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# COMMENTARY - FINANCIAL CAPITALISM AND THE ANTIDOTES AGAINST IT. AWAY FROM THE IMPERIAL CULT

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Published in *Avvenire* on July 7, 2013



To understand what truly lies behind the growing resistance to the closure of businesses on Sunday, we must have the courage to seriously consider the anthropological and cultural aspects of our capitalism. Philosopher Walter Benjamin wrote in 1921 that “one can behold in capitalism a religion, that is to say, capitalism essentially serves to satisfy the same worries, anguish, and disquiet formerly answered by so-called religion. (...) Capitalism itself developed parasitically on Christianity in the West” (*Capitalism as Religion*, 1921). And prophetically he added: “A commanding view will, however, later become possible”.

Indeed, the religious nature of capitalism is much more evident today than it was in the 1920s, especially when one considers how increasingly rare it is to find areas of our lives that are not for sale. It is a pagan religion that calls for an exclusive form of worship and aims to replace Christianity (not any other religion), because it spawned from Jewish-Christian humanism. According to this view, modernity is not characterized by a desecration or disenchantment of the world, but instead by the affirmation of a new religion, i.e., by the transformation of the Christian spirit into the “spirit” of capitalism. The argument is strong and inevitably controversial, but it undoubtedly captures a fundamental dimension of our time, one that was perceived at the dawn of capitalism by the philosophical genius of Antonio Rosmini.

The intertwined relations between Christianity and capitalism run deep since their very origins. Capitalism borrows from the vocabulary of the Bible (faith-trust, credit-belief...), and even the evangelists use the economic language of their time to make comparisons and compose parables. And we cannot understand the Middle Ages, the Reformation or Modernity unless we take into account the numerous intersections between grace and money. Nevertheless, only in recent times has capitalism fully revealed its true nature as a pagan religion. It is not limited to the worship of goddess Fortuna, supreme deity of countless “games” who dominates whole new categories of underprivileged. Nor is it confined to shopping centers designed like temples, or to the culture of multilevel marketing companies that initiate their sessions with the sign of the cross looking for new followers for their must-have products, or even to the creation of a financial system that is based exclusively on faith and lacks any connection with the real economy.

This new religion promises and offers us much more: a pseudo-eternity, a surrogate for eternal life. As an individual product, an automobile ages and deteriorates, but if one has money or credit, a new one can be immediately purchased and death may thus be vanquished. From the apotheosis of cosmetic surgery, it offers the elixir of (illusory) eternal youth. As all pagan religions, it celebrates pleasure and youth, and as a result it deliberately turns its gaze away from death and conceals it (which also includes the glorified idea of self-determination that leads to euthanasia and assisted suicide). Death is concealed because it is too real to be understood by capitalism: who runs across a funeral procession along our streets anymore? Who sees the children gather around the bedside of their deceased grandfather any longer? Idolatry, which is the illness of every religious civilization, has thus transformed the worship of money, together with capitalism, into a *de facto* religion complete with its own priests, churches, incenses, liturgies and saints, whose worship is performed twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, in a perpetual state of adoration that has no regard for the Sabbath, Fridays, or even Sundays. It is therefore a naïve illusion to think the capitalist culture capable of respecting Sunday rest: there is no Sunday in that religion, because every day is a day of worship. There is no possible coexistence between the culture of Sunday and the culture of capitalism.

The various forms of capitalism, however, are not all the same - or at least they were different until recently. Europe, in particular, has produced its own version of capitalism, which represents the culmination of a conception of economics and society that was born at the heart of the Franciscan and Dominican monastic charisms. The Reformation and Counter-Reformation inflicted a deep wound in the market economy that made Florence, Venice and Lisbon into great and beautiful cities.

The long history of Europe, which afforded her a vast amount of experience with different and mixed societies, has been able to bring to life a social kind of capitalism or, as I prefer to say, a civil market economy that has produced economic miracles, the development of a cooperative movement (the greatest non-capitalist market economy experience in history), a great project for a united Europe, and the creation of a communitarian and welfare state and that the civilized world envied. Let us not forget today, in the age of globalization, that our capitalism was different because it was based on the idea of market and communitarian solidarity. If our civil capitalism were still alive, there would be no "legal" betting and gaming companies that "donate" a mere 0.0001% of their enormous profits to foundations that offer treatment for the very addiction to games of chance they themselves have created. By the same token, there would be no foundations or government agencies that would accept such dishonest and deadly contributions. And no European citizen would witness in silence those human sacrifices to these new pagan gods. Nonetheless, these situations do exist and proliferate due to the complicity of our governments and a lack of political vigor, accompanied by a deficiency of deep thinking and the absence of a mature and responsible civil society. In the twentieth century, the Churches, especially the Catholic Church, identified the great collectivist systems as enemies of the faith and played a decisive role in the collapse of their walls. And even before the dust of those crumbling walls settled, the voice of the Pope was faithful to warn of another presumptuous and "unbridled" force that continued to threaten the men and women of our time.

However, there is still no pervasive consciousness of the equally anti-Christian and devastating danger of financial capitalism, which, partly due to our own carelessness, is dominating and paganizing the world. The capitalist man cannot be evangelized, because he already has his own gospel, one that demands much less than the Gospel of Jesus.

The good fight to preserve Sunday as a day free from a one-track market culture makes sense if interpreted as a symbol of the resurgence of a different kind of political and economic thinking, one that calls into question the dogmas and taboos imposed by the cult of the market. The Christian and humanist roots of European civilization cannot be invoked only to recognize where we come from; they should also point towards the path we are to follow. And they are disclaimed and opposed exactly because they are a sign of a contradiction, because they provide the moral resources necessary to plot an alternative course to the one currently imposed. As every other empire in history, the empire built by financial capitalism and its religion is destined to fall, and there are numerous signs that foretell its imminent collapse. We must take to heart the responsibility to act and react immediately to ensure that in two or three decades our grandchildren can grow free from the totems and taboos that have taken up our time and even our souls.

*Translated by Tomás Olcese*