *sui generis*, in line with a “von Nell-Breuning-type” structuralist idea of social justice such as that criticized by Novak.

For the rest, as if he had wanted to clear up all doubt on this point, Maritain wrote a short article near the end of his life entitled “A society without money” (Maritain, 1985), inspired by his meeting with two religious from the congregation of the little brothers of Charles de Foucauld recently arrived from Cuba. Although Maritain rejects in the article the totalitarian method of Fidel Castro, he rescues some elements of the Cuban experience to develop a series of utopian statements – with a really poor or erroneous technical basis – for an economy “without money”. Beyond the details of the text (Haines, 1987; Chabot, 2012), what the article mostly indicates is that Maritain continued to fight his eternal enemy, capitalism, practically until the end. If one were to take this text completely seriously – something some are hesitant to do given the great thinker’s advanced age when he wrote it – Novak’s thesis would become even more difficult to defend.

7) Conclusion: contributions and limitations of Novak’s thought to rethink the relations between capitalism and Catholicism in today’s global world

Given the strong doubts raised by Novak’s project of presenting Maritain, the highest representative of Catholic social thought, as a supporter of capitalism, is his project of reconciliation between capitalism and Catholicism then destined to fail? I think this question is complex and requires an answer that goes far beyond a simple yes or no. The complexity of the answer offers, however, the opportunity to present a brief final balance of Novak’s contributions to the relationship of Catholic social thought with capitalism, also weighing the possibilities of its application in our current situation of globalized capitalism.

I believe that Novak’s greatest contribution has been to question the often negative vision of capitalism in Catholic social thought. On the one hand, he showed the weakness of a dogmatically Weberian approach that identifies capitalism with Protestantism and always opposes it to Catholicism. This idea is historically false: prestigious historians have shown that capitalism has its roots in the medieval Catholic world and that even in the Modern Age, capitalism has also developed in Catholic countries and regions. On the other hand, Novak has also shown the falsity of the idea that capitalism admits no other logic than the unlimited pursuit of individualistic profit. On the contrary, as Novak always points out, capitalism does not work alone or always on the exclusive basis of profit: the most varied experimental investigations have shown that the behavior of people in a capitalist economy includes many other motivations such as the taste for work, the desire for innovation and even strong moral motivations or the spirit of associative cooperation between individuals.

Finally, Novak has had the merit of denouncing the penetration within Catholic social thought of a certain Rousseauianism that has led many Catholic thinkers and even several Popes to reject liberal-capitalism flatly and without nuances, due to an excessively structuralist idea of social justice. In this sense, I believe that Novak has clearly shown how, properly framed legally and morally, some types of capitalism can be compatible with Catholic social thought, as it was stressed especially in the encyclicals of John Paul II and Benedict XVI.

In any case, I also see important weaknesses in Novak’s approach. The most important is, in my opinion, his attempt to present American “democratic” capitalism as the best morally, socially and culturally framed economic system to be integrated into Catholicism. This thesis is, in my opinion, open to criticism for two reasons. Firstly, because American capitalism has varied strongly over time: there has never been a single pure historical configuration of an American “democratic” capitalism that survived all historical circumstances and economic-political theories. In fact, when analyzing Novak’s attempt to present Maritain as a defender of American capitalism, we have been able to verify that what he approved was not really American capitalism, but its social-Keynesian version of the 40s and 50s. In fact, we know that later this capitalism that Maritain admired would turn since the 90s and 2000s, into a deregulated global financial capitalism. Therefore: which of the four or five types of capitalism

that the US has historically had is, for Novak, the authentically democratic one and therefore the most compatible with Catholicism?

Secondly, it is worth asking whether the type of American capitalism that seems closest to Novak's vision – that is to say, the capitalism of liberal style that developed in the US since the 80's – is really the most appropriate to be integrated into Catholicism. In this sense, it must be remembered that this capitalism was strongly inspired by authors such as Milton Friedman from the Chicago school who favored a type of utilitarian conception of the economy. If one compares it with other types of capitalism, such as the German social market economy inspired by authors like Wilhelm Röpke, it seems more likely that it is German capitalism and not contemporary American capitalism, a system much closer to Catholicism. Furthermore, another question that arises today regarding Novak's proposal is whether the more or less homogeneous form that capitalism has acquired in the last decades of globalization allows us to continue supporting the idea of a moral superiority of American capitalism and therefore its greater capacity to be integrated into Catholicism.

For the rest, beyond its strengths and weaknesses, it is a very difficult fact to refute that Novak's thought has become in the last thirty years an inescapable point of reference that marks a milestone in the history of the relations between capitalism and Catholicism. Accompanying and interpreting the social magisterium of John Paul II, Novak has become, together with Maritain – probably his opposite pole on this issue beyond what Novak would have wanted – one of the referents of the two great interpretative currents of the social doctrine of the Church in relation to the economy. In this sense, in our time, when, due to the crisis of globalization, strong criticisms against capitalism are raised both outside and within the Church – many of them extreme, indiscriminate and tinged with a renewed Rousseauianism – the discussion and many of the insights that Novak introduced into the debate on Catholic social thought are again very relevant.

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