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Article

Theological Economy, Catholic Social Teaching and Human Flourishing[1]

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Abstract

There is increasing evidence of a political economy that endorses inequitable access to resources giving rise to income disparities, a loss of human dignity and environmental degradation. Any concern is accentuated by accelerating globalisation and increasing utility-maximising behaviour by firms and individuals. In this paper it is argued that neoliberalism, a bedfellow of neo classical economics, perpetuates the disproportionate resource consumptive behaviour of the wealthy at the expense of the dispossessed who have a claim to the same resources. This paper argues for a vision of human flourishing rooted in the common good and suggests a platform that promotes greater social justice and equality.

Keywords

Individualism, Neoliberal Economics, Catholic Social Teaching, Encyclical, Human Flourishing

Introduction

There is growing evidence to suggest that population growth and rising consumption have combined to exceed the planet's ecological carrying capacity and we are spending our environmental capital instead of living off the interest (Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2016). Environmental degradation and socio-economic inequities are fuelled by concentrations of trade, finance, and economic production in the hands of a minority. The concomitant stress and resentment felt by billions of people around the globe has resulted in a situation that needs to be quickly remedied before it leads to more serious breakdowns. The richest 20% of the global population are becoming increasingly affluent and the poorest 20% experience abject poverty in both rural areas and urban ghettos (Laszlo & Seidel, 2006). The resulting conditions continue to fuel resentment and lead to massive urban migration from poorer countries to richer countries. Even in developed countries job security is not as it was in the past. Increasingly, both poor countries and rich countries exhaust productive land, contaminate waterways and mine aquifers beyond their assimilative capacity.

What used to be local or regional problems are now global and require a new way of global thinking that cannot be prescribed or regulatory. A way of thinking that, in its heart, concede s that we must modify our human behaviour (Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2016). Judt (2010, p. 1) declared:

> *Something is profoundly wrong with the way we live today. For 30 years we have made a virtue out of the pursuit of material self-interest. We no longer ask of a judicial ruling or a legislative act: Is it good? Is it fair? Is it just? Is it right? Will it help to bring about a better society or a better world? Those used to be the political questions, even if they invited no easy answers. We must learn once again to pose them.*

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The Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities (2011, p. 7) states:

> *Because global interdependence demands that we must live with each other in harmony, human beings need rules and constraints. Ethics are the minimum standards that make a collective life possible. Without ethics and self-restraint that are their result, humankind would revert to the survival of the fittest. The world is in need of an ethical base on which to stand.*

Laszlo (2001) insists that our values and beliefs define our perception of the world and influence our responses to these perceptions. Any chance of creating a better likelihood for human survival will necessitate some form of civil self-regulation which, in a democratic society, will need to be a m oral code or set of principles that will also need to have universal appeal given our global or globally interdependent world (Laszlo & Seidel, 2006). Traditionally, religions established the norms of morality, for example, The Ten Commandments of Jews and Christians, Islam's Provisions for the Faithful and Buddhists' Rules of Right Livelihood. However, in the 21st century science has eroded the influence of religion to regulate human behaviour yet has offered little alternative guidance.

When countries persistently pursue singular objectives, such as economic expansion, at the expense of social and environmental wellbeing, the opportunity cost can be extremely high. In exchange for economic growth many countries in recent years have inherited climbing inequality, embedded social exclusion and witness a severe deterioration of their natural resources. Significantly, in his 2015 encyclical Pope Francis noted:

> *Politics and the economy tend to blame each other when it comes to poverty and environmental degradation. It is to be hoped that they can acknowledge their own mistakes and find forms of interaction directed to the common good. While some are concerned only with financial gain, and others with holding on to or increasing their power, what we are left with are conflicts or spurious agreements where the last thing either party is concerned about is caring for the environment and protecting those who are most vulnerable (Pope Francis, 2015, p. 198).*

Neoliberal economics has made no significant inroads into the alleviation of poverty and nudged the global economy to the edge of the abyss with the 2007 financial crisis with its US$30 trillion financial meltdown that neoliberal economists insisted could never happen (Dallas Federal Reserve, 2017). Only massive government intervention and ongoing personal losses incurred by private citizens saved the day. Commentators talk of 'remoralising' economics, arguing that 2007 would have been averted if society conducted itself with greater care for one another's welfare (Zampini-Davies, 2016).

In this paper it is suggested that any remoralising of these values and beliefs might be captured in the principles of Catholic social teaching (CST) that can unite people from diverse cultures and backgrounds to strengthen human flourishing and entrench the common good in society. Giving substance to the suggestion, Annett (2016) asserts that human beings are intuitively predisposed toward eudemonistic notions of happiness that are inextricably linked to the common good and that the neo-classical economic systems have fostered self-satisfying individualism that erode the common good of its content. CST is based on the documents presented by the *magisterium* (Thompson, 2010) - the accepted or designated teaching offices of the Pope and bishops in the Catholic Church. The *magisterium* are responsible for advocating and expressing the Church's social doctrine (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 2005) through encyclicals. These authoritative documents that are the formal declarations of the pope. CST is frequently referred to as Catholicism's *Best Kept Secret* following Henriot, DeBerri and Schultheis' 1963 book by that name and described by Clark (2014) as, 'the church's explicit and official grappling with contemporary and social problems'.

It is not the intention to suggest that the Catholic church has an implicit claim on being a respected source of advice on moral theology especially in light of the credibility problem with the widely publicised history of concealing and protecting serial abusers from the law. However, in very short order, Pope Francis has demonstrated the seriousness with which the abuse crisis has being taken and acted upon. Spearheaded with his new *motu proprio* or apostolic letter *Vos estis lux mundi* (2019), Pope Francis responded to the impetus created by the collective voices of the faithful by promulgating laws that impose a universal and mandatory obligation on all

religious, under threat of jail time, to immediately report all accusations of abuse or the cover-up of abuse to the authorities (O'Connell, 2019). 'The time and tone of the new law are revolutionary, yet the law is solidly grounded in tradition... and leave no room to use the abuse crisis for ideological purposes' (Martens, 2019, p. 1).

The praxis of Catholic social teaching is presented as an alternative way of thinking and behaving in order to safeguard private and public capital and strengthen antipoverty programmes by advocating moral and ethical principles like supporting the common good, solidarity and social justice. The principles are intended for 'churches and ecclesial communities, other religions and all people of goodwill committed to serving the common good' (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 2005, para12). By acknowledging that the principles are intended to be inclusive and transboundary makes them a useful vehicle for exploring how the common good may be nurtured. Within the context of the modern global economy, the aim of the paper is to argue for a vision of human flourishing and other principles that are embedded in CST.

Method

Within the milieu of theological economy, intertextuality techniques are employed to consider neoliberal economics behaviour and utility maximising ideologies to explore solutions to the social, political and economic challenges of the 21st century (Paltridge, 2012). Discrete discourse communities are studied to identify patterns and pathways that support the interconnectedness of shared values and beliefs. The separation of theology from economic discourse and vice versa are examined to give substance to the call for a theological economy to confront inequality and encourage human flourishing. Deductively, the activities and ideological positions of economic agencies are examined and, inductively, social structures and the political economy of inequality and social injustice are examined. The centrality of CST and the discourse surrounding applied economics outcomes in the world is the reason for adopting a study approach that combines interpretive structuralism and critical discourse analysis and intertextuality methods of social constructionism. The reason for this is that these methods acknowledge the manner in which texts inform and shape discourses and this allows us to gain a better understanding of how CST might influence the morality of economic decision-making and foster human flourishing.

Two exogenous factors that influence the methodological considerations in this paper are the changes in the understanding of words over time and the scale of the time period under consideration. First, there are enormous challenges involved in tracking the evolution or development of ideas and gauging their subsequent influence on texts or events (Ricoeur, 1976). These challenges increase by orders of magnitude when one considers the multiple and mutual areas of thought and belief simultaneously in theology, anthropology, economics and politics. The task is further complicated by the fact that the issues considered occur over a timeline spanning generations and sometimes centuries. With time, words, thinking and philosophies might gain new meanings, for example, today the term 'economic liberal' predicates regulatory government intervention, the provision of social welfare, health and health programmes (Nixon, 2007). However, during the nineteenth century, the same term conveyed the exact opposite meaning and portrayed a fundamental, *laissez faire* approach to business that praised self-independence and minimised the role of the state in the economy (Nixon, 2013).

The second consideration is the absolute abundance of material (Ederer, 2011). The CST texts and associated commentaries are prodigious as are the influence of CST in the economic and political arenas starting in 1891 with *Rerum novarum*, the encyclical of Leo XIII. Consequently, the paper has necessitated reasonable boundaries and for this reason the study has been confined to the foremost papal encyclical s that address economic matters.

Principles of Catholic Social Teaching

Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home is Pope Francis' encyclical or appeal addressed to "every person living on this planet" for an inclusive dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet. In it, Francis decries the pursuit of a model where finance dominates the real economy and individual prosperity and self-sufficiency erode the attractiveness of the common good (Pope Francis, 2015, p. 109). This is not to eschew or upend an economic system that have enabled technological advances and improved standards of living, quality of life and recognition of human rights in many parts of the world, rather, in this paper Catholic social teaching (CST)

is presented as an approach to address the pervasive negative externalities associated with the free market. Annett (2016, p. 59) refers to Catholic social teaching as, 'the body of social encyclicals issued by successive popes that address moral questions related to the functioning of the modern industrial, and increasingly globalized, economy from Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* in 1891 to Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'* in 2015'.

With the nineteenth century came rapid economic, social and political changes. Some of the most notable changes include the development of factories, worker exploitation and the emergence of communism and socialism. It was out of this cultural milieu that modern Catholic social teaching arose with the release of Pope Leo's *Rerum Novarum* (On the Conditions of Labour, 1891). The encyclical is the genesis of a body of social teaching within the Catholic Church and addressed the people, systems and structures that underpin the principles of justice and peace that are cornerstones of the Church's societal duty. The encyclical highlighted the punitive conditions factory workers faced during the Industrial Revolution and stressed that 'oppressed workers, above all, ought to be liberated from the savagery of greedy men, who inordinately use human beings as things for gain' (Pope Leo XIII, 1891, para.54). The document formed the platform upon which deliberations of how the Catholic Church would influence economic events, and how even today, the Church can improve its credibility on economic debates and matters of political economy. Catholic social teaching is grounded in a historical tradition of Christian moral reflection and is refined and developed through social engagement and debate that has been advanced through successive encyclicals and episcopal statements (Clark, 2014).

The 2004 Compendium of the Social Doctrine of The Church (2004, p. 160) identifies four permanent principles of the Church's social doctrine. These constitute the essence of Catholic social teaching namely, the principles of: the dignity of the human person (referred to as the foundation of all the other principles); the common good; subsidiarity; and solidarity.

> *These are principles of a general and fundamental character, since they concern the reality of society in its entirety: from close and immediate relationships to those mediated by politics, economics and law; from relationships among communities and groups to relations between peoples and nations' (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of The Church – Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004, p. 161).*

Catholic social teaching provides a n important primary resource and contribution to the public debate on matters of globalisation, justice, *human dignity*, and peace' (Clark, 2014). In this age of the Anthropocene it is suggested that the principles imbedded in CST offer a defendable framework to underpin a vision of human flourishing in the global economy. Catholic social teaching principles are interconnected and should be seen collectively rather than viewed as a list of discrete items. The principles inform one another mutually as expressions of Christian anthropology (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 2005). The principles are:

- Human dignity
- Community and the common good
- Subsidiarity and the role of government
- Solidarity
- Participation
- Option for the poor and vulnerable
- Dignity of work and rights of workers
- Stewardship of God's creation
- Promotion of peace

Within the context of intense materialism and a reduced respect for human life, CST advocates that the combination of *human dignity* and the sacredness of human life form a foundation or cornerstone upon which a moral vision of society hinges (Catholic Charities Office for Social Justice, 2015; Thompson, 2010). The dignity of individuals are not only defined by their 'uniqueness' and sense of self and other human attributes, it is also that they are theocentric. Human dignity is seen to be an inalienable gift of creation that cannot be withdrawn. Every human being's dignity is equal and respecting this forms the basis for the CST and is the basis of a just and

nurturing community (Thompson, 2010). Belief in the inherent dignity of individuals is the starting point for a moral vision for society and is rooted in the idea that the person is the clearest reflection of God among us (Learning to Give, 2017).

The principle underpinning the notion of *community and the common good* is that the good or welfare of each individual is bound up with the good of the community; everyone is responsible for everyone (Hollenbach, 1994). 'Human flourishing and the quality of common life are linked by the common good. In the contemporary world, which is increasingly interdependent, the common good has a global dimension' (Thompson, 2010, p. 59). Thompson (2010) contends that the manner in which we organize ourselves in economics, politics, in law, and institutionally directly affects human dignity of individuals' propensity to develop as a community. The role of the government and other organisations is to safeguard human life and the self-worth and dignity of people to uphold the common good. Bradstock (2013), maintains that, whatever the situation, the good of the individual is subordinated to the good of the wider community'.

The virtue of *subsidiarity* first appeared in the Pope Pius XI's 1931 encyclical, *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931). The principle of subsidiarity advocates that the functions of government should be performed at their lowest possible level, and as long as they are carried out efficiently, should not be overridden by higher levels of government. Pope Francis, in his dialogue on politics and economics, pays particular attention to the need for greater subsidiarity in both government and private economic sectors.

The current model, with its emphasis on success and self-reliance, does not appear to favour an investment in efforts to help the slow, the weak or the less talented to find opportunities in life' (Pope Francis, 2015, p. 13). *Solidarity* can best be understood as the communal outcome of the altruism displayed by everyone who truly cares about what happens to fellow members of the community. 'Group or community solidarity, also known as social cohesion, is manifest in advocacy, personal support, social services, voluntary work, collaborative action and acts of kindness' (Learning to Give, 2017). It might be argued that the flipside to the virtue of solidarity is the vice of excessive individualism that assumes humans are basically isolated, atomised individuals.

The moral test for justice within a society is how it treats its poor and vulnerable members. Thompson (2010) cogently articulates the substance of this claim by arguing, 'the poor have the most urgent moral claim on the conscience of the nation. We are called to look at public policy decisions in terms of how they affect the poor' (Catholic Charities Office for Social Justice, 2015). The '*option for the poor*' is not intended to simply distinguish between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots', but to show that by depriving the powerless at the expense of the powerful, the collective community becomes impoverished and the fabric of the common good is weakened. Thompson (2010, p. 63) insists that, 'the fundamental moral criteria for all economic decisions, policies and institutions is this, they must be at the service of *all people, especially the poor*'.

Paradoxically, many people may perceive the Vatican's unwavering stance on birth control to be at odds with its moral obligations to addressing poverty and sustainable futures. In his encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, Pope Paul VI judged that contraception is morally wrong teaching that "it is not licit, even for the gravest reasons, to do evil so that good may follow therefrom" (Pope Paul VI, 1968, para14). Pope Francis maintains this position, however 'many Catholics choose to ignore the Vatican's ban on birth control, but the world's poorest people do not have that luxury. For half a century, the Catholic hierarchy has blocked funding and access to contraception for family planning and HIV/Aids prevention, with deadly impacts for the most vulnerable globally' (Sherwood, 2018).

The creation of socio-economic rights like health, housing and education enables individuals to contribute towards the common good. *Participation*, then, is an important pillar of CST and is a litmus test for how healthy a community actually is. Participation is a requirement for the attainment of the common good. Individuals are called to contribute towards the molding of society in a manner that encourages and promotes the wellbeing of its members and, by this means, the dignity of the person is achieved (Dwyer, 1994). All people have a right to participate in the economic, political, and cultural life of society (Learning to Give, 2017).

All the subsequent encyclicals to *Rerum Novarum* echo its pioneering and outspoken advocacy *of the dignity of work and rights of workers* to decent and fair wages and to safe working conditions, to organize and join unions and a right to economic initiative and private property (Archer, 2003). The economy must serve people,

not the other way around. But these rights have limits and no one should amass excessive wealth when others lack the basic necessities of life. Catholic social teaching opposes collectivist and statist economic approaches. But it also rejects the notion that a free market automatically produces justice. Distributive justice cannot be achieved by relying entirely on free market forces. Competition and free markets are useful elements of economic systems, however, there are many needs that cannot be satisfied by the market system and both the state and of all society are tasked to intervene and ensure that these needs are met (Catholic Charities Office for Social Justice, 2015).

Paradoxically, despite the widespread acceptance of human rights there remain disturbing and ubiquitous violations where woman are trafficked as sex slaves, workers are paid extortionate wages in 'sweat shops', the passports of vulnerable people are confiscated by employers and their workers are then blackmailed with threats of being declared prohibited immigrants (Polychroniou, 2018).

Laudato Si' is revolutionary in that it calls for a 'bold cultural revolution' to challenge the environmental crisis confronting the world and extends the traditional teaching that *stewardship of God's creation* calls for by taking a more action-oriented approach to how we live and act with regard to the preservation and protection of natural resources (Pope Francis, 2015, p. 53). The encyclical challenges people 'to examine how our excessive consumerism and poor environmental practices are exploiting the earth and take measures to correct our destructive patterns.

Catholic teaching *promotes peace* as a positive, action-oriented concept. In the words of John Paul II, 'peace is not just the absence of war. It involves mutual respect and confidence between peoples and nations. It involves collaboration and binding agreements.' There is a close relationship in Catholic teaching between peace and justice. Peace is the fruit of justice and is dependent upon right order among human beings (Learning to Give, 2017).

There is broad based support for Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'* ranging from multilateral organisations such as the United Nations Global Compact and the European Environment Commission through to religious organisations such as the World Council of Churches. The encyclical even draws upon the teachings of Islam.

The general secretary of the World Council of Churches endorsed *Laudato Si* and encouraged all churches to support the justice and peace initiatives at the heart of the document and added, 'this is the time to focus on our shared responsibility as human beings, and the way we as churches should support those who are ready to make the required changes' (Tveit, 2015, p. 1). I n an open letter to Pope Francis, the United Nations Global Compact (2015) acknowledged both the inspirational attributes of *Laudato Si'* and that the 'challenges threatening the earth's survival are far too great for any one sector or institution to address alone... and we will continue our work to realize a vision of a truly sustainable and inclusive future for all' (United Nations Global Compact, 2015, p. 1). The President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, said, "we have great hope that *Laudato Si* will serve as a wake-up call and encourage people to address our common future" (Vella, 2015, p. 1). The Commission also acknowledged how *Laudato Si* was frequently referred to during discussions on establishing the UN Sustainable Development Goals, especially during the final push for agreement.

Inequality

The 2017 World Happiness Report (2017) contains a calculation of the inequality of happiness across individuals from 3,000 respondents from more than 150 countries. Respondents evaluated their current lives on a scaled ladder (0 worst - 10 best) and the results show that, for the world as a whole, the distribution of the responses are normal with a weighted mean of 5.3. However, when the global population is divided into ten regions, a bimodal distribution is revealed with a three-point difference separating average life evaluation scores of the 10 happiest nations from the 10 least happy nations. Using data from 2005 to 2016, Helliwell, Layard, and Sachs, (2017) found that 75 percent of the variance between countries in the study can be explained by six variables that explain different aspects of life (Table 1). The variables are per capita GDP, years of healthy life expectancy, social support (somebody to rely on in times of distress), trust (perceptions of corruption in government/business), perceived freedom to make life decisions, and generosity (recent donations). The most important attributes are social support, income and healthy life expectancy (Helliwell et al., 2017).

Notes: This is a pooled OLS regression for a tattered panel explaining annual national average Cantril ladder

responses from all available surveys from 2005 to 2016. ***, **, and * indicate significance at the 1, 5 and 10 percent levels respectively.

Table 1: Regressions to Explain Average Happiness across Countries.

(This is a pooled OLS regression for a tattered panel explaining annual national average Cantril ladder responses from all available surveys from 2005 to 2016. ***, **, and * indicate significance at the 1, 5 and 10 percent levels respectively.)

Log GDP per capita	0.341 ***
Social support	2.332 ***
Healthy life expectancy at birth	0.029 ***
Freedom to make life choices	1.098 ***
Generosity	0.842 ***
Perceptions of corruption	-.533 *
Number of countries	155
Number of obs.	1,249
Adjusted R-squared	0.746

Helliwell et al. (2017) argue that human beings are intuitively attracted towards diverse notions of happiness that are intimately tied to the common good but this has been corroded by post-Enlightenment political and economic developments. In this paper it is suggested that the restoration of the supremacy of the common good and the other principles imbedded in CST provides a mechanism to restore a vision of human flourishing 'in a way that does not depend on agreeing with the confessional claims of the Catholic Church.' CST offers a framework with universal appeal and the capacity to inspire and mobilise the compassionate part of all humans Helliwell et al. (2017, p. 20) commented:

> *In the language of Jews, Christians and Muslims, it embodies the commandment to do as you would be done by, and to love your neighbour as yourself. In the language of Hinduism and Buddhism, it embodies the principle of compassion that we should, in all our dealings, truly wish for the happiness of all of those we can affect, and we should cultivate in ourselves an attitude of unconditional benevolence.*

Laudato Si' is an instrument about justice with a focus on the environment, and not the other way around and through it the Pope aims to make the global economic, social and environmental space to be more inclusive of and fairer to the poorest people on the planet (Omar, 2015). The encyclical's concerns surrounding social justice issues resonate with the teachings of Islam (Omar, 2015). Indeed, in his encyclical, Pope Francis quotes Muslim Mystic, Amir al-Khawas (Pope Francis, 2015, para. 233), to defend of his theology of environmental transcendence and 'foster ecumenical and interfaith dialogue about shared spirituality' (Omar, 201 5, p. 1).

Naturally, there is a great deal of skepticism at the prospect of achieving such a compassionate and caring way of living because of the inherent belief that humans are hedonistic and self-serving (Nixon, 2013). However, Ricard (2015) suggests that human beings have two natures; one of them is selfish whilst the other is altruistic and our ethical culture promotes our altruistic tendencies ahead of those egotistical ones. And so an ethical framework that favours both the flourishing of others at the same time as the individual's flourishing stands a better chance of going forward.

Whilst some would argue that only a non-religious (as opposed to anti-religious) organisation could promote ethical living and provide mutual support to meet human need s, the fact is that there are not many secular organisations able to perform this function (Helliwell et al., 2017). There are open access to churches, mosques and temples and their message relates to every aspect of life and offers a sense of meaning and connectedness.

Eudaimonia and the Common Good

Helliwell et al. (2016, p. 39) state that, 'human beings are by their nature oriented toward eudemonistic notions

of happiness' that are intimately bound to notions of the common good. With the post-Enlightenment turn toward the individual (Sachs, Bechetti, & Annett, 2016, p. 39) and eco-political developments stripping much of the

common good of substantive content, the restoration of the centrality of the common good offered by CST provides a route toward genuine human flourishing. Annett (2016) asserts that people are motivated beyond simple hedonism and derive utility from human flourishing through their personal development. The concept of eudaimonia emphases human beings placing a premium on living intrinsically purposeful, meaningful and worthwhile lives where relationships, health, and contributing to the community are valued factors. Nussbaum (2004, p. 60-68) defines it as 'a kind of living that is active, inclusive of all that has intrinsic value, and complete, lacking nothing that would make it richer or better.' Eudaimonia is a concept rooted in Aristotle's virtue ethics that has its genesis in his teleological perspective that there is a reason or *telos* for all things. Aristotelian virtue ethics are essentially about people becoming who they are meant to be which is not to be confused with being wealthy (Thomson, 1953). Athanassoulis (2019) summarises the relationship between reason and the function of man thus, 'if the function of man is reason, then the good man is the man who reasons well. This is the life of excellence or of eudaimonia. Eudaimonia is the life of virtue, activity in accordance with reason, man's highest function'.

Ricard (2015) identifies two attributes that demonstrate the strong tendencies of human beings toward altruism. First, valuing the 'other' and being concerned about the others' circumstances is borne out by displays of benevolence and reveals a willingness to care for others (Ricard, 2015). Second, 'relationship' which is central to well-being and now economists are looking at so-called 'relational goods'. Bruni (2012) considered that 'these are goods that can only be enjoyed if shared reciprocally and are characterized by gratuitousness and where the source of the good lies in the relationship itself. Relational goods are intrinsically worthwhile, and possession of these goods contributes to eudaimonia' (Bruni, 2012; Pers comm, 2016).

Decline of the Common Good

Given that individual flourishing and community flourishing are mutually dependent, then eudaimonia indicates the common good or the things individuals aspire to enjoy collectively. Neoliberal economics is largely rooted in utilitarianism which is in direct contrast to eudemonism that is rooted in the common good and motivates people to attend to the needs of others rather than being focused on consuming market goods and services to maximise individuals' utility. Sachs et al., (2016) ask whether 'it is egotistical rather than altruistic, assuming that people are motivated solely by satisfying their own desires and preferences,' but Bruni (2012) maintains that the eudemonistic way takes people as they are without discounting relational, cultural and spiritual values.

Annett (2016) contends that the egotistical, self-serving behaviour of *homo economicus* is unnatural and perpetuates the mindset that anti-social behavior is natural (Sachs, et al., 2016). Gregory, (2012) considers that the acquisitive mentality of consumers where the 'good society' is replaced by a 'goods society' and where libertarianism is unreflectively absorbed along with its celebrity gossip culture, is reminiscent of economist Robbins (1935) famously explaining the distinction between positive and normative economics: 'economics deals with ascertainable facts, ethics with valuations and obligations'. Economics prides itself in being value-neutral or value-free thereby giving priority to, means (efficiency and growth) rather than ends (Nelson, Daly., & Cobb, 1991).

Conclusion

It might be argued that the custom of the post-enlightenment era is to diminish the impact and importance of the common good by reducing it to a simple accumulation of individual goods, thereby reversing the previously accepted notion that the good of a single individual is intrinsically connected to the good of all individuals (Barron, 2015). Thomas Aquinas advocated the idea of *bonum commune*, whereby the well-being of others is the primary desire of each person and this results in the 'common good' (*ibid*.). Similarly, Bruni (2012) reminds us that an individual's contribution towards the common good is reciprocated through support of the common

good and this eudemonistic vision creates a dynamic cohesion that further develops social capital, and nurtures human flourishing. It also encourages the cultural, social, economic, political, emotional, intellectual, aesthetic, and religious development of all person s without exception and in doing so builds up physical human, social and natural capital.

Institutionalised injustices frequently deprive individuals, families and communities of their basic human rights and treat them as if they are inanimate factors of economic production. It is almost inevitable, therefore, that the principle of the common good becomes a summons to solidarity for the poor. The principle of common good invokes an appreciation of the enormous dignity of the poor and should convince us that treating the disenfranchised with dignity and honour becomes an ethical imperative to attain the common good (Pope Francis, 2015, p. 158). Any intellection of the common good must include consideration of future generations. The global financial and economic crises of 2007 showcased the destructive consequences that result from neglecting our common good and hope for the future. Further, any discussion of sustainable development must be concomitant with intergenerational solidarity and Francis (2015) suggests that consideration be given to the state of the world inherited from our forebears and the state of the world being bequeathed to the next generation. Francis insists that 'intergenerational solidarity is not optional, but rather a basic question of justice, since the world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us [and].. the environment is on loan to each generation, which must then hand it on to the next' (Portuguese Bishops' Conference, 2003, p. 20). In the same way, an integral ecology is marked by this broader vision (Pope Francis, 2015, p. 159).

In the first Apostolic Exhortation of his Pontificate, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis speaks for a 'return of economics and finance to an ethical approach which favours human beings' (Pope Francis, 2013, p. 58). Developing countries are especially vulnerable. While their average debt ratios are at historically low levels, their debt overhang, augmented by the tardiness of the international community to contribute towards climate change and biodiversity degradation mitigation costs, exacerbates poor countries' financial problems (Millennium Development Goal Gap Task Force Report, 2013). Not only does the extent of the debt crisis choke the ability of poor countries to attain their human rights aspirations, it also serves as a siren call to the developed world to support the establishment of *ex-ante* financial mechanisms to redress the fact that, as noted in *Laudato Si'*, 'we are all too slow in developing economic institutions and social initiatives which can give the poor regular access to basic resources. We fail to see the deepest roots of our present failures, which have to do with the direction, goals, meaning and social implications of technological and economic growth' (Pope Francis, 2015, p. 109). The current economic and financial framework is unable to safeguard the common good and needs to be reformulated to uphold the principles of subsidiarity, values the dignity of humans and pay attention to those living on the margins of society who are impoverished and seem to be without hope. *Laudato Si'* breaks new ground and offers a passionate call to all people to take 'swift and unified global action', particularly in relation to politics, economics and the destruction of the environment. The *magisterium* stress that there is a symbiotic relation- ship between society and nature: 'the human environment and the natural environment deteriorate together; we cannot adequately combat environmental degradation unless we attend to causes related to human and social degradation' (Pope Francis, 2015, p. 148).

We acknowledge the hurdles that exist when it comes to enabling the principles of CST in a pluralist society where the essence of the common good should be something that emerges from inclusive discourse rather than an imposed requirement. However, as de Botton (2012) argues, 'the lack of absolute agreement on the good life should not in itself be enough to disqualify us from investigating and promoting the theoretical notion of such a life'. Plant (2001) suggests that progress is made by focusing on the language of social justice in our endeavours to promote the common good. Finally, the *magisterium*, through the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace asserts that:

> *An authentic democracy is not merely the result of a formal observation of a set of rules but is the fruit of a convinced acceptance of the values that inspire democratic procedures: the dignity of every human person, the respect of human rights, commitment to the common good as the purpose and guiding criterion for political life. If there is no general consensus on these values, the deepest meaning of democracy is lost and its stability is compromised (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 2005, p. 407).*

Looking ahead

The architecture of our economic systems is struggling to support options that enhance the common good and ensure that financial, social and natural capital is used sustainably. Pope Francis (2013, para 58) warns, 'money must serve not rule!' The Church and its teachings are not perfect but Catholic social teaching has contributed a respectable body of literature and developed a track record she can be proud of. Thompson (2010, p. 167-68) identifies three strengths in particular. First, the content and substance of CST represent a noteworthy moral voice in the modern world. The church calls upon its members to contribute towards the creation of a just and peaceful society and to be servants to those in need. Second, the primary values of CST provide a core stability that augments its effectiveness. CST obviates individualism and collectivism by promoting the dignity of the individual within a community that contributes towards human flourishing. Third, CST has a humanistic basis in natural law making it available to 'all people of good will' - it encourages ecumenical dialogue backed not only by Christians but the whole of society.

When CST reflects on inequality, it often does so through an Aristotelian lens, the idea being that excess inequality undermines the civic virtues and severs the sense of shared purpose necessary for the common good. Pope Benedict XVI made this point when he argued that inequality depletes social capital and undermines the norms of reciprocity (Pope Francis, 2013). Similarly, Pope Francis argued that inequality leads to a 'throwaway culture' in which the sense of common purpose has become so impoverished that the excluded are no longer even considered part of society. It is for this reason that he calls inequality 'the root of social ills.'

The release of Pope Francis (2015) encyclical intentionally preceded that of the United Nations' Agenda 30 Sustainable Development Goals (UN Resolution, 2015) with the hope of influencing international politics. Responding to the twin juggernauts of global environmental degradation and poverty and the economic desperation that accompany them, Pope Francis (2015, para 13) challenges the 'whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development" by examining our relationship to each other, the planet and the economy as a first step to effecting change. Francis suggests that the dialogue or conversation could start in the arena of international policy.

The 2007 global financial crisis eloquently demonstrated neoliberalism's capacity to simultaneously generate and devour great wealth. The consequent fracturing of social cohesion that results from the excessive rewards to the already wealthy behind the banner of risk and uncertainty and concomitant stasis of the net financial position of those who directly created the wealth through their labour, inevitably weakens the cohesion required to nurture the common good.

This article has made the case against the dismembered, post-Enlightenment emergence of the atomised individual and instead argued in favour of Catholic social teaching principles underpinning a vision for eudemonistic living with purpose, meaning, sociality, and mutuality that is intrinsically linked with the common good. An argument has been offered that suggests the principles enshrined in teaching offer tangible means to restore the best aspects of this vision in the context of the global market economy without compromising the socio-economic gains of modernity.

Notes

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