

New Paradigm for Catholic Social Ethics. Ecological Humanism and Market Criticism in the Encyclical Laudato Si'

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Topical Introduction

The results of the last Climate Summit in Bonn 2017 have led to more resignation rather than to encouragement. The USA has disengaged itself openly in order to pursue its own business interests without hindrance. And in this climate-political misery suddenly emerges the gigantic environmental sinner China as international climate saviour with great publicity to everybody's stunning surprise. In reality, should economic tactics not be of greater interest than actual honest concern for our Earth? As before, such open or concealed plays cause great concern about Creation, the bone of contention of unrelenting national egoisms. The more topical resounds Pope Francis' appeal shouted out in his environmental encyclical *Laudato Si'*, namely to put the question about the preservation of Creation in the top rank of themes Social Teaching of the Church must centre around. This document, as well as the Pope himself, have had to face up to much criticism especially so in regard to continued criticism of an economy orientated toward the market. Numerous representatives from the sciences of economics feel as overdone this criticism of basics respectively inexpert. In the following contribution written in spring 2016 and published in January 2017¹ I myself, despite a positive appreciation of the text, have hinted at such criticism and supplemented it with a few queries about the foundation of argumentation which he bases his judgment on. In this context, I could not yet consider the Pope's speech of May 6, 2016, delivered on the occasion of his being awarded the Charlemagne Prize. There, with reservations, he took a step towards such critics by his professing the idea of social market economy thereby at least qualifying his fundamental criticism of the market. Here it is not completely clear what the term social market economy precisely stands for in respect to content. In the sense of the founding fathers, it is an *ordo-liberal* model of economic order. But if the Pope professes same at least remains an open question. This lack of certitude is due to the fact that many, one another excluding, positions refer to the social market economy thus contributing to this term gradually becoming devoid of content. In line and in despite of this, with reservations about the remarkable turn-around by the Pope toward market economical order, I still adhere to my basically critical take expressed in my article, in regard to the relation of the market and sciences of economics to the Christian thought of humaneness addressed in his encyclical.

Revolution of Ecclesiastical Social Teaching

In his encyclical ‘Laudato Si’’, Pope Francis presented new wineskins for new wine in terms of theme, style and systematics. Highlighting environmental protection as a theme for a social encyclical is something new. The notion ecology is broadly expanded, however, comprising for example relationships among people. The concept of the common home (oekos) besides humans also encompasses the relationship with the Earth and thus with things surrounding humans as Creation. In stylistic terms, the encyclical is not – as was its precursor – a scientifically structured treatise. Images from the Bible, mysticism and prayers, not least from the Holy Francis of Assisi turn the text into a sermon pervaded by spirituality captivating with emotions and passion. In this vividness, new for an encyclical, the Gospel of the genuinely human Pope Francis emanates in a credible manner. He writes what he lives: gestures, signs, images, practice with spiritual spirit. Systematically, the encyclical does not cite anymore ethics’ cherished justification based on the law of nature. This rational access deduced from Holy Thomas Aquinas’ doctrine stringent justification of Christian values and social principles is not dismissed but not expressively touched upon either as was the case with Benedict XVI. In the place of the in encyclicals, where always were found basic ethical questions of justification, now emerges a radical orientation towards application with concrete suggestions for a good way of acting and thinking of humankind. But their deduction is not up in the air. Without any reference to the natural law, it is now carried out mostly by recurring to the Franciscan theology and mysticism (e.g. Bonaventura). Besides, for the analysis of economics, modern thought patterns are consulted, among others, that of liberation theology, for a long time condemned by the Church which cannot be understood as continuing the theology of Benedict XVI.

However, many references point to the preceding ecclesiastical documents showing that Francis wants his encyclical to be understood in the tradition of Social Teaching. (15). This corresponds to his papal self-image. But it is indisputable that he does not simply continue what others have thought before him. Francis does not follow the trodden paths of the Church’s Social Teaching. Herewith, he does justice to the criticism expressed outside the Church which identifies the latter’s ponderousness and antiquation in the ecclesiastical teaching’s rigid dependence on the right path. Francis strikes the chords of a new paradigm which must prove its strength leading to the future. The new thing about this paradigm in the field of theological systematic is not the notion but the semantics connected with human ecology which he introduces as a key to the social- ethical appreciation of current problems. This understanding of an ecological humanism must not simply be incorporated into the tradition of teaching up to now in a levelling manner. This would take away from the encyclical its innovative explosive power it harbours. Therefore, I will show why *Laudato Si’* is less an evolutionary but rather a revolutionary ecclesiastical document before this challenging message will be critically appreciated subsequently.

Analysis: Culture of Human Self-Destruction

As any ethical humanism, the ecological variant that Francis profiles, begins with humankind. His holistic human ecology regards normatively the human being in his relationship to God, his neighbour and to the environment (27). In the order of Creation God has passed on to Man this three-fold responsibility whose compliance leads to salvation, but whose disregard ends up in the harm of singular human being and – through the aggregate of rules and incentives leading to consequences – to humanity as a whole. From such a perspective of salvation is testified the current human ecological crisis of Man which manifests in many self-destructive

phenomena (79). As reason for this wilted three-fold culture of relationships, the Pope cites a fundamental crisis of economics.

Three-Fold Crisis of Holistic Human Ecology

First, a glance at the concretely addressed crises-phenomena de-humanizing Man today. As already done in the exhortation 'Evangelii Gaudium', from the privileged view of the poor, is condemned above all the social and economic exclusion of people, where human beings e.g. in the slums of big cities are regarded as quasi superfluous trash because they are of no use to a society focussed on consumption and profit. To a large extent, today the value of Man is confined to his measureable economic usefulness in terms of money. Oblivious of God, Man himself places himself in the position of God (66) and defines in his economic logic who is a human being in the full sense of the word and who is not. Thus unimpeachability of human dignity, which in a Christian way is deduced from the image of God (84), is being perverted. Someone who is of no use is not a human being anymore. Such a picture of Man contradicts holistic human ecology. It is destroyed 1.) *Man's relationship with God* as it becomes identical with self-destruction of the human essence (Humanum). It corresponds to the ethics of the so-called economic imperialism which has been developed by the bearer of the Nobel Prize, Gary Becker and others in total radicalism and is to be found in weaker forms in several economic business ethics. Man is someone of economic use. This is what normative economics centres around which understands itself as the continuation of ethics with economic means. Following such logic, good acting is geared to consumption and efficiency. The Pope understands this as the breeding ground of exploitation (5). Thus, with these economic ethics can be justified an anthropocentrism which still excludes a large part of humanity. This is paradoxical because in the name of ethical focussing on Man, a large part of humankind is denied their dignity. This exclusion has been identified as a fundamental evil of our times.

An ethics of homo oeconomicus leads to a uniformity of humans, also globally, with a throw-away mentality on the one hand marked by fear and, on the other, by greed (59,105, 203). Such a culture contradicts holistic human ecology as it undermines the Christian-orientated living together of humans as a family of humankind and thus 2.) *their assigned responsibility towards neighbours*. Humans are turned into merely functioning cogwheels of the economy or understood as a human resource serving, among other things, a short-term profit. If the rule of consumption and efficiency governs the 'good' human being, human comfort (48) and social integration (46) lose their value. Individualisation (208) with social coldness in the sense of a merely anonymous coexistence in society as propagated by the US- American Nobel Prize winner in economics, James Buchanan, as a 'Moral Order' worth striving for. To Francis, the consequences of such logics of incentive, which drive out the cultural social assets of e.g. a native population (45) as well as individual morality which, in the sense of the liberal ethicist in economics, Karl Homann and his school, such 'ethics' must give a warning call. Possibly, an individualistic virtue advocating comfort, inclusion or cultural diversity disturbs the predictability of economic allocations. Ways out of worldwide social injustice (48ff) are hampered by the interconnection of debt (52) so that the excluding logic of human self-destruction is social-ethically perpetuated.

Besides this close leading to the economic calculation, the Pope extrapolates 3.) *responsible relationship to the environment* from the vantage point view of the plan of Creation which is given to Man as his responsibility being the addressee. Herein lies the third violation of the command issued by holistic human ecology. Global warming (167),

the shortage of clean water (185) landfills and air pollution are mentioned as examples. So are migration (25), social tensions and wars (14, 142) as logical implications of the lack of responsibility of the few rich contrary to the many excluded poor of this world. The value inherent in creatures has been forgotten under the regimen of anthropocentric economics. This is identified as a betrayal of the divine mission of Creation (69). Programmatically, Pope Francis turns himself into a mouthpiece of the poor's accusation and, in the same vein, of sister Earth (49). By his putting the two on an equal footing, the admonishing voice of Creation is rendered an upgrading unheard of before in the Church's social teaching. The human ecological crisis can thus be focussed as follows: oblivion of God, social coldness of humans among each other and a lack of responsibility toward Creation are to be understood as Man's triple breach of the contract with God. Technological hubris of feasibility without responsibility to God, Creation and social culture has become an open floodgate.

Crisis of Economics

Francis sees this self-destruction of Man as indivisibly coupled with a correspondingly destructive regimen of a morality-free power which is made possible by the closed ranks of a mighty power and technology (102). In the name of freedom, the virtue of Man withers away which is a paradoxical way that elevates egoism as morality which, following normative logic, shapes human relationships (105). Here is regarded as fundamental evil the ousting of political governance by an unbridled market power (196). A globalized financial system (54, 144), normative economic image of Man, a market logic focussed on short-term profit (32, 54), the order of private property (196, 93 f) and the technology-dependent market system accordingly lead – in the wake of an accepted utilitarian pragmatism (205) – to uneven external effects on the environment for the poorest (36), their becoming a growing mass and facing slavery (105) as well as an ousting of the real economy (110). Corruption and political pressure through financial dependencies are flanking ramifications. The technological – economic paradigm destroys human ecology by undermining the three dimensions of responsibility on the basis of the individual as well as social-ethically at the expense of peace with God, the world and humans among themselves (229).

Systematic: New Order by New Humans

To Pope Francis, holistic human ecology is the normative authority of God's divine plan of salvation with humankind (5, 13) and ranks, in the sense of the Böckenförde-Dictum as the normative conditions that a community is not capable of producing itself. Whereas other encyclicals discuss social and economic issues, the ecological question here is not only made the theme of a field of application as a previously outlined in an ethical systematic though this, by itself, is innovative. Beyond this, it is put as an ingredient of the economy of salvation before the bracket of any Christian – ethical legitimacy and thus profiled as a value compass of first priority. For the justification of this normative objectivity, the logic of natural law is done without. The notion of nature is applied several times, but it is not understood as a normative one in a scientific theoretical sense that, by means of human reason's insight, absolute (human) rights and duties can be inferred. Francis sees Nature in a more commonly understandable sense as Creation whose normativity now is not deduced from an objective essence but rather from the relationship of Man with Creation (6, 115,120). Instead of natural law, with a view on human ecological catastrophes, Biblical or mystic – theological sources serve as a justification of such objectivity as based on evidence. The starting point is the more spiritual than rationally disclosed love logic of the divine plan of salvation (77) which pervades Man's three relationships of responsibility. Thus Francis distances himself with a now different justification of values from relativism which his precursors have identified as

opponent to a Christian humanism. The universal claim of ethics is being preserved this way. But contrary to his forerunners, the Pope lets the traditional philosophical level of justification fade into the background.

With the primary value compass of human ecology, the power of the market is to be replaced by the primacy of politics (196): a thesis also to be found in the current discourse – ethical approaches on economics (e.g. the St. Gallen ethicist of economics, Peter Ulrich). Human ecological orientation to civic well-being is to replace, by laws and virtues (42), a mindset of rugged, selfish individualism. Such a change of systems striven for leads to a new normative notion of progress which is cable of reigning in technology and the power of the market under a politically thorough revitalisation of the Christian principle of the general allocation of goods (42, 67). This new synthesis has got nothing to do with a social market economy's third way of "sustainable growth" as it counts as a foul compromise which, at best, nicely coats the evil of market logic (194). According to Francis, for such a self-delusion, there is no more time left. It is rather about a radical change of systems to a new economy under a politically organized ecological primacy. (42)

The fundamentally wrong order with its constraints and dependencies of paths is to be transformed into an order inspired by Jesus. (82) The dialectics of technological-economic paradigm and exclusion, is to be overcome by a holistic synthesis of human ecology which, in the sense of Friedrich Engels, is to lead out of the alleged domain of necessity without alternatives into a domain of freedom which – now again beyond socialist logic – cultivates for each human being spaces of competence for realizing his/her three levels of responsibility provided in the divine plan of salvation.

For all this, there is need for a new virtues human being who fulfils this responsibility in compliance with this plan of salvation thus revolutionizing the order in a human-ecological manner.

Implementation: International Regimen of Virtue

Education of virtue to eradicate consumerism and egoism (192) smaller and larger ecological gestures of each human, political primacy over market power (203), ideal of community instead of individualism (208), orientation to civic well-being within the framework of a new definition of property are the political consequences of a new ecological world order of New Man. For such a cultural change, there is need of a social – ethical concept of order and a cultural programme for the individual's ethics. Social-ethical universalism in the sense of the traditional Catholic vision of the brotherhood of Man (13, 52) now is to give wings to the international solidarity with the poorest (14, 142). The political authority of the world (175) demanded by Benedict XVI as an authority for the implementation for internationally effective realization of human rights is now given additional thought, under the premise of the option for the poor, as an international leadership. This is to understand itself as the curator of the continuity of a human-ecological culture, also beyond national changes of government (181). The implementation of the idea of a brotherhood of Man in more concrete terms is linked to a universal political culture regimen for inculcating and spreading a universal ecological consciousness (207). Economics must be understood as an ancillary part of this culture which itself is not exposed to the immanent laws of the market.

With the help of this new political regimen, humans are to be changed sustainably. For this is needed a comprehensive education programme, especially for exploiters and the egoists geared to consumption in order to put in practice a new lifestyle. Then global conditions, respectively world order, will also change as visualized by this visionary idea. On this, the

Pope has developed an impressive programme of Franciscan – ecological spirituality which, from such a synoptic view, is unique in ecclesiastical Social Teaching. Demand is made for an ecological about-face of the individual and community which is simultaneously prophetic and contemplative (216). Mystically, trinitarianly and eucharistically God's plan of salvation manifests in a corresponding ideal of human conduct and is sketched out to be used as a benchmark for real living together. Following Jesus role model (221 f), a charisma- oriented culture of thankfulness, no money, simplicity, the love of the environment like brother or sister, modesty, humility, awe, serenity (224), mindfulness (231), harmony, justice, brotherly love (82) and tenderness (91). The individual and communal turning back to the universally conceived cultural model is regarded as feasible by Pope Francis (205). In this, he contributes the Christian virtue of hope which encourages us that the reversal is worthwhile for everybody even if it is late but, in this sense, not too late for it.

The socio-ethical demand for a international human-ecological cultural authority and the individual-ethical demand for a change of mindset of each individual correspond with one another. The goals are killing off egoism thereby gaining a new freedom before God. The key to that is one's shaping of the three-fold-ecological responsibility within rules and virtues in accordance with the plan of salvation. Here, in this logic, Bertold Brecht's question arises if for such a new social synthesis Man or conditions must be changed first. It is left unanswered.

Critical Appreciation

The innovative impact of the encyclical in the context of Catholic Social Teaching can hardly be overestimated. A great achievement of the encyclical doubtlessly becomes apparent in the unheard of before passion of spiritual theology for making fruitful the questions of social ethics. Establishing the ecological queries in the three-fold human responsibility as an essential part of the primary value basis of Christian Social Ethics is, in face the all-encompassing ecological challenges for humankind, a necessary and courageous step forward. Questions that today vex humans are made vivid through concrete images so that the message can reach many people who rather tend to close their minds to a systematic- theological approach. The loving language, especially to the poor, makes the text sympathetic which makes ecclesiastical social ethics appear in a positive light, and certainly is helping gain vast reception in many countries of the world.

In this, Pope Francis does not step into the trap of being pocketed politically by the eco-movement. To such a possible temptation to the Church, to the widely spread gender perspective within it (155), the emphasis on the family being the first place of inculcating values (214) he expresses a stern refusal as well as a sharp criticism of ecological oblivion of humanity (136) through which environmental protection without protection of life is propagated.

For a fruitful discussion about the impact of the encyclical, I now want to point out some critical observations from my point of view. About these one should exchange ideas in a fair culture of discourse in the Church without any sanctions. In addition, it corresponds to a fruitful synodal thought:

- Without any doubt, the encyclical is a great virtue-ethical appeal. Thereby, above all, the responsibility for the benefit of the environment and the civic well-fare are given great emphasis. The value of love of self and responsibility for oneself in being a person shifts a bit into the background. Human ecology's three-fold responsibility inferred from the divine plan of salvation, in this sense, puts self-love in second rank though in Jesus Christ's Golden Rule, which itself is deduced from the responsibility

toward God, instead of love of Earth self-love is emphasized as an equivalent addressee besides the social responsibility of the individual. This aspect can be found at a different place (155), however, but this new hierarchy might put in a shadow the personal aspect of responsible self-love and individuality. Negligence of self-love, e.g. against the backdrop of growing mental strain at work certainly, is not the Pope's intention. Doubtlessly, individuality with love of self is the fundamental basis of every Christian morality as God's plan of salvation takes us up on our promise to esteem oneself and one's own talents and to unfold them. The upgrade of the Earth must not lead to downgrading Man's self-love; it is rather about the relation between the two.

- The idealistic image of Man that wants egoism to be killed off does not refer to the realism of Holy Thomas Aquinas who already turned away from such wishful thinking of an ideal communism in the justification of his doctrine of property. Man is not only altruistic and self-less. A responsible shaping of the social order with all its facets is obligated to consider this. Thus, according to the teaching of Holy Thomas Aquinas, private property remains a secondary natural right and only a second-best solution but which does justice to the sinful being of Man and, therefore, is responsible-ethical in a respective order of private property, Christian-grounded and called for. Instead, a Christian eco-socialism is idealized in the encyclical which conjures up the world as a harmonious life in a monastery with common property (cf. Buff, 2016). This utopia did not only fail secular communism but also the model of an order of professions that was introduced as a Christian market alternative in the encyclical *Quadragesimo AD* 1931.
- Abstaining from the justification of ethics based on the law of nature does not impair the topicality and applicability of the encyclical. However, the universal claim to absolute human responsibility and dignity thereby loses its plausibility. Plan of salvation, Bible and mystics cited as references find it difficult in a discussion of fundamentals with secular or non-religious ethics marked by rational arguments. The fact that Franciscan tradition comfortably blends with the law of nature has been proven by the Late Scholastics of the School of Salamanca (cf. Franco, 2016). Re-discovering such a symbiosis instead of sacrificing the law of nature to me seems consequent, innovative and rewarding for rationally standing up for the message.
- To me, the systematic dialectics with some motives from class struggle have an irritating effect but probably are to be understood as residue of the influence of the liberation theology. A discourse on the contents of market economical theories of economics is expressively refused (46). It rather should be about the true development of humankind. Such an attitude hardens the fronts between Church and the free science of economics. Theses by Leonardo Boff ring a bell which identifies a foul fruit in capitalism one should not waste time on. Whereas in many modern and post-modern theologies one seeks ways of connecting to secular theories, the categorical hint not even to seek such an approach, comes as a surprise. Such a dialogue at eye level is necessary with caution to bridge gaps and to re-establish a culture of a philosophy of economics which links economic and ethical rationality. This is the task of business ethics for the future which acknowledges ethical issues of the market as well as its ethical deficits. The logic of the market should be kept an eye on in a differentiated way with its own potential of justice, to avoid the waste of scarce resources. What exactly is meant by utilitarian pragmatism? Utilitarianism has many faces. The implied equation of market and economic imperialism draws a distorted picture of a liberal economy. Without any doubt, Becker's ideology is not compatible

with Christian justice. For example, social market economy in its humanistic programme shows a different, Christian face of social justice that has got nothing to do with economic imperialism and still holds on to the market. To me, this third way seems promising to be more successful in the sense of the Christian plan of salvation than a change to a planned economy.

- The visionary international regimen of virtue, depending on building and shaping, harbours the risk of state paternalism. Who sets the contents for re-educating the masses? What is meant by social turning back (216)? The turning back of an individual is pedagogically and spiritually thinkable. If collective consciousness is meant here that has to be moved to a turning back, this task harbours the risk of sacrificing the view on the individual in favour of a collective with growing masses, just the thing that Pope Francis obviously does not want. Here, misunderstandings must be cleared up.

Translated from the German by York R. Buttler 1/18

¹ Erschienen als: Ökologischer Humanismus – neues Paradigma in der Katholischen Soziallehre, in: Wolfgang George (Hg.): *Laudato Si - Wissenschaftler Antworten*, Gießen 2017: 233-243 (mit freundlicher Genehmigung des Herausgebers zum Wiederabdruck)

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(15.8.2017)