

## SOME PHILOSOPHICAL REMARKS ON THE ENCYCLICAL LETTER

### LAUDATO SI'

DOI: 10.7413/18281567081

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#### *Abstract*

In this paper, I aim at interpreting the project of the encyclical as a sort of paradigmatic turn in the way of conceiving Christian faith. At paragraph 49, it is underlined that a “true ecological approach *always* becomes a social approach” and this implies the need of hearing “*both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor*”. In my view, by uniting the two categories of “nature/creation” and “poverty”, the encyclical implicitly builds an ideal bridge between Pope Francis’ paradigmatic turn and that “political turn” invoked by the Catholic theologian J. B. Metz from the end of the sixties through the proposal of a “New Political Theology”. Indeed, the excesses of the neo-liberal paradigm and the perverse effects of a certain organization of global market pushes Christianity to act by involving all social, cultural and religious actors, in order to fight against all the forms of suffering and dehumanization of contemporary society. I’m also interested in underlining some weak aspects of Pope’s ecological approach.

**Keywords:** Pope Francis, integral ecology, J. B. Metz, political Theology.

Today, due to the global trend towards secularization and modernization, Christianity, and in particular Catholicism, do not enjoy political protection and have no sway on people’s political, moral and social behaviour. For this reason, Pope Francis’ encyclical letter *Laudato Si'* ought to be considered as a project in favor of a “political theological” turn of Christianity. When I speak about political theology I refer to the theological perspective outlined by the German theologian Johann Baptist Metz in the second half of the nineteen-sixties. As I will briefly clarify in the first paragraph, Metz proposes the project of a New Political Theology as a new way of conceiving the roles of

theology and Christian religion in contemporary society. His theological program has evolved in the following decades, focusing on the issues caused by an increasingly secular society which, in his view, should cause the Catholic Church to refocus from emphasizing the private or bourgeois dimension of religion to a more “political” one.

In the second paragraph, I will analyze the main elements of the *Laudato Si'* in order to show how ecological care and attention towards the poor are strictly connected. Therefore, Christianity's public role should emphasize taking care of our “common home”.

I immediately clarify the reason why I prefer to point out the ideal link between the eco-theological turn of *Laudato Si'* and Metz's New Political Theology rather than its link with certain tendencies of the Latin American theology of liberation. As I will demonstrate, in the encyclical it is possible to see the influence of Leonardo Boff, famous representative of the theology of liberation. But, in my opinion, this theoretical connection is behind some of the most critical issues on the relationship between human being and nature and the negative judgments on modernity and free market.<sup>1</sup>

My thesis is that the link between eco-theological and social crisis stressed by Pope Francis can be considered like a remarkable development of Metz's approach. The Pope's ecumenical and cosmopolitan perspective undoubtedly represents and answers the questions asked by Metz regarding the relationships between decentralisation, the truth vs. pluralism, universal Church vs. local churches: these are the global challenges facing Christianity nowadays.

But, a more direct link with Metz's New Political Theology would most likely have prompted the Pope to avoid the paradoxes regarding the negative judgment on modernity and free market.

### **1. Metz's New Political Theology: *praxis*, suffering and *memoria passionis***

Metz's program placed itself within the great theological debate that started after the Second Vatican Council. Metz was Karl Rahner's disciple and, consistently with his teacher, he firstly worked within the philosophical and theological transcendental paradigm. Since the second half of the nine-

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<sup>1</sup> Some European theologians, often criticized by Theologians of liberations for being too Eurocentric, also developed an “ecological turn” very close to that of theorists like Leonardo Boff. I refer, for example, to Protestant Theologian Jürgen Moltmann's recent work, *Ethik der Hoffnung* (München: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2010).

teen-sixties, Metz broke with transcendental Thomism and begun to work at the “theology of the world”, a project which developed in the paradigmatic proposal of a New Political Theology.<sup>2</sup>

Metz considered transcendental Thomism insufficient to approach the crucial question of human suffering (*Leidensfrage*). While Rahner’s transcendental Thomism generally focused on the question of Being (*Seinsfrage*), Metz thought that it was necessary to focus on the classical issue of suffering and its relationship with God.

The first step of the break with transcendental Thomism is the book *Theology of the World* (1968) where Metz faces the challenge of the relationship between Christianity and modernity in the new conception of time typical of the modern age. The latter is an age in which human being are increasingly aware of their status as free and responsible subjects. This fact leads to a different perception of his role within time and space. As shown by Reinhardt Koselleck’s works,<sup>3</sup> the “unknown” character of the future is the new element in the modern perception of our behavioural code and in the modern political lexicon is characterized by key words like emancipation, rights and liberty.

To those who consider secularization as antichristian, Metz affirms that the ‘spirit’ of Christianity is permanently embedded in the “essence” of world history and needs to re-affirm itself in its course, irreversible as it might be.<sup>4</sup> Today, therefore, theology’s aim is that of providing a code of interpretation for the future by recovering the eschatological aspect of Christianity, which disappeared because of the neo-scholastic and transcendental philosophical and theological approaches. Theological reflection has to be oriented towards a theology of the world that refuses religion as an interior discourse and needs to critically reflect on the religion/society link; necessary after the modern Enlightenment critique of religion.

But the decisive step towards the core of a New Political Theology is affirmed in “*Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*” (1977) where the confrontation with

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<sup>2</sup> Metz uses the expression New Political Theology in order to distinguish it from the political Theology of the German jurist Carl Schmitt. The latter is a theory of State while Metz, even by recognizing a certain ambiguity of the term “political”, clarifies that he considers “political” and “public” like synonymous. In his view, Christian theology and religion are not a private or interior discourse but they must play a public role in society: Johann Baptist Metz and Werner Kroh, “Politische Theologie,” in *Evangelisches Kirchenlexicon III*, (Göttingen: Vandenhöck & Ruprecht, 1992, 1261-65).

<sup>3</sup> Reinhardt Koselleck, “Space of Experience” and “Horizon of Expectation”: Two Historical Categories”, in *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 255-275.

<sup>4</sup> Johann Baptist Metz, *Theology of the World* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1973), 16.

Marxism and the Frankfurt School becomes essential for Metz. Metz borrows from Marxism the attention for the theory/praxis bond in which theology should not be considered like a neutral form of knowledge disconnected from the political and social experience. But, related to the Frankfurt School, Metz is influenced by Walter Benjamin and Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno and by their reflections on the “unfair suffering” and on the importance of Memory.

Metz does not perceive a proposal of a New Political Theology as a mere application of Marxist or Frankfurt ideas to theology. Indeed it would be a great misunderstanding but it is one of the core differences between Metz’s view and a core development of the Latin American Theology of liberation. As Metz explains, the Enlightenment and Marxist idea of emancipation has generated the modern idea of history characterized by the utopia of progress which set all suffering and violence aside. Even regarding the Frankfurt approach, Metz expresses new ideas without blindly applying critical theory to theology. The distance between Metz and the Frankfurt School mainly concerns guilt and death that can only be dealt from a theological perspective inspired to the imitation of Christ.<sup>5</sup>

In Metz’s most recent works, it is clear that political theology has to be critical-negative to denounce all types of oppression and dehumanization of contemporary society. Over the years, Metz is mostly interested in the question of time; this is why the comparison with Nietzsche becomes fundamental. By introducing the concept of the “eternal recurrence” Nietzsche is the authentic prophet of post-modern culture, which abandoned any pretension of Reason often falling down in a kind of inhuman nihilism. The works of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze are a clear proof of a sterile and nihilist critical discourse within a post-Nietzschean perspective.<sup>6</sup>

In a departure with the postmodern approach, Metz is interested in preserving the positive heritage of the Enlightenment and, because of that, he resembles a theorist like Jürgen Habermas for his defense of the modern Enlightenment project. But, a key difference is that Metz believes the ultimate authority in the human discourse not to be based on argumentation but on human “suffering”:

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<sup>5</sup> Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2007), 117.

<sup>6</sup> See, James Matthew Ashley, *Interruptions: Mysticism, Politics, and Theology in the Work of Johann Baptist Metz*, (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1998), 197.

There is no suffering in the world that does not concern us. Thus this statement of the elementary equality of all people refers to the recognition of an authority which is available and acceptable to all people, to the authority of those who suffer, of those who suffer innocently and unjustly. It appeals to an authority that is binding for all people before agreement and rapprochement, indeed everyone, whether religious or secular, and thus cannot be undercut and relativized by any human culture demanding the equality of all people and certainly no religion, not even by the church. For this reason also, recognition of this transcultural authority would be such a criterion which could provide orientation for religious and cultural discourse in a globalized context. It would ultimately be the basis for an ethic of freedom for a strictly pluralistic global public.<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, by recovering an Adornian theme, Metz tries to develop the idea of “critical reason” which goes way beyond the simple dynamics posited by Habermas and Apel. In order to be critical, Reason has to maintain a structural link with Memory because it is the only way to avoid forgetting the phenomena of oppression and violence in human history, caused by the mythos of progress, race, class and economy. Memory, which Metz is interested in, presents itself as *memoria passionis et resurrectionis Jesu Christi* which Christians celebrate during the sacramental experience and by caring daily for those who live at the margins of society. As a consequence of the fact that no salvation may be reached in human history, the apocalyptic and eschatological dimension of Christianity becomes necessary in order to avoid the tragic nihilism deriving from the premises of the post-modern paradigm.

In a global perspective such as the one that belongs to our times, Metz points out that the true aim of Christianity is that of running for a *praxis* aimed to demystify all forms of oppression and suffering in human society.

In closing, it is worth stressing how Metz’s theological-political program can be considered a “paradigmatic turn” with respect to the previous theological tradition that had characterized the *magi-*

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<sup>7</sup> Johann Baptist Metz, “Two-Fold Political Theology,” in *Political Theology. Contemporary Challenge and Future Directions*, ed. Francis Schüssler Florenza et al. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 20

*sterium* prior to the arrival of Pope Francis. This paradigmatic turn, based on the priority of *praxis*, appears to Metz as the only way for the Church to face the challenges of a globalized age like ours. The issues in the relationships between center and periphery, Truth and pluralism, universal Church and local churches, cannot be fully analysed within the traditional theological approach because of its Eurocentric and hierarchical character. The *Laudato Si'* is the document in which a formal step towards this paradigmatic turn is taken.

## 2. The integral ecology of *Laudato Si'*

‘We require a new and universal solidarity’ (§14).

First of all, the Pope’s call is not just for believers but for all human beings (§64) because responsibility for the world is a common duty of mankind. From this point of view, there is a remarkable reference with John XXIII’s call for the establishment of a World Political Authority, able to tackle the great issues of an economic and ecological balanced planet. The typical interdependence of our global society forces us to think as *one world with a common plan* (§ 164) with a vision on an intergenerational solidarity (§ 159).

The Pope’s ecumenical and cosmopolitan perspective should be centered on the care for a “common home” within a theoretical and cultural framework in which a centralized nature/creation category allows to overcome modern anthropocentrism responsible for the actual ecological crisis.

The Pope even structurally links the social and the ecological questions:

We have to realize that a true ecological approach *always* becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so far to hear *both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor* (§ 49).

First of all, I note that the expression “*the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor*” is undoubtedly an allusion to the famous Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff.<sup>8</sup> But, in my opinion, this theoretical reference can create some paradoxes, as I will illustrate later on.

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<sup>8</sup> See Leonardo Boff, *Ecologia: grito da Terra, grito dos pobres* (S. Paulo: Atica, 1995).

I cannot list all the issues discussed in the encyclical letter, but I will instead focus on the main topics. To start with, in the following paragraph I shall propose some critical remarks on the general theoretical approach of *Laudato Si'*.

*a) The social/ecological link and the complete human development*

According to the Pope, there is connection between the current economic and cultural development and the problem of poverty and inequality in the world; thus not allowing an integral human growth. Therefore, the global struggle against poverty has to be tackled by modifying the productive system, which is the outcome of a theoretical paradigm based on a consumerist culture (§ 203). The reference to the category of “nature” becomes the starting point in order to face the problem of human suffering. The term “Nature” in this case, does not simply identify the inanimate world but the entire creation with all its living species:

It follows that our indifference or cruelty towards fellow creatures of this world sooner or later affects the treatment we mete out to other human beings. We have only one hearth, and the same wretchedness which leads us to mistreat an animal will not be long in showing itself in our relationships with other people (§ 92).

In the Christian tradition, “nature” has always been conceived as “creation”, that is, God’s plan in which every single creature has its own value and significance (§ 76). As a consequence of this, the human role is not that of “dominating” creation but rather of “tilling and keeping” in a relationship of universal solidarity (§ 67).

The Pope’s proposal places itself within the traditional catholic social teaching, particularly focusing on the idea that a complete human development is necessarily linked to a more authentic relationship with nature.

It could be useful to recall the main theoretical steps taken by the catholic social teaching towards the proposal of an integral ecology. In the *Populorum Progressio* (1967), Paul VI introduces the concept of “man’s complete development” (§ 5) by integrating and assimilating the question of la-

bor, which had a central position in the previous social teaching. That is why Benedict XVI singles out the *Populorum Progressio* as the *Rerum Novarum* of present age.<sup>9</sup>

In *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987) John Paul II reminds us that human development has to take into account the limits imposed by the Creator when using natural resources (§ 34) while, in *Centesimus Annus* (1991), he introduces the concept of “human ecology” by referring to the destruction of natural environment (§ 38). In *Caritas in Veritate* (2009), Benedict XVI speaks about solidarity towards future generations as main goal of our use of natural resources (§ 48-50).

In the *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis reiterated all the issues affirmed by his predecessors and focuses on the importance of working towards a sustainable future (§ 14). Therefore, the ecumenical and cosmopolitan view becomes one of the main aspects of the Pope’s message.

#### *b) The technocratic paradigm*

The third chapter of the encyclical letter is particularly important because it explains the theoretical reasoning in favor of a complete ecology. The Pope ascribes the responsibility of the current ecological crisis to the technocratic culture predominant in the modern age. Though he recognizes the positive elements of technological and scientific developments (§ 102), one must also recognize that progress ‘has not been accompanied by a development in human responsibility, values and conscience’ (§ 105).

The main root of the problem is theoretical:

It is the way that humanity has taken up technology and its development *according to an undifferentiated and one-dimensional paradigm*. This paradigm exalts the concept of a subject who, using logical and rational procedures, progressively approaches and gains control over an external object. This subject makes every effort to establish the scientific and experimental method, which in itself is already a technique of possession, mastery and transformation. It is as if the subject were to find itself in the presence of something formless, completely open to manipulation (§ 106).

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<sup>9</sup> Thomas D. Williams, *The World As It Could Be. Catholic Social Thought for a New Generation* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company), 174-175.

In other words, the true cause of the present ecological crisis appears to be the anthropocentric attitude of the technocratic paradigm: by adopting this approach, the intrinsic value of the world is neglected (§ 115). Obviously, such a technocratic paradigm has been accompanied by a crisis of value. Both things contribute to the ecological crisis:

If the present ecological crisis is one small sign of the ethical, cultural and spiritual crisis of modernity, we cannot presume to heal our relationship with nature and the environment without healing all fundamental human relationships (§ 119).

Clearly noted in the *Evangelii gaudium* (§ 80), as consequence of focusing on the priority of human being, is the risk of relativity:

Hence we should not be surprised to find, in conjunction with the omnipresent technocratic paradigm and the cult of unlimited human power, the rise of a relativism which sees everything as irrelevant unless it serves one's own immediate interests. There is a logic in all this whereby different attitudes can feed on one another, leading to environmental degradation and social decay (§ 122).

As already suggested by Benedict XVI in *Caritas in Veritate* (§ 120), Pope Francis suggests it is possible to overcome both anthropocentrism and relativism with an integral care of all the aspects of life (§ 120).

*c) An ecumenical and cosmopolitan perspective*

An interdependent world not only makes us more conscious of the negative effects of certain lifestyles and models of production and consumption which affect us all; more importantly, it motivates us to ensure that solutions are proposed from a global perspective, and not simply to defend the interests of a few countries. Interdependence obliges us to think of *one world with a common plan* (§ 164).

Since human beings have to recover an authentic relationship with nature, the Pope wishes for new ventures aimed at modifying both the current productive system and the management of natural resources, in order to guarantee sustainability and fairness of their distribution (§ 30, 44, 51, 52).

This challenge is certainly political as well as cultural. Since the Catholic Church does not have an exclusive role in this issue, the other Christian churches and the great religious traditions of mankind are invited by the Pope to focus their effort into this paradigmatic turn.

If in *Evangelii gaudium*, the Pope positively considers the dialogue between all the Christian churches (§ 183), in the first pages of *Laudato Si'* he directly recalls the teaching of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. During a speech in 1998, Bartholomew focused on the ethical and spiritual roots of the current ecological crisis by encouraging human beings to recover values like sacrifice, generosity and sharing (§ 8 and 9). The abandonment of the consumerist attitude in favor of these spiritual values is the only way to reintroduce a culture able to understand 'the interplay of all creatures and the whole of reality' (§ 199) and all religions can contribute to the realisation of this goal.

It is remarkable to point how the ecological crisis became the cornerstone of the global public ethic and the Pope is right in stressing that religions can play a potentially positive role in this matter. One should not be surprised by the Pope's opinion because today, important philosophers like John Rawls<sup>10</sup> or Jürgen Habermas<sup>11</sup> break with a secularist culture by recognizing the positive public role religions need to have in order to maintain an ethical perspective in public political discussions:

It would be quite simplistic to think that ethical principles present themselves purely in the abstract, detached from any context. Nor does the fact that they may be couched in religious language detract from their value in public debate. The ethical principles capable of being apprehended by reason can always reappear in different guise and find expression in a variety of languages, including religious language (§ 199).

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<sup>10</sup> See John Rawls, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," *Chicago Law Review* 64(1997): 765-807.

<sup>11</sup> See Jürgen Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion* (Malden, Ma: Polity Press, 2008).

According to the Pope, because most people identify as believers, they ought to encourage religions to cooperate in order to promote the care for nature, the defense of the poor, and the creation of respect and fraternity networks (§ 201).

Once again, Pope Francis follows in his predecessors' footsteps, especially Benedict XVI. While in the *Centesimus annus*, John Paul II argues the need for better cooperation or the creation of international organizations (§ 21) able to face the ecological crisis and to regulate the economical development, Benedict XVI explicitly speaks about the need of global *governance*. In *Caritas in Veritate*, Benedict XVI stresses the importance of solidarity and appeals to the crucial role of civil society in order to stimulate governments. The problem of global governance cannot be solved by the creation of an all-powerful world authority, rather by articulating it at a local, national and international level. Therefore, in Benedict XVI's view, the principle of subsidiarity is essential to avoid that an intrusive central authority might limit freedom at local level (§ 57-58).

In the paragraphs of the *Laudato Si'*, dedicated to the issue of global governance, Pope Francis *de facto* accepts Benedict's approach on the importance of solidarity and subsidiarity and of civil society in reaching a more human and ecological development (see § 179-199). As I already noted, religions can give a significant contribution by orienting consciences on the needs of caring for the "common home".<sup>12</sup>

The path shown by Pope Francis seems more promising in respect to projects such as the one pursued by Hans Küng at the end of twentieth century on the ethic of religions. Küng's project is focused on the research of common ethical principles among the world's great religions but it has been rightly criticized for its abstract and generic character and for the lack of rational evidence that leads to major difficulties in creating a common *ethos*.<sup>13</sup> On the contrary, the path shown in the *Laudato Si'* identifies a specific problem: ecological sustainability of the current global system of production. Therefore, the Pope proposes a joint effort based on common practical needs rather than com-

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<sup>12</sup> At this matter, there is an important difference with Benedict XVI who, in *Caritas in Veritate*, by even speaking in favor of a public role of religions, also suggests that we have to distinguish between them because religious sensitivities are not all committed to spread toleration, peace and fraternity (§ 55). In *Laudato Si'*, the Pope generally refers to the sensitivity which the great religions have towards nature, without making further differences.

<sup>13</sup> See Joachim Fest, *Die schwierigkeit Freiheit* (Berlin: Siedler, 1993), 47-81.

mon ethical agreements. From this point of view, the Pope's ecological perspective seems rich of potential and in a sense prophetic.

### **3. Some remarks on the theoretical presuppositions of *Laudato Si'***

In my opinion, the practical and political turn, which I briefly described in the previous chapter, presents a major theoretical difficulty. On the one hand, *Laudato Si'* is in line with Catholic social teaching but, on the other hand, it offers a renewed sensitivity with respect to the Pope's predecessors, by de-emphasizing some issues.

The weak point of the encyclical letter is the critique against the technocratic paradigm and modernity. Although the Pope positively judges the achievements of modern age caused by the progress of technology, science (§ 82 e 134) and human creativity (§ 191), the overall message of the encyclical letter appears to be negative with regard to the path of the last few centuries. Let me explain.

I propose to distinguish two different approaches to the ecological question, both presented in the *Laudato Si'*. My thesis is that there is not a final synthesis between these two approaches. The first one (hereafter "approach 1") faces the ecological challenge, considering nature at an ecosystem level. Those who follow this approach consider the question of environmental crisis and "ecological violence" in terms of available resources, correct waste management, fight against pollution and poverty but always in the anthropocentric vision which considers world's care just by referring to present and future salvation of human life. The second approach (hereafter "approach 2"), although similar to the first one for some aspects, is actually more general or holistic because of its orientation to giving nature a sort of ontological dignity in which nature is to be placed side by side with human beings.

The necessity of distinguishing between these approaches seems evident when we look at the passages in which the Pope speaks about the change that occurred in modern age, regarding our way of relating to nature:

Men and women have constantly intervened in nature, but for a long time this meant being in tune with and respecting the possibilities offered by the things themselves. It was a matter of receiving what nature itself allowed, as if from its own hand (§ 106).

The “approach 2” cannot be reduced to the “approach 1” and the encyclical is very clear on this point:

Ecological culture cannot be reduced to a series of urgent and partial responses to the immediate problems of pollution, environmental decay and the depletion of natural resources. There needs to be a distinctive way of looking at things, a way of thinking, policies, an educational programme, a lifestyle and a spirituality which together generate resistance to the assault of the technocratic paradigm. Otherwise, even the best ecological initiatives can find themselves caught up in the same globalized logic. To seek only a technical remedy to each environmental problem which comes up is to separate what is in reality interconnected and to mask the true and deepest problems of the global system (§ 111).

The Pope argues that biblical tradition forces human being to respect ‘rhythms inscribed in nature by the hand of the Creator’ (§ 71). So:

The best way to restore men and women to their rightful place, putting an end to their claim to absolute dominion over the earth, is to speak once more of the figure of a Father who creates and who alone owns the world. Otherwise, human beings will always try to impose their own laws and interests on reality (§ 75).

That is why the Pope, by adopting what I called a *holistic* vision, stresses the urgency of attributing an intrinsic dignity to nature and to other creatures since their final goal ‘is not to be found in us. Rather, all creatures are moving forward with us and through us towards a common point of arrival, which is God’ (§ 83).

At this point, the intrinsic limit of this argument is clear. As consequence of this approach, the Pope considers the “ecological violence” as a result of the modern technocratic paradigm. But, the idea that in a pre-modern age, human beings always had a holistic relationship with nature is rather diffi-

cult to affirm. In the *Critias*,<sup>14</sup> for example, Plato denounces the deforestation of Attica and we have many historical examples that a certain measure of “ecological violence” belonged to all human societies and not just to the occidental one starting from modernity.<sup>15</sup>

However, it has been possible to overcome many typical difficulties of the pre-modern societies such as famines and epidemics, thanks to a certain objectification of nature caused by the arrival of both modern science and technocratic paradigm. The Pope praises progress in medicine and science, which would have not occurred without the technocratic paradigm which is strongly criticized in the *Laudato Si'* in favor of a holistic paradigm.

In my opinion, this theoretical ambiguity comes from the fact that the Pope, inspired by Boff, wants to pursue “approach 2” and not just “approach 1”. Although the Pope, like Benedict XVI, refuses the neo-pagan visions of nature proposed by movements close to the New Age, it is also true that some passages of the *Laudato Si'* seem to refer to Boff’s holistic approach.<sup>16</sup>

As proof of what I just said, it is useful to recall that Boff is one of the most enthusiastic admirers of the *Laudato Si'*, hence his view that: ‘It is the first time a pope addresses the issue of ecology in the sense of an holistic ecology (as it goes beyond the environment) in such a complete way’.<sup>17</sup>

Boff’s passage seems to justify both: my attribution of a holistic attitude to the Pope and the previously suggested difference between “approach 1” and “approach 2” while facing the ecological issue. Indeed, the integral ecology discussed in the encyclical letter does not coincide with the care of the ecosystem for the surviving of mankind but something deeper, that is a holistic vision.

I do not want to affirm that the theology of the Pope is the same as Boff’s, but it is undeniable that many passages of the *Laudato Si'* show a real commonality of views. However, apart from this in-

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<sup>14</sup> See Platon, *Critias* 111 b-d.

<sup>15</sup> See Roger S. Gottlieb, “Introduction. Religion and Ecology - What Is the Connection and Why Does It Matter?,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, edited by Roger S. Gottlieb (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 6.

<sup>16</sup> For example the emphasis both on the category of relationality (§ 79) and on Saint Francis (§ 10-12).

<sup>17</sup> Leonardo Boff, *The Magna Carta of holistic Ecology: cry of the Earth / cry of the poor*, <https://leonardoboff.wordpress.com/2015/06/18/the-magna-carta-of-integral-ecology-cry-of-the-earth-cry-of-the-poor/>, 2/July 2015. Boff’s theological proposal of panentheism would impose a reinterpretation of many aspects of Christianity but I cannot here examine in depth these questions: see Leonardo Boff, *Christianity in a Nutshell* (New York: Orbis Book, 2013).

tellektual link, the approach developed in the encyclical letter risks creating some conceptual tensions.

If the *Laudato Si'* would just pursue “approach 1” rather than “approach 2”, it would not be necessary to attribute the responsibility of the current ecological crisis to the technocratic paradigm and the free market. In this case, for example, one could insist on the necessity of a more sustainable economic development from an environmental point of view; highlighting the distortions of the current and global economic system, without forgetting the positive achievements that free market has achieved in the last decades.

It is important to recall that the more accurate academics, stressed the Christian origin of such achievements, fruit of both modernity and free market. One could think, for example, of Michael Novak’s proposal of a “democratic capitalism” in which Christianity should be the vital energy of a free market based on the centrality of the category of the human person.<sup>18</sup> Amongst the documents of the teaching of the Church, John Paul II’s *Centesimus Annus* is the most remarkable with regards to the compatibility of Christianity and free market as long as it would not be divinized by marginalizing the human being.<sup>19</sup>

The critique against the divinization of the market is presented in the *Laudato Si'* (§ 190), but within a theoretical framework, I would say, in a more pessimistic way in respect to the *Centesimus Annus*. In the latter, John Paul II positively exalts the creativeness of human beings (§ 32), the role of the firms in realizing a more human society (§ 35) and their function in using the resources in the best way possible (§ 40). It was correctly said that:

John Paul offered a helpful appraisal of the causes of wealth in developed nations, rather than focusing on the causes of poverty. For instance, along with the external conditions needed for economic growth such as a stable political environment and favorable tax structures, John Paul indicated the virtues of businesspeople that make

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<sup>18</sup> See Michael Novak, *The Spirit of democratic Capitalism* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982), *The Catholic Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: The Free Press, 1993) and “The Future of Democratic Capitalism,” *First Things* June/July 2015, 33-37.

<sup>19</sup> See John Paul II, *Centesimus annus* § 43. Novak has a more negative opinion on *Caritas in veritate* because of its scepticism on free market (see Michael Novak, “Pope Benedict’s Caritas,” *First Things*, August 7, 2009).

such growth possible “such as diligence, industriousness, prudence in undertaking reasonable risks, reliability and fidelity in interpersonal relationships.”<sup>20</sup>

It seems that Pope Francis, compared to John Paul II, is more interested in the causes of poverty rather than in the best means of producing wealth, although he is not theoretically refusing both progress and free market because he does not want “a return to the Stone Age” (§ 114). But, examining this argument as a whole, I should say that his judgment on the market is to be considered very pessimistic. The market, with its consumeristic logic (§ 114) is a central aspect of that process of decadence caused by the arrival of the technocratic and anthropocentric modern paradigm, according to which: ‘Human beings and material objects no longer extend a friendly hand to one another; the relationship has become confrontational’ (§ 106).

The Pope’s point of view could have a different theoretical meaning if he followed “approach 1” in the ecological issue. In this case, the question would be the fair distribution of resources and sustainable, as well as global, development, certainly compatible with the natural resources offered by Earth in order to preserve mankind’s survival. Based on this distinction, I think that evidence of “approach 1” can be found in the more recent social encyclical letters such as the *Centesimus annus* (§ 37) and the *Caritas in veritate* (§ 49-51)<sup>21</sup> while “approach 2” can be found in the *Laudato Si’*.

In the *Laudato Si’*, there are several passages in line with the previous social encyclical letters such as, for example, the social responsibility of the consumer (§ 206), the necessity of changing lifestyle or the important role of civil society, in order to influence the political powers in passing more sustainable legislative choices from an ecological point of view (§ 179).

But, to face the ecological crisis with “approach 1” does not imply reference to a holistic perspective which risks to give the nature/cosmos a higher status. If the Pope had followed the Church’s established social teaching, he might have stressed the link between several forms of current social “suffering” and present distributive order or priority of finance. But these are *pathological* aspects

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<sup>20</sup> Thomas D. Williams, *The World As It Could Be. Catholic Social Thought for a New Generation* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company), 105.

<sup>21</sup> As it has been already observed by Th. D. Williams, ‘Benedict’s environmentalism is markedly *anthropocentric*’: Williams, *The World As It Could Be. Catholic Social Thought for a New Generation*, 184.

of the free market, rather than implicit results caused by the arrival of a technocratic and anthropocentric paradigm not respectful of the ontological statute of Nature.

Undoubtedly, the free market systems and modern technologies are not perfect and need several corrective actions but we should not forget their extraordinary achievements. Some examples might be useful.

UNICEF's Progress Report 2015 states that between 1990 and 2015 the rate of global mortality of children under five years of age has fallen by 53% and since 2000, 48 million children under the age of 5 have been saved due to the enormous progresses of health services and medicine.<sup>22</sup> A second example is that mentioned by Robert Sirico in a comment on the *Laudato Si'*: according to the *International Labor Office*, the number of people living on \$1.25 a day, was of 811 million in 1991 and 375 million in 2013.<sup>23</sup>

These are only some examples of the significant achievements generated by both free market and scientific progresses. Of course, there is still much to do but it is important to be aware that such positive results would have been impossible without that paradigmatic anthropocentric turn contested, *alas*, by the Pope. From this point of view, I fear that the encyclical letter, *volens nolens*, shares a pessimistic attitude towards modern age with several "decadent narratives".<sup>24</sup> This attitude risks offering us a reductive framework of our time which does not take into account the progress made in the last two centuries in terms of wealth and moral sensitivity.<sup>25</sup> So, the challenge today is to make these economic and moral advances sustainable and available to a higher percentage of the world's population.

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<sup>22</sup> See "Committing Child Survival. A Promise Renewed. Progress Report 2015", accessed December 1, 2015, 12 [http://www.unicef.org/publications/index\\_83078.html](http://www.unicef.org/publications/index_83078.html)

<sup>23</sup> See Robert Sirico, "The Pope's Green Theology", *The Wall Street Journal*, June 18, 2015, accessed December 3, 2015, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/the-popes-green-theology-1434668086>.

<sup>24</sup> By the expression "decadent narrative" I refer to several cultural and philosophical visions, which often present important differences among them but with a common *Leitmotiv*, that is a pessimistic conception of history and modernity. Some examples of this approach are: the first theorists of the Frankfurt School and, in particular, Adorno; Michel Foucault's critique of liberal modernity; some post-cultural visions which conceive modernity just through the categories of colonialism and imperialism; the Islamic vision of history as departure from the golden age, that is Mohammed's one; some Catholics which conceive modernity as the fruit of Ockham and Descartes' nominalistic and rationalistic mistakes.

<sup>25</sup> A more optimistic perspective on modernity is that of Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA-London: Harvard University Press, 2007).

#### 4. Conclusion

The message of *Laudato Si'* is important because it reminds Christians that their duty towards future generations is important. The Pope's call to be more responsible with regard to the ecological context and sustainability is remarkable. These topics play a fundamental role for the future of mankind and, because of that, the ecumenical and cosmopolitan dialogue seems one of the most concrete and productive proposals in order to *correct* the pathologies of the current economical system.

I also wanted to stress a weak point, from a philosophical point of view, in the Pope's argument because I think that the encyclical letter does not succeed in realizing a full synthesis between the two possible approaches ("approach 1" and "approach 2") when considering the ecological issue. I fear that this vision does not allow a correct narrative of what has been happening in the last two centuries. My opinion is that by following "approach 1" the Pope could have recovered the main theme of Metz's political theology, that is the public role of Christianity in struggling against all forms of suffering. In respect to Metz, the contribution of *Laudato Si'* would have been that of stressing the link between the wild exploitation of the environment and several forms of consequent suffering. Therefore, the Christian's aim, as well as all human beings, is to counterbalance the pathologies of market and savage consumerism, both of which risk having negative effects on the life of many people.

Nevertheless, the Pope's reference to "approach 2" in ecology is probably fruit of Boff's influence but it also creates tension with "approach 1". In my opinion, this tension comes from the excessive attention to a holistic vision of nature and from the auspices that human beings may recover a more authentic relationship with cosmos in respect to that of the modern technocratic paradigm. As I observed, the free market and the great discoveries in the field of science and medicine would have not occurred without the the technocratic paradigm. Therefore, it seems reductive to me, to attribute to them the main responsibility for both the "ecological violence" and the environmental crisis which depends on different causes such as corruption, egoism, lack of democracy and political liberty in many parts of the world.

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via Monfalcone, 17/19

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Autorizzazione del Tribunale di Varese n. 893 del 23/02/2006.  
ISSN 1828-1567



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