

**Fanfani, Amintore. *Catholicism, Protestantism, and Capitalism*. Norfolk, Virginia: IHS Press, 2003. 187 pp. \$14.95 softcover.**

Fanfani's primary message in this book is the unequivocal statement that Catholicism, in none of its teachings, recommends nor supports a Capitalistic way of life, nor capitalism as a socioeconomic order. He, in fact, concludes that "there is an unbridgeable gulf between the Catholic and the capitalistic conception of life" (118). For this reason alone, it is especially meaningful in this modern age, and can be useful in motivating change; but the book says so much more and can be useful, too, in diverse ways as a pedagogic instrument. The book not only provides a fundamental, understandable, and, I believe, compelling explanation of capitalist development and evolution, but also insight on understanding modern geopolitical motivations towards empire-building, and the inevitable revolutionary consequences contained within this particular modern/colonial expansion strategy. Fanfani also confidently claims an inevitable and ongoing subversion of the State to the economic principals in a capitalistic society, a position he then, in my estimation, successfully supports.

Fanfani smartly identifies and examines capitalism from the basis not of its structure, but of its "essence," which he considers the "capitalist spirit," or that "economic spirit which informs modern man as he attends to business" (54). Capitalism is treated as an inevitable outcome of the release of the "capitalist spirit," humanly inherent, but previously restricted; thus, the relation of Catholicism to capitalism as the extra-economic restrictor of this human impulse. Fanfani takes great pains to distinguish pre-capitalist behaviors from capitalist in his desire to clearly separate human action as a result of adherence to a Catholic morality from human action as motivated by the "capitalist spirit." The two sections on the development and evolution of Capitalism, in the first part of the work, then again in a separate chapter, provide a logical sequence within which the capitalist spirit is transformed from an individual motivator to a dominant social force.

There are several aspects of this book that I find pedagogically useful. Fanfani is unusually explicit in his argument that it is Catholicism, not communism, which represents an opposite approach to socioeconomic organization. Catholic philosophy, he claims—rightly I think—subjugates the economic to the political, in that it "relates the material well-being of the individual to the material well-being of his neighbor and subordinates purely economic well-being to individual and social well-being" (93). Communism, therefore, is not the

adversary of Capitalism, but “its final and most highly evolved stage” (92). Too often, in my classrooms, Communism is understood as the opposite of Capitalism.

There are more conclusions drawn that tend to fit “in between” capitalism and socialism/communism in the general diatribe among the industrially educated; conclusions that most of my students would not have previously encountered. Statements like, “political liberties, through which the citizen cooperates in forming the will of the State” (97) provide the guarantee that stabilizes the economically liberal policies of the United States, for example, that feature, even glorify, non-Catholic notions of self-interest as the highest form of economic motivation. Most of my students would shrink from such a suggestion that democracy could be considered as potentially contributing to their economic servitude, due to increasing concentration of ownership, by allowing the public to sanction their own dependence, all the while thinking they are free because they got to decide.

Fanfani, too, is unusually explicit in explaining the role of the State in furthering the capitalist order, claiming that “always the state is the instrument of capitalistic organization of the world” (102). His conclusion that the State, as the primary tool of the capitalist, is subject to capitalist economic principles, in fact, directed by them toward facilitating the economic expansion critical to the capitalist membership, is not often found in the secular readings common to social-science-course bibliographies. It is therefore useful in stimulating thought. Industries, he claims, urged the state to expand colonially as a platform for economic colonial expansion. This kind of controversy is upsetting to students, because they have been led in the opposite direction by another tool of capitalism: an education system designed to place at the disposal of the capitalistic sector, a docile, manageable (cheap) labor force. Many U.S. students would find this bordering on treason if Fanfani were an American.

One last aspect I find useful in the classroom is Fanfani’s conclusion that capitalism is the primary motivator for nationalization and, by extension, globalization. He contends that since capitalism requires an expanding market, homogeneity (nationalization/globalization) is facilitated both internally through government action, and externally through colonization. The State works to encourage cultural convergence on a rather singular ideal through legislative action regarding sameness in language, law, custom, transportation, communication, money, etc. Only recently, though, have these legislative actions begun to facilitate the newer world globalization, through such institutions as the United Nations, World Bank, World Trade Organization, the Internet, and world courts of various types.

The final component adding to this intriguing and thought-provoking treatise on Capitalism as a sort of rogue economic system in the eyes of the Roman Catholic Church, is how Fanfani explains the impact of Protestantism on facilitating, perhaps accelerating, the release of the human capitalist spirit. He rejects the traditional notion that Protestant devotion to vocation as a primary motivator of human activity was the main Protestant contribution to the establishment of capitalism, because the release of the capitalist spirit, Fanfani contends and demonstrates, pre-existed Protestantism. He also does not attribute the spread of Capitalism to any aspect of Protestantism as a religion; in fact, he considers it indisputable that Protestant reformers overwhelmingly *reiterated* Catholic teaching. But the impact of Protestantism he considered substantial nonetheless. It was to Protestantism that he attributed the force that destroyed the unity of the pre-capitalist state and “made its restoration impossible” (142). From the time of the Reformation on, he contended, the State “no longer had a creed to defend, only interests” (142), which meant the removal of any extra-economic obstacles to economic life and “encouraged the tendency to count the religious question among problems that could be left out of the reckoning.”

The directors at IHS Press, in republishing this highly recommended work, have included their own Preface, and solicited an additional Foreword and Introduction from current scholars on the issue. This preamble is useful in connecting Fanfani’s 1935 work to recent times, which really serves to underscore that little has changed to render his thinking obsolete; it only shows the renewed urgency with which the new world order should recognize and respond.

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