



## **Review of Anthony M. Annett's *Cathonomics: How Catholic Tradition Can Create a More Just Economy*, Gregorian University Press 2022, 314 pp.**

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Pope Francis's papacy has influenced many lives through his farsighted insights on humanity as a whole. *Cathonomics*, written by Anthony M. Annett, is the outcome of such influence, which he acknowledges in the book's preface. Annett's profile as a Gabelli Fellow at Fordham University with a PhD in political economy and macroeconomics from Columbia University, his long experience at the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and his present active membership in the 'ethics in action' initiative of the Vatican, warrants this informed critique of the modern economic system. The book's highlight is a comprehensive and thorough investigation of contemporary economics in the light of catholic social teachings. Annett suggests reframing economics, drawing insights from the principles of Catholic Social Thought (CST).

The purposes of the book are twofold: theoretical and practical (hence constituting the two parts—theoretical and practical—of the work, although no such division is explicitly made in the book). The theoretical part introduces catholic social principles to the context of grand economic systems with the potentiality of CST to address current economic issues and spotlight the need for a just and more equitable economy. It exposes the flaws of the existing neoliberal ideologies that are guiding the contemporary economic world. The book fulfils its practical purpose by presenting the ways and means to build "an economy of relationship," and invites the readers to be aware of the true purpose of the economy. In this second part, Annett presents what this new model of the economy will look like. The author observes the current economic system languishing in the trade-offs between hopes for economic growth, individualism, indifference, social concerns, and environmental care, and then outlines the ways that it might be enriched by the profound insights offered by CST.

The book is structured into eight chapters with a preface and a general conclusion. The first chapter explores the roots of CST. Starting from the Hebrew scriptural passages and New Testament, the author travels through the works of early Church Fathers, Aristotle, and Aquinas. He identifies how the aspects of justice, care for the poor, and individual betterment were already present in these fundamental ideals of CST. The discussion in the second chapter focuses on Vatican social documents, starting from *Rerum Novarum*, that form the core of contemporary CST. Here the author identifies three overarching principles of CST and then

breaks them down into ten concrete principles, namely, “the common good”, “integral human development”, “integral ecology”, “solidarity”, “subsidiarity”, “reciprocity and gratuitousness”, “universal destination of goods”, “preferential option for the poor”, “Catholic notions of rights and duties”, and “Catholic notions of justice” (p. 42). The third chapter compares these ten principles with the principles that guide the neoclassical (Annett prefers to use the term “neoclassical,” as he finds the term “neoliberal” “ill-defined;” p. 102) economic system. With that, Annett exposes how the inappreciable principles behind the neoclassical system led to unhealthy social outcomes; with explanations from economics, evolutionary biology, happiness studies, neuroscience, and psychology, he substantiates that an economic system based on CST can bring about better social good than its neoclassical counterpart.

In the fourth chapter, Annett describes how the complex system of the global economy has been functioning over the past four decades. His evaluation proves that the free-market ideology has not performed as well as an economy under government regulations and cooperation. Hence, cooperation, not competition, can be taken as the appropriate ideal for a sustainable economy. While globalization has brought in good effects such as poverty eradication, it has many negative sides as well—among them the growing gap between the rich and the poor. The worst impact of globalization is the increase in corruption and corporate power. Annett sees that in the complex balancing act of the economy, the Church’s teachings have played a significant positive role explicitly and implicitly. The fifth chapter presents the author’s design of a new economic system in the framework of CST. He demonstrates how this system differs from the neoliberal system based on maximum individual freedom, and from the socialist-collectivist system where individual freedom tends to be minimized. For the new economic system prescribes two of CST’s fundamental principles: solidarity and subsidiarity. This choice indicates that his main argument rests on the ethics of the economy. The problems caused by inequality—an offshoot of the neoliberal system—as well as possible solutions to reduce inequality are discussed in the sixth chapter. He agrees with Pope Francis’ assertion that inequality is the foundation of many social evils. He thus maintains that a move toward equality will also be a movement toward integral human development.

The seventh chapter is based on the papal encyclical *Laudato Si’*. Annett presents the hope of achieving decarbonization by the middle of the twenty-first century if political leaders promote both individual and institutional conversion towards eco-friendly actions. Such actions range from little daily deeds such as minimizing the use of plastic to more advanced steps such as the use of renewable energy. Annett’s eighth chapter highlights the need for global solutions to various issues. While certain issues should be dealt with at the local level, some issues must be handled at the global level. Hence, the optimal economic system should reflect the combined outcome of both national and international solutions. Set against this background, towards the goal of achieving what he terms “ethical globalization,” Annett presents seven areas to be dealt with: “the global commons, tax havens, financing the Sustainable Development Goals, debt relief, globalization, and finance, globalization and trade,

and globalization and people” (p. 254). He reiterates his conviction that CST can guide the interconnected world with its fundamental principles, including solidarity and subsidiarity. At the same time, he also warns that history and political developments should serve as reminders about the dangers that globalization can create if not adequately managed.

Overall, the book presents a compelling argument for a ‘moral economy’ that values highly the relationship of a person with not only present and future generations but also the environment. Annett’s vision of economy stands more for communitarian flourishing than for individual gains. At the same time, that vision in no way opposes individual integral growth; instead, it believes that cultivating a ‘moral economy’ that promotes the well-being of every individual and nature will, in turn, help human beings to achieve integral development. Every important concept mentioned in this easily readable book is also explained in sufficient detail. With the book’s objectives aimed at a general audience, the author capably explains various Catholic principles and ideas. Likewise, after every important and lengthy discussion, he sums up the main idea of the discussion in a small paragraph, helping the readers to grasp and summarize the core arguments of the passage. The same approach can be seen towards the end of each chapter and in the book’s concluding section.

As for a few possible criticisms, one that may well be raised against this book comes from the fact that its arguments are based on Catholic Social Thought. Since CST is not a single document and as the teachings are spread over a long period of time, it is probable that people interpret the teachings in varied ways. Hence, an economic system based on CST could possibly become muddled. However, since Annett focuses more on the underlying values of CST than the details of various documents, such criticism may be less relevant. Secondly, even though the author has made a great effort to address readers from all faith backgrounds, it is likely that the projection of CST could avert readers who do not want to link the economy with any religion. Even though it would have been acceptable to take the principles of CST as the inspiration for the new model of the economy, names such as “Cathonomics” and the clear siding with the Catholic Church may naturally lead some to label the work as Catholic propaganda, rather than to see it as a new model of economics. Such a stance may hinder the potential goodness the model could have brought into society. Annett’s work is surely an interesting work for theological ethicists in the field of economics; it is doubtful whether his intended audience of economists will take the work seriously, however, due to its closeness to Catholic ideologies. A final criticism is that he does not deal with the issue of gender and the related challenges within our economy where different sexes are sometimes treated differently with regard to their capabilities, roles, and worth.

Keeping criticisms aside, one may notice that there has been a sincere and courageous effort from the author to challenge the existing model of economics and its ideals—a system that continuously proves itself wrong through the social inequality it creates. As Jeffrey D. Sachs rightly notes in the foreword of the book, “Annett shows persuasively how this great ethical wisdom [from CST, SJ] can guide practical action to achieve a world economy that is prosperous, inclusive, and sustainable; that is, a world economy that serves the common good”

(p. xi). Annett's reflections brilliantly combine heart, head, and hand as he underscores how important it is that the economy should be driven by values that can eradicate poverty, bring peace and love, and protect nature. Any impartial reviewer can clearly say that the book is a valuable contribution towards the efforts being made to achieve a more just economy that promotes equity and environmental sustainability. I trust that this work is helpful for economists, policymakers, theologians, and students from all these areas.