



Conference: "Global Responsibility 2030:
The MDGs and the Post-2015-Process as a challenge for the Universal Church"
Katholisch-Soziales Institut, Bad Honnef, Germany, 5 March 2016

Catholic social teaching, integral ecology and sustainable development¹

In the name of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, I am very happy to participate in this year's conference "Global Responsibility 2030" co-sponsored by the academic association *Ordo Socialis*² and the Katholisch-Soziales Institut of the Archdiocese of Cologne.³ Also in the name of the whole Council, let me wholeheartedly congratulate Cardinal Oscar Rodríguez Maradiaga for so deservedly receiving the *Ordo Socialis* prize for his faith-filled Christian commitment and for the many valuable ways in which he has addressed problems of exclusion, poverty and governance.

In addition, please join me in looking ahead for a moment to next year. It will be an auspicious double anniversary. The Katholisch-Soziales Institut was founded in 1947. Then in 1967, Blessed Pope Paul VI founded the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. As we celebrate such special birthdays in the same year, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace is happy to honour the Katholisch-Soziales Institut as twenty years our senior!

¹ With gratitude to Anthony Annett (New York) and Robert Czerny (Ottawa) for help in drafting and editing this address.

² ORDO SOCIALIS for the Promotion of Christian Social Teaching <http://ordosocialis.de/en/wir-ueber-uns/>

³ Located in Bad Honnef.

At this point, I call on Pope Francis himself to introduce *Laudato si'* briefly in a short video. Let us watch it now.⁴

Here are some key take-aways from the video and from *Laudato si'* itself:

- Our nature is created by God and surrounded by the gifts of creation
- Our failures are that we over-consume and that we do not share the gifts of creation. We have tilled too much and kept too little – with dire consequences for the poor and the planet.
- And so it is urgent that we change our sense of progress, our management of the economy, and our style of life. This coherent and sustainable approach to life is what we call ***integral ecology***.

My contribution to today's reflections is entitled *Catholic social teaching, integral ecology and sustainable development*, and what I hope to show is how the three elements of the title all converge in the ample proposals made by Pope Francis, especially in *Laudato si'*.

Sustainable development

Sustainable development is one of the greatest challenges facing the human family. The main idea recognizes that it is no longer sufficient to measure human progress only in terms of a growing Gross Domestic Product (GDP). GDP was always an inadequate measure of well-being. As a gross measure, it ignored significant variations of outcomes among sub-populations – and we now have disastrous gaps between the super-rich and the utterly destitute. As a single measure, it always ignored other essential foundations of well-being. This is especially so in the current global reality. So today, we slowly but surely acknowledge that social inclusion and environmental sustainability are intrinsic to true development. True development must be sustainable development. It must rest on three legs— economic, social, and environmental. And if one leg is neglected, then the entire structure collapses.

In many respects, sustainable development is a response to a problem of scale. Since the industrial revolution, which began in the 18th century, the global population has increased ninefold, and the global economy is now more than 200

⁴ English: <http://thepopevideo.org/en.html>

times larger. And the trend shows no sign of slowing down. By mid-century, global population is expected to surpass 9 billion, and—on best estimates—the size of the global economy could increase threefold. This is a staggering change in such a short period of time, and it is bound to create economic, social, and environmental challenges.

From the very beginning of these “new things” or *res novae*, the Church sought to grapple with all this dizzying change. This is how modern Catholic social teaching was born—in Pope Leo XIII’s effort to align timeless Christian principles with the *res novae* of the modern industrial economy. And yet, when the great encyclical *Rerum Novarum* was written in 1891, the technological revolution was still in its infancy. The age of steam and railways was well underway, but the age of electricity had just begun, and the great advances in automobiles and petrochemicals—to say nothing of information technology—still lay in the future. Since 1950, the economic potential from the technological revolution has increasingly but unevenly benefited the various corners of the world. The process began with inequalities including colonialism and even slavery; and the process remains very unequal, unfinished and, in some places, much retarded if not blocked.

While *Rerum Novarum* focussed on the conditions and rights of workers, it also contained some seeds of current ideas about our natural environment. For example, it stated that those who receive God’s bounty in the form of natural resources or property should exercise their responsibility “as the steward of God’s providence, for the benefit of others”.⁵ Moreover, *Rerum Novarum*—and all subsequent papal social encyclicals—warned about the tendency of modern capitalism to create stark divisions between rich and poor within countries, and between rich countries and poor ones. When the economic impulse is propelled primarily by self-interest, by greed, by zeal for material accumulation and unfettered consumption, the result is dysfunction and imbalance, and it leads to large numbers of human beings ignored, excluded, and discarded. With its relatively narrow focus on growth, it leaves economies prone to damaging booms and busts.

⁵ Encyclical *Rerum novarum*, Leo XIII (15 May 1891), 22.

In 2007, Pope Benedict XVI spoke of “eliminating the structural causes of the dysfunctions of the world economy and correcting models of growth which have proved incapable of ensuring respect for the environment”.⁶ This becomes the strong message of Pope Francis in *Laudato si’*. As the global economy expands in size and reach, so do its “short-sighted approaches to the economy, commerce and production” (§32). This gives rise, says Pope Francis, to a “throwaway culture”, which is the driving force behind the economy of exclusion. The excluded are not even considered part of society, the Holy Father decries, they are the outcasts, the ‘leftovers’.

But there’s more to it. When *Rerum Novarum* was written, the scale of the global economy was much smaller, as was its impact on the earth and its natural systems and cycles. This is no longer the case today. In writing *Laudato si’*, Pope Francis consulted with some of the world’s top scientists—including from here in Germany. The message is loud and clear—human beings are interfering with earth’s natural cycles in an unprecedented and highly dangerous manner. The scale of human activity means that we are brushing against some vital planetary boundaries—including climate change; ocean acidification; deforestation; depletion of precious water resources; pollution from extensive use of fertilizers, and from the massive burning of fossil fuels; and the undermining of delicate ecosystems and the tragic loss of biodiversity.

Unique for a papal encyclical, Pope Francis references these dangers, especially in the first chapter, “What is happening to our common home”. The reason is simple. If we do not slow down and re-assess our behaviour, we will destroy the bountiful earth given by God to all of us. In doing so, we undermine the conditions for human flourishing—especially for the poor and for future generations.⁷

This is why sustainable development is such a great challenge of our age. We must restore a proper sense of balance, and put the social and environmental pillars on the same level as the economic pillar. Sustainable development calls for a world in which economic progress is widespread, poverty is eliminated, the resources of the

⁶ *Address to the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See* (8 January 2007): AAS 99 (2007), 73.

⁷ Easter Island is an illustration of reckless practices leading to near-extinction.

earth are shared fairly, the environment is protected from human-induced degradation, and all people can flourish.

In this spirit, the leaders of the world gathered in New York last September to endorse the 17 Sustainable Development Goals; and again at COP21 in Paris in December, to commit themselves to phasing out the use of dangerous fossil fuels. These goals are the right priorities for the world at this moment. They aim to make the economy work for everyone; to end the scandal of poverty and hunger in a world of plenty; to ensure clean water, accessible energy, health care and education for all; to protect the world's ecosystems and shift to a sustainable use of the earth's resources; and to build more inclusive, just and peaceful societies.

In this, the Sustainable Development Goals build on the momentum of the Millennium Development Goals. The earlier goals applied only to developing countries, and focused on a shorter list of priority areas including poverty, hunger, health, education, and gender equality. Yet they show what can be done when the world unites around a set of urgent moral priorities. Thanks to these goals, poverty fell precipitously, and health outcomes improved dramatically.⁸ The new goals are for everyone in every part of the world, and they encompass the full range of challenges facing our human family. So yes, the SDGs are more ambitious. Nevertheless, we have learned that, when people and especially their leaders focus on a concrete framework for action, success is possible.

The market system is certainly capable of generating wealth and delivering economic growth. We can see that. But it cannot really go beyond this. We can see that too. The market does not guarantee social inclusion, and it certainly does not seek to sustain our limited natural resources. So the market alone will not be able to bring about sustainable development.

⁸ The following are significant improvements since 1990:

- people living in extreme poverty almost halved, from 1.9 billion to 836 million
- undernourished people in developing countries almost halved, from 23 percent to 13 percent
- deaths of children under five down by more than half, from 12.7 million to 6 million
- maternal mortality rate has declined by 45 percent
- new HIV infections fell by 40 percent between 2000-2013. 13.6 million have anti retroviral treatment, up from just 800,000 in 2003
- lives saved from various diseases: AIDS, 7.6 million (1995-2013); malaria, 6.2 million (2000-2015); tuberculosis, 37 million (2000-2013).

Source: The Millennium Development Goals Report 2015 (United Nations).

2 billion people have gained access to better sanitation.

The problem, says Pope Francis, is not so much the market economy itself, but the ideology that too often lies behind it—the “deified market” or the “magical conception of the market” which resist the necessary political oversight and regulation. “Politics must not be subject to the economy, nor should the economy be subject to the dictates of an efficiency-driven paradigm of technocracy” (§189). The solution, according to Catholic social teaching, is to choose solidarity over self-interest, the common good over profit maximization, integral human development over materialism, and sustainability over short-termism. That does not mean rejecting the market; it does mean recognizing its clear limits, and keeping it under human and ethical control.

Speaking of solidarity, let me note the wonderful stance of contemporary Germany in this regard. This country’s reception of refugees is a dramatic, concrete exercise of compassion towards those who are excluded and marginalized. Here too, sustainability is vital. As Pope Francis spells out:

With regard to migration, there is a need for mid-term and long-term planning which is not limited to emergency responses. Such planning should include effective assistance for integrating migrants in their receiving countries, while also promoting the development of their countries of origin through policies inspired by solidarity, yet not linking assistance to ideological strategies and practices alien or contrary to the cultures of the peoples being assisted.⁹

The plight of migrants and refugees has been an impassioned element of the current papacy; your response in Germany is truly an exercise of *Misericordia* within this great Year of Mercy.

Integral human development, integral ecology and Catholic Social Teaching

So far, I have focused my remarks on sustainable development. In *Laudato si'*, however, Pope Francis is calling for something broader and more encompassing than what the world means by sustainable development. He is calling for “integral and sustainable human development”. This might seem like merely adding the extra word “integral”, but that extra word makes all the difference! In Catholic social teaching, integral human development refers to the development of the

⁹ Pope Francis, *Address to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See*, 11.01.2016.

whole person and every person. Such multi-faceted development goes well beyond an ever-expanding GDP, even a better-distributed one, and merely economic or material progress. It encompasses the cultural, social, emotional, intellectual, aesthetic, and religious dimensions. It is an invitation for each person on the planet to flourish, to use the gifts given to them by God to become who they were meant to be.

This more encompassing and holistic approach to development goes well beyond narrower reductionist ones. Development should not be conceived of in purely technocratic terms that set aside moral considerations. *Laudato si'* strongly condemns the dominance of the “technocratic paradigm”. By this Pope Francis means the tendency to take efficiency and productivity as the benchmarks of success, and to see nature as something to be manipulated, mastered and controlled, with no concern for its inherent value or limits. In turn, this leads to a temptation to seek “infinite or unlimited growth” and an inclination to put individual benefit ahead of the common good. It leads to the tendency to define economic success based on profit and material calculation, which reflects a disordered desire for instant gratification. According to Pope Francis, it is precisely such a short-sighted and self-serving attitude that lies behind the social and environmental crisis. “The alliance between the economy and technology ends up side-lining anything unrelated to its immediate interests” (§54).

In practice, this calls for a re-assessment of our obsession with GDP growth and consumerism. *Laudato si'* notes that some countries will indeed need higher economic growth—namely, the developing countries who justifiably hope to improve their living standards. This is a matter of justice. But just as important, the richer countries might need to reconsider their own lifestyle and the role of merely economic growth. They (we!) must re-assess the whirlwind of consumerism that drives their growth.

Pope Francis is calling on all people to pursue a kind of progress that is more integral, more sustainable, and ultimately more worthwhile. This is one facet of the Pope’s *integral ecology*: the value of integration and harmony of our lives with the natural world (§225). It comprehends “our unique place as human beings in this world and our relationship to our surroundings” (§15), in the varied aspects of our

life, in economy and politics, in various cultures, in particular those which are most threatened, and in every moment of our daily lives.

In particular, we must not forget the poor of today “whose life on this earth is brief and who cannot keep on waiting” (§162). In the contemporary world, where “injustices abound and growing numbers of people are deprived of basic human rights and considered expendable”, working for the common good means to make choices in solidarity based on “a preferential option for the poorest” (§158).

The common good also regards future generations: “We can no longer speak of sustainable development apart from intergenerational solidarity” (§159). Here, in the context of integral ecology, Pope Francis invokes *care for our children* to formulate his pivotal question about the environment: “*What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?*” (§160).

Conclusion

I have spoken about supplanting traditional market thinking that distorts the full notion of integral and sustainable human development. But this is not a call for pre-industrial romanticism. Rather, I would wish to see the tools of the market and the skills of its experts applied to achieving full human flourishing and sustainable development. Rapacious profits are not intrinsic to well-functioning markets; corruption, bribery, and cruelty are not intrinsic to well-functioning markets. Indeed, the opposite is true. Better governance means greater genuine prosperity. Both classical and contemporary theorists point to the basis of well-functioning markets in certain *virtues* such as trust, honesty, solidarity, reciprocity, and cooperation. If anything is intrinsic to markets, it is not vice but virtue. So there is nothing strange about challenging the markets to produce virtuous outcomes such as common good, sustainability and solidarity. This is the best of what the former MDGs and the new SDGs hope for and strive for.

Such hope echoes the magisterium of Pope Francis. Overcoming the interrelated social and environmental crises will require a wholly different attitude—a cultural revolution, he says. By this, the Holy Father does not mean a naïve rejection of

technology and the benefits of modern society. No, he means putting human ingenuity in the service of a better kind of progress—one that is healthier, more human, more social, and more integral. In turn, this calls for us to overturn what he calls the myths of modernity—individualism, unlimited progress, competition, consumerism, a market without rules. Pope Francis is calling for sustainable development, yes, but ultimately for a deeper vision of what is to be served by that development: the Earth returned to its health and beauty, home for all our future generations. For this we must pray to work with each other, guided by God, in order to make the Earth worthy once again of comparison with Heaven. *Dein Wille geschehe, wie im Himmel, so auf Erden.* – Thy Will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven!

Cardinal Peter K.A. Turkson
President