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Degrowth and Catholic social thought:
rethinking socio-economics for a planet in crisis

Chad Baron

A Thesis
Submitted to the Department of International Studies
in partial fulfillment for the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

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Master of Arts in International Studies

Advised by Dr. Sam Mickey

Degrowth and Catholic social thought:
rethinking socio-economics for a planet in crisis

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS
in
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

by Chad Baron
April 30, 2022

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO
Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this thesis project has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

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Abstract

It is assumed within both degrowth literature and the social teaching of the Roman Catholic Church (CST) that socio-economic transitions and transformations are needed due to the failings of the dominant capitalist paradigm. Both bodies of thought engage with issues of socio-economic transitions by considering what constitutes globally just development, and by outlining key principles they espouse to be foundational to global justice. By highlighting these principles, and locating the affinities between the two, these theories of socio-economic development can benefit from engaging with the other's promoted framework. What could follow is a more coherent and holistic approach to development, and a more galvanized and intentional engagement within religious circles and degrowth circles with development issues as it relates to faith and spirituality. The thesis reviews the key formulations in both bodies of thought and highlights the overlaps, particularly those overlaps that engage with economic growth, wealth concentration, and neocolonialism. Furthermore, the thesis explores the potentially contentious topic of private property, and how degrowth and CST envision the institution in light of justice issues.

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1. Preface

In the spring semester of my final year of undergraduate studies at James Madison University, I took a political geography class which, appropriate for the discipline, utilized a critical lens when engaging with contemporary and past issues of governance and mechanisms of power. It quickly became one of my favorite undergraduate classes because of this critical lens. It facilitated a depth of inquiry I had not explored personally, and fostered both frustration and a drive I had yet not felt to address ills that were becoming increasingly apparent to me. Though I wish I had taken that class earlier in my undergraduate studies, it was perhaps the class I needed to take just before graduation.

Shortly after receiving my diploma I moved to San José, California, to live and work with a community of seven people, each working in a school or nonprofit in the city. I, along with one of my housemates, worked at a high school that sought to provide college-preparatory education to communities for which access to such education was financially out of reach. Others worked at a legal advocacy organization, spaces providing resources for people experiencing houselessness, and a middle school serving low-income youth. As a community, we navigated and explored the issues confronted everyday and the complexities perpetuating seemingly intolerable circumstances. The critical lens I used in the classroom just months before, became an important tool in examining these complexities. Importantly, it also helped me explore my own positionality and complicitness, whether knowingly or unknowingly, in patterns of marginalization, and what I could do both presently and in the future to contribute to change. For the next few years I remained in spaces of education and nonprofits addressing important societal challenges impacting communities in the cities of San José and Santa Ana in California, and in Virginia.

Like many, the COVID-19 Pandemic became catalytic and ultimately changed the trajectory of my educational and professional pursuits. I was able to reflect deeply on the growing list of questions that formed as I worked in these educational and nonprofit spaces. And I reflected on the issues I became most concerned about and those I wanted to engage with in a deeper way. As a result I decided to attend the University of San Francisco to more intentionally study the foundational causes of patterns of injustice and explore what development looks like now and what it can look like. Personally, one of the key takeaways I gained from the program is that social and environmental issues are inextricable, and often manifest in profound and devastating ways. This became central to my own personal research: in what ways do local and global systems impact the environment? And in what ways does the (changing) environment impact local and global systems? How has development at both local and global scales contributed to environmental and social injustices? And what does, and can, sustainable development look like when these concerns are centered? It was clear to me, after the few years of professional experience, and a year of graduate education, that systemic change of some sort is needed.

I have been particularly interested in issues of development throughout my graduate school experience, researching and writing on development efforts in Alaska, South America, and broader global trends. Through my research it appeared to me that the development governments often advocate for and sustain is not always welcome by local populations, and, in many ways, is destructive for local populations. I wanted to understand the ways in which development efforts were altering life in these locations, and what implications development had on the economic, spiritual, and physical life of communities. What was revealed through the research was a counternarrative to the dominant development narrative presented by governments that well-being is tied to technological progress and economic growth, or modernization. I thus began a deep dive

into literature engaging with development efforts, and I sought out literature that critiqued the dominant development narrative and offered insight into what different approaches look like, and can look like.

Early on in my program I was introduced to degrowth, a community of activists and scholars, which challenges dominant development narratives and envisions alternative approaches. I found their criticisms compelling and their visions of development quite appealing, and I ultimately decided to center degrowth in my thesis research. Preparing for the project, I read through a significant amount of degrowth literature searching for potential gaps that could be filled, at least in part, through my master's thesis. There have been important articles exploring degrowth ideas and ecospirituality (see Hall 2017, Lester 2020). The journal entry titled *Pope Francis and Degrowth: A Possible Dialogue for a Post-Capitalist Alternative*, by Robert Puggioni, offers a particularly insightful exploration in the thematic overlaps of degrowth and Pope Francis's landmark encyclical *Laudato Si'*, an encyclical that forwards key concepts found in the social teaching of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC). Closing the article, Puggioni states that, "Surely, there is the need to study more in depth the social doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church, as well as other religious social doctrines, from the perspective of Degrowth doctrines" (32). After reading this, I decided to solidify my research project around degrowth and Catholic social thought, in hopes of partially filling the gaps Puggioni mentions. To my knowledge, there has been no effort to engage intentionally with the broad body of Catholic social thought to explore thematic overlaps and shared visions of societal transformations.

This thesis is an attempt to not only partially fill a gap in the degrowth literature, but to also encourage greater dialogue between degrowth and spiritual circles. Furthermore, it is an attempt to give greater space in development discourse to alternative understandings of well-being that

consider social and environmental issues. I hope that, with this broader exploration of the affinities of Catholic social thought and degrowth, others might be encouraged to engage more deeply and intentionally with issues of development, so that the multifaceted and interconnected social and environmental crises we face as a global community are addressed with greater care and with more well-rounded approaches.

2. Introduction

Ecological economists have argued that the present capitalist socio-economic system and its trajectory is ultimately unsustainable, and that, should trends continue, important thresholds would be surpassed, further disbalancing environmental processes that sustain life as we know it. Indeed, the issue of climate change itself has been an explicit global concern for 40 years, with many conferences and international treaties attempting to spark meaningful change to safeguard the well-being of global citizens and the environment (Boehmer-Christiansen 1994). Presently, it is all the clearer that climate change is impacting much of the globe in different ways with varying severity. The climate crisis-derived negative impacts are compounded by issues of social justice that have systemic roots. Some transition is needed, and fast. And within a globalized capitalist socio-economic system that encompasses nearly everyone on the planet, envisaged transitions must take into account justice at not only the local and national level, but at the global level.

The failings of the current capitalist paradigm have prompted many among different disciplines to forward visions of development and accompanying principles in hopes of ushering in a more sustainable existence. An intrinsic growth quality drives environmental degradation, wealth concentration, and perpetuates colonial relations between the global North and global South. Degrowth, a relatively young social movement, and modern Catholic Social Teaching (CST), a body of ethical literature formed over the past 220 years, along with the broader field of Catholic social thought, offer particular insights into what socio-economic developments must occur to curb human-caused environmental degradation while promoting justice. From these two bodies of literature come diagnoses of causes of environmental and social injustice that have roots in prevalent patterns of contemporary capitalism. They also provide extensive conceptualization and

theorization regarding sustainable and just transitions to alter these patterns. By more intentionally bringing these two schools of thought together in conversation, important movements toward a globally just and sustainable socio-economic system can be achieved.

It is important to state the position degrowth and Catholic social thought take when addressing issues of socio-economic nature. Neither claim to offer a specific alternative system to the current dominant paradigm. It is, rather, a focus on what ought to be fundamental principles nurtured, held, and respected by a socio-economic system. Kallis (2017) states that “Advocates of degrowth refrain from offering any one blueprint to replace today’s growth centric ‘free’ market. Their objective is to open up conceptual space for imagining and enacting diverse alternative futures” (21). In *The Case for Degrowth,* Kallis et al (2020) put it another way saying that “Degrowth does not claim one unitary theory or plan of action. A remarkably diverse network of thinkers and actors experiment with different initiatives, and engage in healthy debates about what degrowth is, and what forms it can or should take in different contexts” (19).

The Roman Catholic Church does not align itself unequivocally to any specific economic system, which would be against its goal to remain critical and impartial in questions of justice. Pope Paul VI (1965) states in *Gaudium et Spes* that “in virtue of her [the RCC’s] mission and nature she is bound to no particular form of human culture, nor to any political, economic or social system” (Section 42). No social teaching will endorse unquestioningly an economic system, nor will it offer a specific system of its own devising. In this regard, the position of the RCC is similar to that of degrowth. Pope John Paul II (1988) states, “The Church does not have direct competence for proposing technical solutions of an economic-political nature. However, she calls for a constant revision of all systems according to the criterion of the dignity of the human person” (section 41). If

systems are not promoting or respecting the dignity of the human person the Church, according to Pope John Paul II, must interject and encourage change.

Scholars have noted that religious traditions can offer insightful and meaningful contributions to conversations about sustainable socio-economic transitions (Christie et al 2019, Puggioni 2017, Kallis et al 2018). Christie et al (2019) state that there has been "increasing recognition within religious communities, especially Christian ones, of the scale of the planetary challenges of unsustainable development and the need for major transitions" (1344) and that CST may be particularly helpful in ushering in transitions. The social teaching of the Roman Catholic Church indeed shares many goals with theories of development, and this may further substantiate certain theories, at the very least in religious and spiritual circles. Furthermore, the RCC is the largest Christian denomination in the world, and it influences the hearts and minds of many beyond its faithful. With its rich history of social analysis and breadth of influence, it can play an even more significant role in sustainable transitions by intentionally engaging with those trying to enact change outside of religious circles.

Degrowth has an opportunity to engage spiritual traditions in a way that attracts support from those circles, expanding its influence. With a pope that is so outspoken against the ills of the current system and sympathetic to many of degrowth's aims (Kallis 2017, Puggioni 2017), degrowth can take advantage by engaging with not only the pope, but the larger scope of Catholic social thought. Additionally, degrowth may offer an avenue through which the Roman Catholic Church's teachings on socio-economics can manifest in a significant way.

The focus and intent of the thesis is to explore the affinities and tensions between Degrowth and important contributions to the social thought of the RCC, to invigorate conversation within both spiritual and academic circles regarding sustainable socio-economic transitions. The

point of the thesis is not to examine the structural logic of degrowth or Catholic social thought, but to explore the conclusions and principles they develop to highlight thematic overlaps. By reviewing both bodies of literature using qualitative content analysis, I will outline central concepts and offer commentary on how concepts found in both bodies of literature overlap and complement their perspectives and mutual goal of development that is holistic, sustainable, and globally just. I will use qualitative content analysis methods to review principles relating to environmental and economic justice in both bodies of literature, with a specific focus on revealing similar principles. This work will highlight some conflicting principles between Degrowth and CST as well, though not the primary focus.

Regarding degrowth, the texts I engage with are from those more prominent figures in the movement and those they cite as being credible. Of course, this is not to discredit other important contributions that have been made by the community of scholars and activists, it is to keep a coherent framework and a common point of reference. There are theoretical areas of degrowth that need to be explored more, and there are areas of much contention within the community itself. My analysis of Catholic social thought will engage with important documents coming from the Vatican, such as encyclicals and apostolic exhortations, and the important contributions liberation theology (LT) has made to understanding issues of faith and justice. Furthermore, I will explore the work of Ivan Illich, who acts as a common interlocutor between both degrowth and Catholic social thought.

In this paper I use degrowth to encompass scholars and activists and that which is espoused by them in their body of literature. I will use the abbreviation RCC to refer to the Roman Catholic Church. Catholic social teaching, or CST, will be used to categorize the authoritative texts of the RCC that outline official social doctrine. Catholic social thought, on the other hand, is a broader term I use to encompass not just doctrine but also those outside of clergy, bishops, and popes, who

have contributed significantly to the advancement of social thinking in Roman Catholic circles. Understanding that there are key differences in the terms sustainability and sustainable development when used in conversations surrounding socio-economic transitions, I will use them interchangeably to refer to the concern for moving society towards transitions, and transformations, that respect biophysical limits while promoting greater well-being.

3. Degrowth, Catholic social thought, and global justice

3.1 Degrowth, a brief history and context

Degrowth is a term often used by scholars and activists to both critique the ideology of economic growth (Kallis et al 2018) and, more recently, to offer visions of a sustainable future (Bliss 2018, Parrique 2019). With growing interest, degrowth has invited many in activist and academic circles to contribute to a burgeoning body of literature that is truly transdisciplinary. While this contributes to rich inquiry and explorations, the result is an array of contributions from a wide range of perspectives and disciplines that are not seamless in their conceptual or theoretical makeup (Parrique 2019). A lack of symmetry makes it more difficult to outline foundational tenets of degrowth for comparison with tenets of Catholic social thought on socio-economic development. Nevertheless, there are certainly theoretical underpinnings that can be located.

In this section I explore the origins of degrowth to situate it within the larger fields of sustainable development and ecological economics, and to provide a brief history of how it gained popularity in Europe and how it is progressing in the United States. The section will end with an

examination of what we can locate as the pillars of degrowth as a conceptual framework for sustainable post-growth transitions.

Degrowth has roots in the field of ecological economics with thinkers like Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen and Herman Daly paving the way for its future conceptual developments (Kallis et al 2018, Bliss 2018). Georgescu-Roegen was one of the pioneers of the field of ecological economics, and brought the natural sciences into conversation with economics. His most catalytic hypothesis was that economic activity, if maintaining a pattern of growth, would inevitably be bound by the laws of thermodynamics. By using thermodynamics as a framework he, along with the ecological economists to follow, was able to illustrate how the economy interacts with the environment in terms of its matter and energy use (Mayumi 2017). Georgescu-Roegen revealed that the economic system cannot consume increasing amounts of energy past a certain threshold given the first and second laws of thermodynamics. The first law states that energy cannot be created nor destroyed, and the second law states that as energy is consumed and transformed, it disperses, or becomes less and less harnessable. In other words, sources of energy are not infinite and economic growth increases entropy (Parrique 2019). The concept, neglected within neoclassical economic thought which saw the earth system as a closed one in which energy does not dissipate, challenges the predominant notion that economic growth can continue infinitely unabated (Mayumi 2017).

In a conference in 1972, André Gorz reflected on the findings of Georgescu-Roegen and is credited with first using the term degrowth (Akbulut 2021) when he asked “Is the earth’s balance, for which no-growth [non-croissance] – or even degrowth [décroissance] – of material production is a necessary condition, compatible with the survival of the capitalist system?”[1]. The term degrowth was used here to describe an inevitable, either voluntary or involuntary, retraction of

[1] As quoted by Parrique (2019)

economic activity due to biophysical limits or thresholds. The term only concerned the economic function. Timmothée Parrique, whose doctoral dissertation is on the political economy of degrowth, states that “At the time, the concept [was] at an embryonic stage… only understood as the symmetrical inverse of economic growth or a synonym with decline. With hindsight, one would say it was not degrowth but only an objection to growth” (179). This objection to growth was an objection to an economic trend and goal.

In the early aughts, Parrique (2019) notes that degrowth came to be known not just as an objection to growth, but as a critique of an ideology birthing growth; a notable shift from how the term was understood in its embryonic stage. This is largely due to the works of Serge Latouche who had contributed significantly to the conceptualization of degrowth during this period. Bengi Akbulut (2021) drawing on the works of Latouche, states that degrowth certainly rejects economic growth and argues for “material downscaling” of the economy, and that “it is more fundamentally a call to break with economic growth as a societal goal and to oppose the automatic association of growth with better outcomes—that is, the ideology of growth” (98). The conceptual development of degrowth as a theory now came to address not just concerns regarding economic thresholds, but a set of beliefs. With this step, degrowth became a point of interest for more than the ecological economics community.

Degrowth became more than a topic discussed by economists and academics in the early 2000’s, and manifested into a social movement in France critiquing a development that promotes consumerism, excessive advertising, and de-localizing food production (Kallis et al 2018, Demaria et al 2013). In the years that would follow, other countries in Europe began using degrowth as a rallying slogan for a different kind of development. It was not until the 2010’s that the U.S. began to see some movement around the term when heterodox political economists used it to critique the

dominant paradigm's intrinsic characteristics and dominant theories of development (Bliss 2018). Even with the term permeating academic circles in the country, "degrowth has not entered the American vernacular" (Bliss 2018, 5). Today, there are research centers dedicated to the study of post-growth socio-economic futures, college programs predominantly in Europe, and international conferences (Parrique 2019).

3.2 Conceptual underpinnings of degrowth

With its breadth of influence expanding, degrowth has offered an intellectual space for studying, theorizing, and practicing post-growth development concepts (Kallis et al 2018). As stated earlier, scholars and activists from different disciplines are encouraged to engage and contribute to its conceptual development. Amidst the array of contributions are foundational tenets, or underpinnings. Demaria et al (2013), locate "streams of thought which cross each other without being in competition" (196). These include ecology, critiques of development and praise for anti-utilitarianism, meaning of life and well-being, bioeconomics, democracy, and justice. These streams of thought are what I call the underpinnings of degrowth, providing the conceptual foundation for a large body of literature that, again, has some internal tension and disagreements.

The *ecological* stream of degrowth recognizes ecosystems as "having value in themselves" (Demaria et al 2013, 196). The environment has intrinsic value and is not something to be exploited to the point of destruction for the sake of industrial expansion or technological progress as it is understood in prominent growth oriented, free market development efforts. Degrowth is an explicit call to relieve stressors placed on ecological systems that, activists and scholars argue, can only be done through a decrease in material throughput (Hickel and Kallis 2020), and it is a call to

reorient our socio-economic system to promote the well-being of both human and natural systems. Indeed, the health of the former is intrinsically tied to the health of the latter.

The stream of *critiques of development and praise for anti-utilitarianism* flows from the field of anthropology. Demaria et al (2013) state that degrowth “criticises the notion of ‘development’ itself” (197), and it calls for alternate pathways to sustainable existence that challenge the dominant paradigm (Escobar 2015). It is also a call to disentangle social organization from the social construct of *homo economicus* where humans are seen as predominantly self-interested individuals driving economic activity (Kallis et al 2020). In so doing, society will be free to envision alternative systems that promote conviviality, reciprocity, and generosity.

Meaning of life and well-being, according to Demaria et al (2013), is an important thought stream in degrowth that emphasizes disassociating progress in happiness with progress in production and consumption (GDP). Within this stream is a critique of the current paradigm by highlighting what some call the “threshold hypothesis” wherein it is postulated that happiness, at a certain point, no longer increases as economic growth increases. The stream draws on evidence that at a particular threshold economic growth causes happiness to decrease. Max-Neef’s (1995) observation concludes as much: “for every society there seems to be a period in which economic growth (as conventionally measured) brings about an improvement in the quality of life, but only up to a point—the threshold point—beyond which, if there is more economic growth, quality of life may begin to deteriorate” (117). This is a challenge to the dominant belief that well-being increases concomitantly with GDP, now the modern marker for progress (Latouche 2020). Embedded here is a critique of the ideological foundations that posit happiness and well-being as being tied to increases in what is produced and consumed. It is a critique of productivism and consumerism

(Demaria et al 2013) as well as vision for how to maintain and promote well-being with an "equitable downscaling of throughput" (Kallis et al 2018, 297).

As stated earlier, the biophysical limits of economic activity was the foundational concern that gave rise to the field of ecological economics and the incipient degrowth movement in the late 1900s (Parrique 2019). It remains a prominent one, and it is assumed in the scholarship that the current socio-economic paradigm cannot be sustained within biophysical limits. Biophysical limits and economic activity, *bioeconomics* as Demaria et al (2013) word it, is a question of the sustainable use and waste (sinks) of available resources. The bioeconomics stream questions a dominant belief in economic policy that growth can be decoupled from environmental degradation by employing and enhancing green technology, otherwise known as green growth (Hickel and Kallis 2020).

Democracy is a stream of particular contention within degrowth scholarship, not in the sense that it is questioned as an ideal, but how it can be maintained and enhanced in a degrowth society. Demaria et al (2013) highlight this contention as being "between those who defend present democratic institutions considering the risks of losing what we have achieved (a more reformist strand), and those who demand completely new institutions based on direct and participatory democracy (more alternative, or post-capitalist vision)" (199). Nevertheless, democracy is the dominant political organization discussed and advocated for within degrowth scholarship. What appears to be the concern is how to expand support for degrowth initiatives so that changes may occur democratically (D'Alisa and Kallis 2020).

The last stream of thought that Demaria et al (2013) locate is *justice*. Within the degrowth literature there is much discussion regarding how to make just sustainable transitions and transformations possible. This thesis does not explore the granular policy initiatives advocated for

by degrowth scholars and activists, but solely that which they hope to promote and achieve. The key types of justice prevalent in the literature are distributive, environmental, social, and their overlapping contributions to an understanding of global justice. These justice themes not only provide the framework for degrowth theory, but also ground their criticisms, namely the issue of growth and its ties to environmental degradation, neocolonialism, and wealth concentration.

It may be useful to offer a definition of degrowth in terms of justice, acknowledging that no one definition can capture the scope and intricacies of all degrowth's critiques, prescriptions, and visions.[2] Demaria and Latouche (2019) state that "the degrowth project challenges the hegemony of economic growth and calls for a democratically led redistributive downscaling of production and consumption in industrialized countries as a means to achieve environmental sustainability, social justice, and well-being" (148). In this definition we see how streams of thought have come to influence what degrowth is. There is an explicit call to break away from what is argued to be a destructive, unsustainable system that has come to influence the world over, and work toward a new socio-economic paradigm that respects ecological systems and limits, and promotes democracy, justice, and well-being. Furthermore, it is helpful to highlight that there are essentially three dimensions of degrowth as reflected in Demaria and Latouche's definition. The term is used to encourage a decline in material throughput, an emancipation from the ideology of growth, and a destination in which degrowth values and visions are fostered as the first and second dimensions of degrowth are pursued (Parrique 2019).

Scholars and activists in the degrowth community find themselves in a larger discourse that explores transition possibilities (Escobar 2015). Escobar (2015) states that "degrowth and postdevelopment can be seen as belonging to the larger class of 'transition discourses'… that call for a significant paradigmatic or civilizational transformation" (451). He goes on to highlight that

[2] Definitions are also unable to capture the ongoing dialogue occuring within the degrowth movement.

degrowth finds itself and its sources of thought primarily in the transition discourses of the global North, leading to important differences when compared to transition discourses in the global South. However, while influence on degrowth by global North discourses may certainly be more prominent given where concentrations of think tanks and university programs are geographically, the tensions that arise within the transition discourse of the global North is particularly revelatory, as it shows what makes degrowth different, contentious, and potentially catalytic, especially in the global North.

Degrowth's general disassociation with the ideological components of the growth paradigm, and position on technology, place it in direct contention with dominant narratives of sustainable development and other schools of thought within the larger transitions discourse. Ecomodernism is a particularly influential contributor to transitions discourse in the global North that sustain certain tenets of mainstream sustainable development discourse that degrowth rejects. Ecomodernism, or post-environmentalists, argues that decoupling is indeed possible through shifts in energy production toward clean energy. Asafu-Adjaye et al (2015) state that ecomodernists support the expansion of nuclear energy, along with agriculture intensification and urbanization, in order to "make more room" for nature. By doing so, humans and their socio-economic system will be "decoupled" from the environment. In other words, by promoting technological advancement and intensifying urbanization, the current socio-economic system will no longer contribute to environmental degradation. In the words of ecomodernists, "Intensifying many human activities — particularly farming, energy extraction, forestry, and settlement — so that they use less land and interfere less with the natural world is the key to decoupling human development from environmental impacts" (Asafu-Adjaye et al 2015).

There are many reasons why degrowthers are wary of the ecomodernist approach, and it is important to highlight some of the main reasons. Activists and scholars believe that decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation at the rate necessary to avoid catastrophic environmental impact is unlikely, if not impossible (Hickel and Kallis 2020). Ecomodernism, if their theories are to be employed, would intentionally sustain a socio-economic development with an inherent growth quality, that which degrowthers locate as the driving force of the various contemporary crises (Kallis and Bliss 2019). Secondly, even if ecomodernists did not explicitly endorse sustaining development via "modernization," degrwothers would still take issue with their claim that technological advance can decouple human activity from environmental degradation. One reason being, that increased technological advancement leads to a greater efficiency in producing goods, which inevitably leads to an increase in consumption, a phenomenon known as Jevons' Paradox (Hickel and Kallis 2020).

3.3 Catholic social teaching goes global

Like degrowth, Catholic social teaching is concerned with international dynamics of development. But while degrowth had at its inception a global concern and perspective, it would take about a thousand years in the history of CST to take on that trait. Pope Francis states in a talk[3] that "the economy itself cannot be limited to production and distribution. It must also consider its impacts on the environment and the dignity of all people" (TED 2020). His words explicitly reflect not only the global nature CST has come to embody, but also the now central concern of environmental justice, and the long held core principle of the common good.

[3] Pope Francis gave a TED talk titled, *His Holiness Pope Francis | Our moral imperative to act on climate change,* wherein he locates the economy as a central driver of both climate change and social inequalities https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KHuwaKrHuR0

Catholic social teaching, over the course of nearly two millennia, has developed key conceptual underpinnings guiding its socio-economic criticisms and teachings. In its development CST was influenced by prominent theories and shifts in socio-economic thought (Njoku 2007), and it has also influenced the perspectives of those concerned with socio-economic ethics. Prominent figures in the early years of the RCC were concerned with issues of property, through an eschatological lens (Chroust and Affeldt 1950), and religious orders in the fourteenth century gave moral insight into issues of the socio-economic realities of their day (Carrier 1990). The term social justice, which has become a unifying term for all concerned with promoting justice in society, was in fact coined by a Catholic priest whitnessing impacts socio-economic developments had on certain sectors of society (Burke 2010). Luigi Taparelli d'Azeglio according to Burke (2010) was the first to use the term social justice. Burke (2010) states that "Justice, he [Taparelli] argues, is the habitual inclination to level or balance accounts. Distributive justice equalizes proportions in the common good" (101). Justice concerns giving that which is due to the other, and Taparelli's conceptualization of justice has a more narrow view of material justice. While his definition of justice was markedly different from the modern one that incorporates more than material notions of justice, it signifies an important engagement of thinkers with socio-economic issues.

Today the social teaching of the Roman Catholic Church maintains its position as a critical moral authority attempting to guide socio-economic development in a globally just manner (Golemboski 2015). And while the RCC is actively engaged with socio-economic trends and offers criticisms and guidance, it is important to note that the tradition's social teaching does not offer specific economic policies but a framework of principles. There are various periods that can be outlined that help delineate certain conceptual developments and perspective shifts in CST. In

both the Old and New Testaments there are books touching on socio-economic issues, shedding light on the thinking of leaders before and during the formation of the Bible. The period immediately following the Old and New Testaments is known as the Patristics, followed by modern teaching. Scholarly consensus attributes the start of modern CST to the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (DeBerri et al 2003), written by Pope Leo XIII in response to the important socio-economic developments in the 1800s, namely, issues of labor, capital, and socialism. The attribution is due to the encyclical's attentiveness to socio-economic trends and its overall influence (Thompson 2010) and the self-realization of CST's position as a moral authority in questions of a social nature. While the earlier period of CST certainly has relevant points and conceptualizations to contribute to this conversation, most of what is drawn upon in this thesis comes from the modern era as it more naturally deals with issues of modern socio-economic dynamics.

During the patristic period, the social teaching of the RCC was primarily concerned about the Christian community residing in the Greco-Roman world. Prominent figures did not actively address non-Christians when seeking to influence the socio-economic patterns of the day. A shift occurred though, when issues of a socio-economic nature started to transcend more traditional spheres of CST. Golemboski (2015) notes this shift by comparing who popes are addressing in their encyclicals. For example, Pope Leo XIII (1891) in his encyclical *Rerum Novarum* addresses only the "highest tier of religious authorities" (section 1), and not the Catholic laity or lower-tier clergy. Gradually, the popes began directing their writings to a broader audience, the culmination of which being John XXIII (1961) whose address in *Pacem in Terris* reads "To Our Venerable Brethren the Patriarchs, Primates, Archbishops, Bishops, and all other Local Ordinaries who are at Peace and in Communion with the Apostolic See, and to the Clergy and Faithful of the entire Catholic World, *and to all Men of Good Will*" [italics my own] (section 1). Golemboski (2015),

noting the shift, states that "Since 1961… most (though not all) papal encyclicals have been addressed to a readership inclusive of the entire globe" (95). The social teaching has now come to include not just the clergy or Catholics, but all of the earth's inhabitants, or as Golemboski states "global society." Importantly, the papacy of Pope John XXIII marked a shift in the lens through which issues of development were seen. With his papacy, CST recognized explicitly that issues of socio-economic development were not confined to state boundaries, and that they have international dimensions (Bucciarelli et al 2011), whereas before issues of social concern were confined to the state (Golemboski 2015). The RCC's social teaching taking on a global nature is also reflected in the Second Vatican Council in 1962 which occurred under John XXIII. According to DeBerri et al (2003) it "was the first to reflect a truly world church" (7).

3.4 Conceptual underpinnings of CST and development

Having outlined the now global nature of CST, we can understand certain key concepts of the tradition and their relevance to issues of development through this lens. The first concept, the common good, does not have a solidified definition presented by the Roman Catholic Church. Instead it has been open to interpretation (Bucciarelli et al 2011). While this might be the case, there are fundamental aspects of the concept that we can outline. In Pope Paul VI's *Gaudium et Spes*, the common good is described as "the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment" (Section 26). Put another way, Christie et al (2016) state that the common good:

> is not a totalizing vision of one shared set of values for all of society… but rather, a set of public goods that are pre-conditional for individual and collective flourishing in community, which

> stress the sociality between individuals and groups by emphasizing the importance of rights, duties and responsibilities as set out in the 1965 Encyclical [Gaudium] et Spes (1348).

The common good, as outlined by the RCC, locates the goal of both individual and collective well-being, or "flourishing," and recognizes that collectively there must be a respect for, and building up of, those things upon which flourishment is dependent. According to Golemboski (2015), it is the "the primary orienting principle for social and political life" (94).

In order to explore and articulate that which is needed for a flourishing humanity, popes began to formulate a key principle in CST: integral human development. The term has its conceptual roots in the encyclicals *Mater et Magistra* and *Populorum Progressio* (Bucciarelli et al 2011), but was more solidly presented by Pope Benedict XVI in *Caritas in Veritate*. Benedict XVI innovatively puts "integral human development… at the centre of the 'Christian social message'" (Cornish 2009, 450). Integral human development challenges dominant development theory that strictly emphasizes the economic or material. The concept calls for a development of the whole person that respects economic, social, political, and spiritual facets (Cornish 2009). This, of course, is to be acknowledged at the individual and collective level. That is to say, the multifaceted nature of development proposed by the popes pertains to the individual and scales up to the global human community (Bucciarelli et al 2011). It is required to respect and pursue the common good.

Reflected in the idea of integral development is the concept of solidarity. As stated, the human person cannot develop individually without the concomitant development of collective humanity in its multifaceted nature. If this is to be respected, there must be an awareness of others, not only in one's immediate family, community, state, or even nation — a global awareness is necessitated. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* highlights this important aspect of solidarity. It states that:

> Socio-economic problems can be resolved only with the help of all the forms of solidarity: solidarity of the poor among themselves, between rich and poor, of workers among themselves, between employers and employees in a business, solidarity among nations and peoples. *International solidarity is a requirement of the moral order* [italics my own]; world peace depends in part upon this (CCC, para. 1941).

Solidarity, according to the *Catechism*, necessitates engagement with socio-economic issues at local and international levels. Christie et al (2018) summarize this key concept of CST as follows:

> [solidarity] concerns the inherent sociality of human beings and their need, as flawed and dependent creatures, to live in relations of mutual care and responsibility. Each person has a unique dignity and worth, but each is also constituted as a relational being, dependent on and capable of giving to others for the achievement of mutual flourishing (1348).

Solidarity is not just a feeling of connection or the ability to sympathize, or even empathize, with others around the globe. It is, more importantly, a call and responsibility to dedicate oneself to the good of humanity as a whole (Kammer 1991).

The encyclical *Laudato Si'*, written by Pope Francis, builds on previous encyclicals and their key concepts to address contemporary crises, namely inequality, the plight of the poor, and the interrelatedness of social issues to environmental degradation. While an ecological theme was introduced to CST by John XXIII (Bucciarelli et al 2011), Pope Francis more powerfully and intentionally than any pope before calls for a radical reflection of humanity's condition in relation to the earth — a foundational theme in his concept of integral ecology.

Pope Francis develops this concept in light of the root causes of our contemporary crises, which he locates as our economic and social structures that promote consumerism and a “throwaway” culture (Porras 2015). Francis calls for an “ecological conversion” to return us from a discordant relationship with nature to one that recognizes its inherent value. According to Puggioni (2017), “This is, indeed, the main message of the text [*Laudato Si'*] offered to the reader since its

beginning: human beings need to live within nature in harmony with it as a family in a common house and not to use natural resources as a mere object of consumption" (17,18). Central to Pope Francis's integral ecology is a concern for the poor. In his work, he recognizes the disproportionate burden placed on the poor due to income and wealth disparity and the uneven environmental impact in poorer regions perpetuated by the current paradigm's neocolonial tendencies. Francis (2015) states this intersectionality as follows: "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 as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor." *Laudato Si'* explicitly condemns unrestricted free market activity and technological progress that sustains a growth oriented paradigm (Porras 2015).

By reviewing the conceptual underpinnings of both degrowth and the Catholic social teaching, we can already see key overlapping elements. Firstly, the positionality of both are similar in that they are not offering a blueprint. Rather, both are spaces of reflection where visions of alternative pathways may be expanded. Degrowth and CST are concerned with socio-economic dynamics, and it is through a global lens that they analyze and offer commentary. Well-being is to be seen not at an individual level, local, or even national, but global, and it is to consider the whole of the person. This is clearly reflected in the concept of integral human development in CST, and it is reflected in degrowth as we will see more clearly below. Ecological concern and its relation to human well-being is what grounds the ecological economics field and degrowth, and it became a more pronounced central tenet in modern Catholic social teaching with Pope Francis. Both explicitly recognize the inherent value of the environment. The result from the conceptual developments and reflections of degrowthers and the social tradition of the RCC is a

markedly similar approach to development as both emphasizes global solidarity, environmental concern, and a more holistic sense of well-being. It is quite different from a development prioritizing production, consumption, economic growth, and technological progress.

3.5 Liberation theology, a brief history and context

Notions of development and the socio-economic processes implementing them, have changed over the years. Contexts and challenges change, and the social teaching of the RCC has had to adapt to current times in order to offer relevant critiques and guidance. As Golemboski (2015) words it, “this need not be taken to imply that Catholic social teaching is *merely* reactive, of course; only that changing realities in the world influence the shape of the Church’s teaching to that world” [italics in original] (91-92). Uzochukwu Jude Njoku, in a paper titled *The Influence of Changes in Socio-Economic Thinking on the Development of Post-Vatican II Catholic Social Teaching*, outlines well how dominant theories of development influence social teaching. Perhaps taking a stronger stance than Golemboski (2015), Njoku (2007) suggests that “Catholic social thought is a product of the insights, hopes, and arguments of its age” (235). Bucciarelli et al (2011) highlight how Jacques Maritain’s concept of integral humanism provided the foundations for the concept of integral human development, and Njoku (2007) outlines how modernization and dependency theory both influenced the arguments of important papal documents on social issues. For example, Paul VI’s encyclicals *Populorum progressio* and *Gaudium et spes* shared a “basic optimism for modernization theory.” Later in his papacy, however, dependency theory[4] and

[4] Dependency theory argues that some nations, known as core nations, become wealthy at the expense of peripheral nations that have their wealth and resources extracted by the former via global systems.

liberation theology gained prominence and greatly influenced the Vatican's approach to development and led to an important shift in the message of Paul VI's perspective regarding issues of world poverty and just development (Njoku 2007). What is clear is that there is a dialogue between CST and theories of development, certainly, and that has continued into more contemporary social commentary forwarded by popes and other leading figures, especially in the theology of liberation.

Liberation theology is a theological movement that has maintained an air of controversy since its incipient stages, and it has offered poignant critiques of socio-economic development trends while illuminating the intersections these issues have with faith. The theology of liberation developed in Latin America amidst a tumultuous political background and wide wealth disparities stemming from what appeared to be a failed attempt at capitalist socio-political organization (Smith 1991). With growing aggravation, RCC leaders envisaging alternative approaches were gaining traction. Alternative approaches were supported by the catalytic events of Vatican II and the Medellin Conference of 1968 that recognized the necessity of working to guide secular processes — the events galvanized conversations surrounding how to address blatant injustices in Latin America. The Medellin Conference was particularly inspiring as it addressed specifically perceived injustices derived from neoliberal forms of development. Those affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church began participating in not only conversations but protests as well, crying out for social ills to be addressed (Smith 1991). Liberation theology saw its birth when Gustavo Gutiérrez released a book titled *Theology of Liberation* that challenged more dominant discourses of development within the RCC. His publication led to the burgeoning field of liberation theology. Smith (1991) states that "These writings began to overturn traditional theology and to reformulate Christian

theology from the viewpoint of the poor" (21). Gustavo Gutiérrez and other leaders in LT, such as Leonardo Boff, continued to develop the alternative approach to faith, justice, and development.

It is worth noting briefly that the RCC did not initially take a liking to liberation theology. The principal reason being that leaders saw LT as being too aligned with Marxism (Puggioni 2016). Despite reservations, LT greatly influenced the social teaching of the RCC. In fact there are documents of official social teaching that outline what the RCC sees as acceptable components of liberation theology (see Ratzinger 1984). The influence the theological movement has had is probably most notable with the current pope. Concepts developed and perspectives in LT have certainly made their way into Francis' papal encyclicals. For example, Puggioni (2016) shows overlaps between LT and the encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium*, particularly in the shared emphases of "preferential option for the poor," and locating the institutionalized injustices affecting the poor and seeking to change them.

3.6 Conceptual underpinnings of liberation theology

Liberation theology is a theological school that explicitly centers the poor, those who are socially marginalized and oppressed, in issues of a socio-political nature and reflects deeply on the local and global trends that perpetuate global injustices, such as income inequality (Puggioni 2016). The results are pointed criticisms of capitalist economic patterns that conflict with LTs foundational concept of "preferential option for the poor" (Zweig 1991). Preferential option for the poor promotes a socio-political stance, among Christians and non-christians alike, that sides with the poor. It is a call to be in solidarity with those on the margins. By doing so, a perspective shift occurs that highlights those patterns that contribute to their marginalization.

Liberation theologians have reflected deeply on the intersectionality of social and environmental justice. Through their reflection they have come to associate both issues as inseparable and that there is a need to engage with both issues of justice as such. The term "cry of the earth, cry of the poor" is often employed by those in this school to illustrate this point. Leonardo Boff wrote a book titled *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* which examines the relationship between social and environmental injustices with a particular emphasis on his native Brazil. "Winks" to liberation theology, and specifically this contribution by Boff, can be found in Pope Francis's work. While not citing Boff directly, or others in LT, the current pope utilizes the same terminology in his encyclical *Laudato Si'* (Kerber 2018).

Those in the school focus on "institutionalized injustice." Puggioni (2016) states that "One foundational element of Christian liberation theology is the experience of institutionalized injustice oppressing the poor in Latin America and the consequent reflection on the fact that such a situation is not God's will." We can say, then, that LT locates the problem of injustice as being rooted in not the will of God, but in man-made socio-political systems. If held to be true, this leads thinkers to reflect on the implications of such revelations, and what it means to those concerned about justice, i.e. how to use this knowledge and act with a preferential option for the poor. Liberation theology moves from this reflection to conclude that concrete actions must be taken in order to change the status quo (Puggioni 2016). Michael Zweig (1991) states clearly that "Liberation theology interprets religious teachings as a call to social action toward the goal of social justice" (4). In other words, after acknowledging that injustices are occurring, steps must be made to promote justice. From their theological perspective, such a transition reflects a coming of the "Kingdom of God," a liberation from oppression (Puggioni 2016). This stance challenges other perspectives in

Catholicism that would devalue issues of the world to a point of inaction, overly emphasizing the "Kingdom of God" in an eschatological sense (Zweig 1991).

This active engagement with larger systemic issues is somewhat avant-garde for modern social thought in the RCC; avant-garde not in the sense that it critiques systemic capitalist patterns (Kirwan 2012), but challenges people from the angle of faith to act at a systemic level. Zweig (1991) states that "Liberation theology distinguishes itself within this tradition [Christian social tradition]... by stressing the need to go beyond acts of individual charity and good works to confront what we have seen Leonardo Boff describe as the 'structural evils that transcend individual ones'" (14-15). Justice, the coming of the "Kingdom of God," demands from the perspective of liberation theology an active engagement with that which is the source of injustice. Kirwan (2012) states that "Both Catholic Social Teaching and Liberation Theology articulate - one implicitly, the other more explicitly - a fundamental incompatibility between the priorities of a capitalist economy and the imperatives of the Christian gospel" (247-248)." Liberation theology is a call to action among Catholics to not acquiesce to exploitative, neocolonial qualities of capitalism, but to respond in ways that promote justice.

3.7 Ivan Illich, a common interlocutor

Ivan Illich provided an important space for leaders in LT at the Centro Intercultural de Documentación (CIDOC) which Illich founded (McIntyre 2018) and was particularly concerned about issues of development as well. A prominent social critic, activist, and Catholic priest, Ivan Illich led a life devoted to understanding the complexities of life and issues of justice and power.

He is best known for his work analyzing education, medicine, and transportation in the 1970s (Miller 2017).

Illich's investment in issues of development, and the positions he held, resulted in significant tension with the Roman Catholic Church (Hartch 2009). For example, in the late 1960s he released an article in *America,* a Jesuit publication, vehemently critiquing Catholic American involvement in development efforts in Latin America[5]. Illich (1967) saw the RCC's promotion and involvement in the "progress" of Latin America as "part of the many-faceted effort to keep Latin America within the ideologies of the West" (88). In 1969, Illich was removed from public priestly ministry, something he himself requested, but nevertheless practiced his vocation and remained devoted to his faith tradition. According to Miller (2017), his Catholicism remained "the key point of reference for everything he wrote" (82).

Through CIDOC, Ivan Illich was in close proximity to those developing the theology of liberation in Latin America. He not only provided a space for developing the theological and theoretical foundations of the movement, but was in fact friends[6] with leading figures (Miller 2017). While being friends with LT leaders, he did not entirely share their perspective on the intersection of faith and justice (Miller 2017). According to McIntyre (2018) "Illich did not identify with this movement. He wanted social and economic change but did not think that the church as an institution should do it." And while Illich did not share the same approach as those in the school of liberation theology, he nonetheless has contributed significantly to the social thought of those inside and outside religious circles, social theory as a discipline, and issues of development and technology. He is even considered by Parrique (2019) to be one of degrowth's "pioneers" (179).

[5] The article was initially rejected by *The National Catholic Reporter* because Illich refused to submit a "milder version" (Hartch 2009).
[6] According to Miller (2017) "he was involved in a circle of friends that eventually fostered liberation theology, including the likes of Gutiérrez and Sobrino" (85).

Though not an ecological economist, Illich and his ideas greatly influence the field and the movements flowing from it. He was very concerned with the economic system breaching important "thresholds" (Nagarajan 2020), and all of this was conceptualized with an overall goal of conviviality. According to Vijaya Nagarajan (2020), "He thought in the 1960s and 1970s, like Ghandi fifty years before, that if everyone in the world consumed at the rate of the western world, it would not be sustainable" (15). It is thus necessary to place limits on societal organizations that become destructive when certain thresholds are passed.

Like many ecological economists Illich was concerned with energy. He believed that energy use could only grow to a certain point, and that past this point it would become a danger to society (Nagarajan 2020). Illich states that "high quanta of energy degrade social relations just as inevitably as they destroy the physical milieu" (Illich 1974, 2). Limits, then, according to Illich, must be respected in order to maintain not only the physical health of the environment, but also societal health. Here we see an explicit engagement with issues of sustainability and justice. To illustrate this point, Illich used the snail and its shell as a metaphor for thresholds[7]. The snail constructs the shell to protect vital organs, but if the snail were to continue, willingly or unwillingly, generating more shell, at a certain point it would lose its net positive function, weighing down the snail and keeping it from procuring food. Illich's image of the snail as a representation of healthy limits, according to Parrique (2019), "has now become the international symbol of degrowth" (202).

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[7] In an entry titled *Le genre vernaculaire,* Illich (1983) describes the snail. This is the quote in its original French: "L'escargot construit la délicate architecture de sa coquille en ajoutant l'une après l'autre des spires toujours plus larges, puis il cesse brusquement et commence des enroulements" cette fois décroissants. C'est qu'une seule spire encore plus large donnerait à la coquille une dimension seize fois plus grande. Au lieu de contribuer au bien-être de l'animal, elle le surchargerait. Dès lors, tout augmentation de sa productivité servirait seulement à pallier les difficultés créées par cet agrandissement de la coquille au-delà des limites fixées par sa finalité"

Illich offers the concept of conviviality as an alternative to technologies (broadly speaking) that nurture destructive behaviors and relationships due to unhealthy growth that surpasses key thresholds. It appears often in their literature as something degrowthers purport should be respected and nurtured. In the book *Degrowth: a vocabulary for a new era,* D'Alisa et al (2014) devote an entire chapter to Illich's thought and locate it as a central concern for degrowth. In Illich's own words (1973) conviviality designates:

> the opposite of industrial productivity. I intend it to mean autonomous and creative intercourse among persons, and the intercourse of persons with their environment; and this in contrast with the conditioned response of persons to the demands made upon them by others, and by a man-made environment. I consider conviviality to be individual freedom realized in personal interdependence and, as such, an intrinsic ethical value (11).

As Deriu (2014) points out, the concept of conviviality is an important development for ecological thought as it pertains to both environmental and societal health. According to Deriu (2014) "From the perspective of degrowth, conviviality constitutes one of its core anthropological constructs; it represents faith in the possibility of space for relationships, recognition, pleasure and generally living well, and thereby, reduces the dependence on an industrial and consumerist system" (82).

The contributions of Illich to the degrowth movement have been foundational to the movement's expanding theorization. His reflections on energy, thresholds, democracy, and especially his conceptualization of conviviality, have bolstered the degrowth understanding of socio-economic development. And, being so involved with the RCC as a priest, we see an important engagement with issues of faith, justice, and development that led him to engage with the teaching of the RCC and liberation theologians.

4. An economy for the common good, distributive justice and local agency

At this point we have clearly seen overlapping conceptual underpinnings of degrowth and Catholic social thought. This is not necessarily a revelation. With Pope Francis bringing more attention to environmental issues and its intersections with socio-economic development, and especially with the release of Laudato Si',[8] those striving for environmental and social justice have referred often to the current pope and his forwarding of key concepts in CST. Degrowthers, especially their most prominent thinkers, have explicitly noted a potential ally in the leader of the largest branch of Christianity. In an opinion piece titled *La era del decrecimiento*[9] in the Spanish newspaper La Vanguardia,[10] Kallis reviews briefly the overlaps of degrowth with Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato Si'* noting his explicit critiques of growth and its failure to accomplish an integral development and protect the environment (Kallis and Vansintjan 2017). Furthermore, in their book *The Case for Degrowth*, Kallis et al (2020) note Pope Francis's call for transitions through the lens of integral ecology as being an important contribution to an overall shift away from consumerism and toward a healthier, simpler way of life that is contradictory to the growth paradigm and more in line with degrowth envisaged futures. The overlaps certainly do not stop at the more general conceptual underpinnings of degrowth and Catholic social thought. There are key areas in economic practice that the two unapologetically promote. The most notable perhaps being a call for distributive justice, which can inform a shift away from wealth accumulation and concentration characteristic of global capitalist socio-economic patterns.

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[8] For an in depth look at Laudato Si' and its potential to contribute to degrowth see Puggioni (2017) *Pope Francis and Degrowth: A possible dialogue for a post-capitalist alternative*

[9] The chosen English title is *A Pope for degrowth*

[10] The original text can be found here: https://www.lavanguardia.com/opinion/articulos/20150730/54434673799/decrecimiento-giorgos-kallis.html

One does not have to glance too long at both bodies of literature to see that they share a position on what should guide our collective management of wealth, income, and resources more broadly speaking. In *Caritas in Veritate*, Pope Benedict XVI (2009) states that "the social doctrine of the Church has unceasingly highlighted the importance of distributive justice and social justice for the market economy…" (section 35). The modern social teaching of the RCC has indeed held this position (Bucciarelli et al 2011), and seeds of this important principle are clear in the writings of notable patristic leaders. The *Catechism* states that "Solidarity is manifested in the first place by the distribution of goods" (CCC, para. 1940). In the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, much attention is given to distributive justice, highlighting the different goals the principle espouses and how such just management of resources may take place. Take, for example, this excerpt:

> The economic well-being of a country is not measured exclusively by the quantity of goods it produces but also by taking into account the manner in which they are produced and the level of equity in the distribution of income, which should allow everyone access to what is necessary for their personal development and perfection. An equitable distribution of income is to be sought on the basis of criteria not merely of commutative justice but also of social justice that is, considering, beyond the objective value of the work rendered, the human dignity of the subjects who perform it. Authentic economic well-being is pursued also by means of suitable social policies for the redistribution of income which, taking general conditions into account, look at merit as well as at the need of each citizen (section 303).

Understanding equitable distribution of income in light of the concept of integral development, we can conclude that the distribution of income needs to be sufficient enough not to simply keep one alive, but to provide for a more holistic sense of well-being.

In the writings by degrowth scholars and activists there is a similar call to manage wealth, income, and resources in a just manner. It is especially crucial, they argue, should a degrowth

transition occur. A planned reduction in production and consumption is needed, not a recession, with equitable distribution of goods to ensure the well-fare of society (Kallis and Vansintjan 2017). Hickel (2019) states that "By calling for a fairer distribution of existing resources and the expansion of public goods, degrowth demands not scarcity but rather abundance" (54). It is not producing more that will increase peoples' well-being, it is a fairer distribution of that which is already available to us within limits. He goes on to say that "By distributing existing income more fairly we can improve human welfare and accomplish social objectives without growth — and therefore without additional material and energy throughput" (57).

Given that degrowth and Catholic social thought are concerned with international development, it follows that their principles of distributive justice would consider the allocation of resources among nations. There is an active engagement by degrowth scholars and activists and those advancing Catholic social thought with the well documented disparity between countries in the global North and the global South when it comes to resource consumption within the growth paradigm. International dynamics of inequitable, and therefore unjust, resource distribution drew pointed and critical reactions from liberation theology and the Catholic hierarchy. Take, for example the comments, in the Synod of Bishops' (1971) *Justitia in mundo,* written under the papacy of Paul VI:

> The strong drive towards global unity, the unequal distribution which places decisions concerning three quarters of income, investment and trade in the hands of one third of the human race, namely the more highly developed part, the insufficiency of a merely economic progress, and the new recognition of the material limits of the biosphere — all this makes us aware of the fact that in today's world new modes of understanding human dignity are arising.

Here we see a recognition of the failure of an international system to adequately manage resources in a way that respects "moral dignity" espoused by the RCC to be inherent in every person. An

active engagement with the question of distributive justice at the international level was clearly a primary concern of the Vatican. However, as we see, it is not just an announcement of concern. *Justitia in mundo* locates not only flawed international socio-economic patterns, but also those nations driving it, namely "the more highly developed part," highlighting neocolonial patterns of a more monetarily affluent global North siphoning wealth and power from the global South. Furthermore, we see an explicit recognition of biophysical limits placed at the intersection of global distribution of resources. It is easy for those in Catholic circles to emphasize Pope Francis's words on the intersection of environmental and other justice issues because he is certainly the most recent, persistent, and fervent, but it is important to reiterate that these questions, concerns, and pronouncement of environmental and distributive justice were introduced long before his papacy, as we see with Paul VI (Bucciarelli et al 2011).

Leonardo Boff (2012) articulates opinions about the disproportionate wealth appropriation and the disproportionate burden placed on less economically wealthy nations:

> It no longer makes sense to pursue the central purpose of economic industrialist consumerist/ capitalist thought, that used to pose the question: how can we earn more?, and that presupposed dominating nature for economic benefit… Now that conditions have changed, the question is different: how can we produce and live in harmony with nature, with all living beings, with human beings and with the Transcendent?… The response to this question will determine if there is to be prosperity without growth for the developed countries, and pro[s]perity with growth for the poor and emerging countries.

The school of liberation theology in general echoes these same points, highlighting the systemic underpinnings of inequality at the local and global levels, and the need to promote justice even if it means systemic change (Martin 2003).

The galvanizing effect of Pope Francis when it comes to issues of environmental and global justice is unquestionable. His contributions to the advancement of the social teaching of the

RCC for contemporary crises has garnered support both within and outside Catholic circles. In a very similar statement to the one in *Justitia in Mundo,* Pope Francis goes beyond locating the problem of socio-economic patterns, to prescribing a potential solution. Francis (2015) states that:

> We know how unsustainable is the behaviour of those who constantly consume and destroy, while others are not yet able to live in a way worthy of their human dignity. That is why the time has come to accept decreased growth in some parts of the world, in order to provide resources for other places to experience healthy growth (section 193).

According to Francis, it is not just that there needs to be a more appropriate management of resources, but that concomitantly there has to be a decline in extraction and consumption. The proportion of responsibility to decrease material consumption is placed more on the wealthier nations of the world that consume more resources, because with this disproportionate allocation of resources comes a disproportionate contribution to environmental degradation.

Degrowthers acknowledge as well that high consuming nations shoulder more responsibility, speaking often of the desired downscaling of material throughput in the global North to allow space for the global South to develop in a healthy and environmentally just manner. Hickel (2021) states that “Degrowth scholars and activists explicitly recognize the reality of ecological debt and call for an end to the colonial patterns of appropriation that underpin Northern growth, in order to release the South from the grip of extractivism and a future of catastrophic climate breakdown” (1). D’Alisa et al (2014) write in the introduction of *Degrowth: a vocabulary for a new era* that:

> A frequent criticism to the degrowth proposal is that it is applicable only to the overdeveloped economies of the Global North. The poorer countries of the Global South still need to grow to satisfy basic needs. Indeed, degrowth in the North will liberate ecological space for growth in the South. Poverty in the South is the outcome of the exploitation of its natural and human resources at low cost by the North. Degrowth in the North will reduce the demand for, and the prices of,

> natural resources and industrial goods, making them more accessible to the developing South. However, degrowth should be pursued in the North, not in order to allow the South to follow the same path, but first and foremost in order to liberate conceptual space for countries there to find their own trajectories to what they define as the good life.

Hickel (2021) and Kallis et al (2014) reflect degrowth's intentional engagement with colonial issues and promote socio-economic changes that encourage decolonization. Degrowth's message, stressing the responsibility of the global North to shoulder the burden of decreasing material throughput so that the global South may have more adequate ecological space to develop, resonates with Boff's and Pope Francis's words. It also resonates with, at the very least in part, with the words of Paul VI in *Justitia in Mundo* which highlights the disproportionate contribution to global injustice by the global North.

Disincentivizing economic growth, and the wealth accumulation and resource extraction it requires, would not only provide more ecological space for the global South to develop, with healthy growth if needed, but it would also free the global South to envision their future development. In this regard, the principles of subsidiarity and localization are of particular import.

In the social teaching of the RCC, subsidiarity is invoked to support and uplift more local forms of organization that might have greater capacity and insight to support the common good of communities. According to the Catechism, "neither the state nor any larger society should substitute itself for the initiative and responsibility of individuals and intermediary bodies" (CCC, para. 1894). The concept is often employed to analyze and inform the "vertical dimension," that is, the relationships local communities and organizations have with higher tier governing bodies and institutions. van de Donk (2019) states that subsidiarity also has a "horizontal dimension" that calls for local communities, organizations, and governing bodies to engage and regulate sectors of society in order to promote the common good of the locale (48). This means that discerning the

practical manifestations of areas such as education, social services, and, importantly, economics, should be seen through the lens of subsidiarity. Respecting local agency in organizing and guiding economic practice may help to mend neoliberal capitalist socio-economic patterns of wealth concentration and neocolonialism. Local populations, if given the space, can envision what economic and social structures best sustain individual, collective, and environmental well-being in their contexts.

In the degrowth literature, there are constant calls to localize and empower communities to foster that which is needed for a healthy life without dependence on the globalized capitalist economic system (Khmara and Kronenburg 2019). Localizing production is an important facet of this, and degrowthers argue that material throughput will diminish if communities produce what they can locally, reducing the environmental stress caused by human socio-economic activity. Localization for many degrowthers, however, is not just about production. Latouche (2009) states that "This [localization] implies that all economic, political and cultural decisions that can be made at the local level must be made at that level" (39). Latouche's words strongly resemble the theme of subsidiarity in the RCC.

The disproportionate impact on the global South and unequal wealth exchange characteristic of capitalism are not realities rooted in human nature. In other words, these are not outcomes bound to happen as a result of human economic activity. It is possible to transform our economic relations within countries and between countries to foster a healthier existence. What is clear is that, from a degrowth and CST perspective, alternative values must be generated that supplant those forwarded by dominant capitalist economic function. The values of increasing productivity, consumption, technological progress for its own sake, wealth accumulation, and extraction, must be replaced by solidarity, conviviality, reciprocity, and subsidiarity/localization. If

these values become foundational and guide our socio-economic transformations, we may begin to address more honestly the neocolonial patterns of wealth concentration and more environmentally destructive patterns of capitalism.

5. The problem of private property

There is a clear position among leaders in degrowth to reorient property and resources toward more collective ownership and management. Kallis et al (2020) state that “local and national policies have worked wonders to commodify and privatize almost everything, and they can work equally well to promote cooperative production, provisioning, and living” (72). Degrowthers advocate for “new forms of commons,” economic relationships that “diminish the role of private property” (D’Alisa et al 2014, 12). At first glance, this might be seen as an unforgivable tension between degrowthers and the social thought of the Roman Catholic Church. Private property after all, has come to be known as a right that has been advocated for, and enshrined in, Catholic Social Teaching (Booth 2021). However, with a more intentional and in depth look at CST, we will find that it has developed concepts that can inform a different approach to engaging land and resources, in a way that protects environmental processes and secures human access to that which is necessary to secure well-being. Even within degrowth there are ongoing conversations on whether condemning private property outright is beneficial or essential to degrowth futures (Hartley 2018). There is a space for visioning and dialogue among scholars and activists coming from both degrowth and CST. While questions of private property may prove contentious, with the values and visions they share, particularly localizing agency, degrowth and CST can help transform the nature of property, and its relation to economic activity in general, to make key economic transformations possible.

From the degrowth perspective, in order to ensure the earth's resources are shared by all in an hospitable, equitable, and sustainable manner, and that all are able to access those services needed to flourish, there is a clear de-emphasizing of the role of privatization and an emphasizing of commoning (D'Alisa et al 2014). To be clear, the conversation in much of the literature about privatization is not about individually held private property or wealth, what I will call personal property, rather, it is about the privatization or commoning of resources, production, and services upon which the human community depends. Helfrich and Bollier (2014) state:

> Most commons have little to do with individual property rights, markets, or geo-political power. They are focused on solving concrete problems and meeting people's needs by providing effective self-governance of a shared resource or space. Hence, the commons are constantly and continuously being overwhelmed and destroyed by market forces, parliaments, and governments. This process is called enclosure (76).

It is a question of how to manage resources and spaces collectively to ensure the health of those resources and spaces, and the health of the communities that rely on them, not personal property per se.

Hickel (2019) briefly reviews the history of enclosure and traces its impact to the present day. He locates, drawing on Ellen Meiksins Wood, the primary stages of enclosure in England. It was there that the enclosure of land once held in common was usurped to make it more "productive" and began to expand. Where masses of people once utilized land held in common to obtain necessary goods, a transition to a system of leases founded on productivity, on excess production, occurred. During the enclosure movement, for one to maintain their lease on land, they had to compete against those they once related to convivially and produce more than what was necessary or once desired (Hickel 2019). The process marked for Ellen Meiksins Wood (2002) the "birth of capitalism." Today degrowthers see further enclosures of resources, and the extension of

enclosure patterns into the realm of services and wealth that were once public, or, they argue, should be public.

Self-governance of shared resources and services is contradictory to the *modus operandi* of the current socio-economic system that sees privatization as the best form of preserving and distributing resources — a conclusion made in the famous *Tragedy of the Commons* by Garrett Hardin. Hardin argued that should a group of people dependent on a resource held in common be left to their own devices, they would inevitably degrade the resource for individual gain, negatively impacting the ability of individuals in the larger group to benefit from the resource (Ostrom 2000). In order to prevent this, Hardin concludes, there must be an authority, either private or state, outlining and enforcing regulations (Akbulut 2017). The dominant narrative in economics maintains this, and has manifested in mass privatization of land, resources, and services. In a study, Elinor Ostrom (2000) demonstrated that collective management of local resources sans a state or private authority is possible and that “Empirical evidence tells us… that considerable variance in performance exists and many more local users self-organize and are successful than is consistent with the conventional theory” (29).

Degrowth scholars and activists align themselves with this school of thought, seeing the current system of privatization as failing to properly steward and distribute resources. Furthermore, they expand on what commons constitutes. In Ostrom’s (2000) work, the commons referred to tangible resources that a group depended on. While it highlights important components of the commons and how communities might best manage them, it neglects how socio-political dynamics interact with the land and resources held in common (Akbulut 2017). A broader conceptualization that incorporates the “social relationships” that interact with and constitute the commons provides a framework that best encapsulates dynamics at varying scales, and includes, for example, public

services like health care, and the de-privatization of knowledge (intellectual property) (Akbulut 2017). It is this understanding of the commons that degrowth tends to employ, not a more focused and narrow understanding about land and the resources it provides. In an effort to push back on "institutional and ideological environments adapted to support and defend private property and competition" (Kallis et al 2020), degrowth activists and scholars call for promoting "processes of shared stewardship about things that a community (a network or all of humankind) possesses and manages in common or *should* do so" [italics in original] (Helfrich and Bollier 2014, 75).

Such a strong rejection of private property by degrowth may seem to be an impassable roadblock to further dialogue between the social teaching of the Roman Catholic Church and degrowth. To explore this potential roadblock, and gain insight into potentially overcoming it, exploring how CST came to endorse private property is necessary. In the early stages of RCC private property was seen as unnecessary and it was vehemently condemned by leaders. Even in Christian scripture there is a call to abandon all personal property, both land and goods, and to bring it into a common pool for all to access. Recognizing this sentiment held by early RCC leaders, Chroust and Affeldt (1950) quote St. Justin Martyr, who says that "We who once loved riches and earthly possessions above everything else, now turn into common property even that which we already possess, and share it with the needy" (156). The context for this blatant rejection of private personal property was one where Christians believed the second coming of Jesus, and therefore the rapture, was imminent. If that were true, there was certainly no need to cling to land or any other form of property and wealth. However, early Christians shifted their views on personal property as it became clear that the second coming was not going to occur as soon as they initially thought. As acceptance of personal property increased, it came with the caveat that it be used to ensure the well-being of society, especially the poor. Noting this shift, Chroust and Affeldt

(1950) state that “The realistic viewpoint of the Fathers, at least by implication, contains a spirit of toleration of property and wealth, provided that they are used in a charitable manner” (160). While the patristics saw the distribution of income and wealth through a lens of charity and eschatological expectation, there are clear calls to spread resources to those in society that might not have procured enough themselves to live well. Take for example Clement of Alexandria, as quoted by Chroust and Affeldt (1950) “If you should use a tool adroitly, then this tool itself becomes adroit… And such a tool is also wealth. If you should know how to use it properly, then it becomes a means for you to attain true justice. But if you use it unjustly, wealth itself becomes the handmaid of injustice” (161). A review of Clement’s thoughts on wealth lead Chroust and Affeldt (1950) to conclude that “he pointed out that property and wealth, if properly used, that is, if properly and justly distributed, constitute an effective means of maintaining peace on earth and bringing about the true brotherhood of man in this world” (162).

The abhorrence and then cautious acceptance of early Roman Catholic leaders regarding private property was oriented toward the good of the community and the poor, which is the common factor that united the often heterogeneous teachings on the matter by prominent figures (Chroust and Affeldt 1950). Modern Catholic social thought maintains the concern for societal well-being and the poor with regard to property, wealth, and other issues related to socio-economics. This is particularly obvious in liberation theology which strongly emphasizes responding to the marginalized (Zweig 1991).

What is important to note is that there was an important shift in understanding of private property rights within CST that had to respond to contemporary socio-economic trends. The commentary included above from the patristic period does not reference more large scale private ownership of land, resources, and means of production, and addresses predominantly personal

property. Booth (2021) highlights that modern CST began to take into consideration ownership of that which produces goods. For example, Booth (2021) reviews the encyclical of *Mater et Magistra,* and shows the strong affirmation of individuals privately owning land and goods, as well as affirming the right of private ownership of "productive goods," or those things that produce goods — otherwise known as the means of production. While sentiments were certainly sympathetic to this scale of private property in modern CST up until the latter half of the 20th Century, the uncontested right and the extent of support of this right from state and religious circles was brought into greater scrutiny. Instead of advocating more forcefully for the institution of private property, Booth (2021) states that "after the early 1960s, the tenor of Catholic social teaching on property has moved in the opposite direction" (3).

Universal destination of goods is a key concept for Catholic social thought as it relates to socio-economics, and private property more specifically. In *Gaudium et Spes,* Pope Paul VI (1965) states that "Whatever the forms of property may be, as adapted to the legitimate institutions of peoples, according to diverse and changeable circumstances, attention must always be paid to this universal destination of earthly goods" (section 69). The universal destination of goods, as a concept, acts in a way that should balance out the natural right to property espoused by the RCC. The popes recognized that private property without oversight or an understanding of the ultimate purpose of earth's goods could have tragic consequences. In fact, this recognition that the goods of the earth are for all, and that none should be deprived of that which they need to live well, trumps the right to privately own property. In the *Catechism* this point is articulated in a powerful statement:

> The right to private property, acquired by work or received from others by inheritance or gift, does not do away with the original gift of the earth to the whole of mankind. the universal destination

> of goods remains primordial, even if the promotion of the common good requires respect for the right to private property and its exercise (637).

What is important to note then is that the implications of the proper orientation of universal destination of goods and private property leaves space for dialogue and change when it comes to the mechanisms utilized to ensure well-being and its ties to land and resources. Pope Francis (2020) in the recent encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, with the subtitle "on fraternity and social friendship", affirms this social teaching consistent in RCC and holds that the principle of the universal destination of goods scales to the global level, transcending local and national boundaries (section 123).

The conversation surrounding private property and the social teaching of the RCC tends to be quite general, failing to explicitly delineate between personal property and property held by corporations or states when it comes to the problems associated with private property. Pope John XXIII (1961) in *Mater et Magistra*, however, alludes to both personal property and private property held by businesses stating that "private ownership of property, including that of productive goods, is a natural right which the State cannot suppress. But it naturally entails a social obligation as well. It is a right which must be exercised not only for one's own personal benefit but also for the benefit of others." Affirmed here is what Pope John Paul II would later call the "social mortgage" of private property. John Paul II (1988) states in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*: "Private property, in fact, is under a 'social mortgage,' which means that it has an intrinsically social function, based upon and justified precisely by the principle of the universal destination of goods." The question that arises from these teachings, when applied to modern day scenarios, is whether or not private property is fulfilling its responsibility to society, that is, securing the well-being of society as a whole in a just manner.

CST is formulated so that it can adapt to and inform approaches to contemporary issues to offer best guidance. Booth (2021) states that “The social teaching of the Catholic Church is to a degree provisional. It is based on enduring principles which are interpreted according to the signs of the times” (3). This may be the reason Pope Francis has come to question the efficacy of private property, and the mechanisms promoting and uplifting the institution, in securing the well-being of the human community. Consistent with the previous popes, he has seen property through the lens of the universal destination of goods and its implications on social and environmental justice if taken seriously.

Key shifts in the social teaching of the RCC regarding private property may provide more fertile soil for a dialogue between degrowth and CST. There has been and continues to be an increasing emphasis on the social mortgage of the institution and, importantly, the fact that the institution is to be understood as subordinate to the concept of universal destination of goods. If the current socio-economic system and its emphasis on private property rights does not ensure a proper distribution of resources providing the opportunity for all to live healthy lives while preserving environmental systems, then the social teaching of the Roman Catholic Church calls for reviewing, and potentially changing it in light of key principles. While the RCC promulgates that private property is a right, there is clearly room for debate regarding the extent the institution should take on, and in what exact form. Given the somewhat ambiguous nature of both bodies of thought, degrowth and the social thought of the Roman Catholic Church may provide a more solidified and coherent approach based on the many principles they share to achieve their visions of more proper development that recognizes social and environmental forms of justice.

6. Conclusion

Degrowth and Catholic social thought are greatly concerned with issues of global socio-economic dynamics and promote a more just system that considers justice at a global scale. Both share tension with the dominant ideas of development that maintain that growth, and policies promoting it, are the surest way to maximize well-being. The next steps forward in response to this failure, as concluded by scholars and activists in the degrowth movement and more recent developments in the social teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, is to abandon growth as a measure of economic, societal, and individual health. From these two bodies come visions of development that mend destructive socio-economic patterns that contribute to environmental degradation, unjust wealth distribution, and their neocolonial qualities.

Degrowth and Catholic social thought explicitly recognize the intersection of environmental and social justice, incorporating it directly into their framework for development. Degrowthers argue that in order to promote a more holistic sense of well-being, individually and collectively, global society must abandon growth as an economic imperative due to its environmentally and socially destructive nature. What instead needs to be prioritized are those economic functions that facilitate community, agency, and more localized control of resources in the forms of commons. Similarly, Catholic social thought on development demands an integral human development that respects the many-faceted nature of human flourishing. The social thought of the RCC has developed key concepts like the common good, solidarity, and more recently integral ecology, to articulate that development needs to consider the environment and socio-economic dynamics at the global scale. A clear example of overlap in degrowth's and Catholic social thought's vision is that, in order to promote both environmental and social justice, a more equitable distribution of income and wealth are necessary with an emphasis on local agency.

Many shifts in the social teaching of the RCC that effectively led to overlaps with degrowth is due to the theology of liberation. Even though it has remained a somewhat controversial theological school in the RCC, there is clear evidence that LT acted as a catalyst for changing the character of CST. Take for example the shift in Pope Paul VI's stance from promoting modernization in "underdeveloped" countries to a more critical view of the wealthier countries' contribution to issues of wealth inequality between nations. Since LT's influence, the social teaching of the Roman Catholic Church has become more explicit in calling for global systemic change and locating the global North as particularly responsible for past and current ills, and for calling attention to disproportionate socio-political agency. Furthermore, the buzz phrase "cry of the earth and cry of the poor" coined by Boff, calls for a recognition of the inextricable nature of environmental and social injustice and its roots in socio-economic systems. Boff's reflection has directly influenced the current pope's understanding of contemporary crises as he uses words quite reminiscent of those found in the works of liberation theologians. What can be seen is a shift in CST, thanks at least in part to liberation theology, that layers over tenets of degrowth such as anti-colonial approaches that promote the diminishing grip of the global North on ecological space and exploitative policy favoring the global North.

Particularly encouraging for intentional conversation between degrowth scholars and activists and social thinkers in the RCC is the shared interlocutor of Ivan Illich. As shown above, there has already been an indirect engagement between the two bodies as a result of Illich's personal pursuit for a more just development. His concept of conviviality is foundational to Degrowth's framework, and, as Miller (2017) notes, his Catholic faith was the source of his work. Illich has thus inspired many in Catholic and degrowth circles to strive for an appropriate engagement with technology, showing individual and collective restraint when technology

becomes destructive. Now, as degrowth gains an ally in the RCC's highest office with Pope Francis, there is even greater potential for fruitful, intentional, engagement.

What the thesis hopes to show is that there are key understandings shared between degrowth and the social thought of the Roman Catholic Church about where the current capitalist socio-economic system is failing, and what transitions and transformation need to consider when they are pursued. This initial engagement with the social thought of the RCC from a degrowth perspective reveals that there are many overlaps, at least in their more general diagnoses and prescriptions. Further research into the more granular details of the policy and principles they present may reveal more significant overlaps, as well as more areas of potential contestation. What has been revealed through this thesis, however, is that, while there is certainly more room for engagement, there are considerable affinities between the two bodies of thought that provide fertile soil for further dialogue with regard to globally just socio-economic transformations.

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8. Appendix

8.1. Literature Review

Consistent with program norms, I have included a literature review. Normally, the literature review is placed at the beginning of International Studies theses, but given the nature of my thesis, in order to increase readability and flow, it is included below in the appendix. Furthermore, reading the literature review is not necessary to follow and understand the thesis. Nevertheless, in the literature review, readers will find supplemental information for what they have just read.

Degrowth

Degrowth is a social movement that challenges growth-centered economic policy as a way to ensure societal and environmental well-being (Demaria et al 2013), and encourages a reduction in anthropological environmental footprint “while improving the quality of life” (Kallis et al 2018, 292). Demaria et al (2013) trace the origins of the movement to the early 2000’s in France where *Décroissance* became a rallying cry against consumerism employed by activists. While the term degrowth had been used in the past, even in the late twentieth century, to articulate the need for decreasing consumption and production, “Décroissance [degrowth], as a social movement, only started in Lyon (France) in the wake of protests for car-free cities, meals in the streets, food cooperatives and anti-advertising” (Demaria et al 2013, 195). Gradually gaining clout, the movement now has significant influence in academic and political spheres. Degrowth challenges contemporary development schemes that center growth, like green growth, claiming that the

modern growth economy cannot function without further threatening ecological systems. Mastini et al (2021) show that the necessary rapid transitions needed to prevent further environmental crises requires less energy and material consumption, or material throughput. Both Demaria et al (2013) and Kallis et al (2018) stress that degrowth draws influence from a wide range of academic disciplines, highlighting the transdisciplinary nature of the movement.

Proponents of Degrowth challenge the perceived hegemonic nature of the “growth paradigm” which suggests that a growing economy is a healthy economy. Kallis et al (2018) explain it in this way: “The growth paradigm refers to the entrenched cognitive framework in which economic growth is constructed and conceived as necessary, good and imperative” (294). Kallis et al (2018) do not explicitly locate a solid starting point of growth paradigm, outlining a development of the paradigm that culminates in the 1950’s when growth becomes an explicit political imperative. Hickel (2019) on the other hand argues that this economic characteristic has been present since the beginning of capitalism. Scholars in the movement may disagree on the exact origin and development of the hegemonic growth paradigm, but degrowth literature clearly acknowledges that growth is indeed hegemonic. Demaria et al (2013) acknowledges this consensus stating that “generally degrowth challenges the hegemony of growth” (209).

Key arguments forwarded by degrowth scholars center the climate crisis and the inability of the current growth paradigm to ensure sustainable transitions due to material footprint and carbon emission levels (Kallis et al 2018). Growth, according to degrowth scholars and activists, is indeed the characteristic driving the climate crisis, and various environmental crises (like the current mass extinction event). Green growth, the proposed policy transition that claims growth can be sustainable and decoupled from environmental degradation, is incompatible with degrowth. Hickel (2019) begins his entry on degrowth stating “growth drives energy demand up and makes it

significantly more difficult – and likely infeasible – for nations to transition to clean energy quickly enough to prevent potentially catastrophic levels of global warming" (54). Hickel and Kallis (2020) test against empirical evidence the claim that green growth is possible and argue that a true decoupling of environmental degradation and economic growth is not possible. As Mastini et al (2021) show, "the degrowth argument holds… that the slower the rate of economic growth, the easier it is to achieve emissions reductions" (1), and therefore safeguard the environment.

In order to create an economic system that functions within planetary boundaries, degrowth advocates for a smaller material footprint and a more equitable allocation of the planet's resources (Hickel 2019, Kallis et al 2020). Kallis et al (2018) state that "degrowth is defined by ecological economists as an equitable downscaling of throughput, with a concomitant securing of well-being" (297.) In order to achieve this scholars propose certain key policy initiatives. Notable examples from Kallis et al (2018) are decreasing the work week, disincentivizing wealth accumulation, and more efficient resource use. Hickel (2019) reaffirms this last point by advocating for outlawing "planned obsolescence" in production, and incentivizing reusing and repairing products. While policy ideas are often forwarded by degrowth scholars, conversations regarding more granular details are lacking. For example, Buch-Hansen and Koch (2019) note that while "wealth caps" are promoted frequently within the movement, there's little discussion about how this policy takes shape and actually materializes.

This raises the question, how does degrowth influence the socio-economic system to actually promote desired change? Advocates for degrowth discuss changes at different levels of society to achieve the general goal of decreasing material throughput. Parrique (2019) outlines the different levels as the household, community, market, and the state, stating that "any action requires someone to change their behaviour and a level at which the change is expected to happen" (479).

D’Alisa and Kallis (2019) engage with this question by centering the state, and locating it as an outside entity that acts on society, and how transitions to a degrowth paradigm might occur. Though not explicitly claiming degrowth should act in a specific way when it comes to a transition, D’Alisa and Kallis (2019) state that “a Gramscian theory of the integral state is one possible avenue for thinking about social transformation and the state” (7). Parrique (2019) devotes much of his analysis to this issue and defines three general areas of policy degrowth seeks to influence: environmental, social, and conviviality/democracy, with policy focusing on top-down (state level) social interventions. Parrique (2019) further explicates by providing actualized examples of degrowth policy initiatives, like the policies of the Finnish Kohtuusliike. This is an important contribution to degrowth literature regarding transitions, and compliments D’Alisa and Killis’ (2019) purely theoretical analysis.

The decentral characteristic of degrowth, noted as transdisciplinary (Demaria 2013), enables the movement to draw upon many disciplines and affinities with other movements. Treu et al (2020) devote an entire book to the topic of shared characteristics with other movements, highlighting not only the prevalence of affinities with movements that are not explicitly under the degrowth umbrella, but invites these movements to further develop degrowth. Demaria et al (2013), recognizing that the degrowth movement birthed in the global North, explicitly calls for engagement with already influential movements in the global South that question the growth paradigm, like Buen Vivir for example. Historical analyses also provide an important basis for degrowth transitions, as it reflects that the growth paradigm was not always around to be contested. As stated, Hickel (2019) locates the inception of the growth paradigm and capitalism as one in the same, and Kallis et al (2018) outline a more gradual development. Regardless, both agree that socio-economic systems have existed prior to the current growth paradigm. Kallis et al (2018) draw

on anthropological data that reveal historical societies functioning without growth and highlight contemporary examples, arguing that this undermines “the conviction that there is no alternative to growth” (303).

Catholic Social Teaching

Within the history of the RCC we can locate distinct periods of social teaching provided by papal encyclicals (Bucciarelli et al 2011). Specific contemporary ideologies, arguments, and insights notably influence CST, reflecting a certain fluidity and engagement with non-religious circles (Bucciarelli et al 2011, Njoku 2007). Nevertheless, despite clear shifts in teaching, the key theme of justice can be located as a constant within all teachings on socio-economics. The common good, and the justice it demands, is the source of all themes forwarded by the RCC’s social thought, whether it be individual, societal, or environmental. Flowing from this source are many overlapping articulations of justice embodied in the conceptual frameworks of integral human development and integral ecology, which engage with socio-economic and environmental issues our planet faces today. As stated previously, there is a clear call and desire from the academic community to engage in a transdisciplinary conversation regarding issues of globally just sustainable transitions and some scholars and activists explicitly call for greater engagement with the Roman Catholic Church.

Within CST, papal encyclicals build off of previous encyclicals to amend and further develop relevant concepts while also considering contemporary arguments and ideas. This is certainly the case for the RCC’s teachings on socio-economics as it relates to development (Bucciarelli et al 2011, Njoku 2007). Bucciarelli et al (2011) track the conceptualization of integral

human development from the early stages of Catholicism, known as the patristic period, to the post-Conciliar period following the Second Vatican Council. Njoku (2007) pays special attention to the latter period emphasizing external developments that inform the popes' opinions on, and conceptualization of, development. More recently, Puggioni (2017) and Christie et al (2018) articulate themes of CST, as presented in Laudato Si, and their relevance to modern sustainable socio-economic development theory.

CST both resists and perpetuates external conceptualizations of development to varying degrees at different time periods, taking from, and criticizing, prevailing theories (Bucciarelli et al 2011, Njoku 2007). Bucciarelli et al (2011) show this clearly, outlining how in the late 19th Century and the early 20th Century CST emphasized human development by way of economic progress (though other facets of human development were certainly emphasized simultaneously). While Bucciarelli et al (2011) note external influences on CST, Njoku (2007) more strongly argues that the social thought of the Roman Catholic Church is a "product" of prominent schools of thought regarding development and beyond. For example, Bucciarelli et al (2011) articulate that *Gaudium et spes* and *Populorum progressio* criticize the global economic system for disproportionately funneling wealth to certain groups, while leaving others, namely those, to use a contemporary term, in the global South impoverished. The policy solution, as outlined in *Populorum progressio,* Bucciarelli et al (2011) claim, is to employ more post-Keynesian economic theory to promote a more equitable distribution of resources. Njoku (2007) argues that *Gaudium et spes* and *Populorum progressio* reflect modernization theory, clearly sharing "the basic optimism and vision of modernization theory, and viewed the relation between the rich North and the poor South in… paternalistic terms" (238), i.e. the developed North should help develop the South. While Bucciarelli et al (2011) specifically reveal the trends in integral human development's

conceptualization as a response to timely issues, Njoku (2007) centers economic theories to reveal how CST was informed by them. Both Bucciarelli et al (2011) and Njoku (2007) reveal a tradition of CST thought that engages with relevant issues, being informed by external contributions to socio-economic theory, while remaining critical of certain aspects.

Catholic social teachings conceptualization of integral human development and integral ecology are central to the discussion surrounding ethical socio-economics from the Catholic perspective. There are many aspects of these two themes that offer opportunities to engage directly with socio-economic theory. Human dignity is central to CST. Christie et al (2019) reflect this well stating “This foundational idea grounds the Common Good in the uniqueness and inherent equal value of each individual in the eyes of God. Conceptually this includes the dignity of labour and the right of all to meaningful non-exploitative work” (1348). While not explicitly articulated in the same way, Bucciarelli et al (2011) and Puggioni (2017), recognize this foundational tenant. Secondly, Bucciarelli et al (2011) and Puggioni (2017) in some way articulate distributive justice (just distribution of resources) as central to CST on socio-economics. Both Bucciarelli (2011) and Puggioni (2017) note that this particular concept (within integral human development) developed over time to promote a proper understanding of property and its link to the common good. For Bucciarelli et al (2011) and Christie et al (2019), solidarity and subsidiarity are explicitly highlighted as pertinent tenants of CST on socio-economics. Bucciarelli et al (2011) reveals that the popes, from the pre-Conciliar period on, consistently call for global solidarity to promote a more holistic development. Christie et al (2019) articulates this prevailing theme stating that “it concerns the inherent sociality of human beings and their need, as flawed and dependent creatures, to live in relations of mutual care and responsibility” (1348). Bucciarelli et al (2011) locate subsidiarity as a key component of integral human development which compliments solidarity. While solidarity

encourages an awareness of global interconnectedness, subsidiarity calls for the recognition of degrees of autonomy among communities (Christie et al 2019). Lastly, interjected throughout all sources mentioned in this section is the idea of the common good, which solidifies the basis of actions and responsibilities, emphasizing a globally integrated notion of well-being.

The themes of the common good, human dignity, solidarity, and subsidiarity bolster the RCC's teaching on integral human development and more recently helped Pope Francis formulate integral ecology in *Laudato Si.* As Puggioni (2017) points out "Francis summarizes the main ecological worries of his predecessors, from John XXIII, through Paul VI and John Paul II, until Benedict XVI" (17). He then further synthesizes their contributions with contemporary scientific and ecological thought St. Francis of Assisi's integral ecology, the influential medieval theologian and philosopher who saw humans as being in a spiritual and familial relationship with nature. Christie et al (2019) affirm this, stating "Laudato Si' is a remarkably wide-ranging and ambitious text, which can be seen as an integration of CST with secular understandings of sustainability and environmental crisis" (1349).

Both Christie et al (2019) and Puggioni (2017) argue that affinities are found within CST and contemporary socio-economic theory developments. While Christie et al (2019) focus on locating the affinities between *Laudato Si'* and Elinor Ostrom's "sustainable management of the commons," Puggioni (2017) locates the affinities between the document and "degrowth." Both socio-economic theories critique the current socio-economic paradigm as globally destructive and unjust, and encourage sustainable transitions. An important shift in CST is highlighted by Christie et al (2019) as *Laudato Si'* emphasizes a deeper relationship with nature "requiring an ethic of humility, stewardship and care, in the context of a human embeddedness in and dependence on the natural world" (1349). Puggioni (2017) describes the call to a deeper relationship with nature in

familial terms, claiming the main message of *Laudato Si'* is that "human beings need to live within nature in harmony with it as a family in a common house and not to use natural resources as a mere object of consumption" (18). Both Christie et al (2019) and Puggioni (2017) locate the theme of preferential option for the poor in *Laudato Si'* noting that both socio-economic visions forwarded by Ostrom and degrowth find an ally in Francis.

Christie et al (2019) and Puggioni (2017) end their reviews with further research considerations. Firstly, Christie et al (2019), while encouraging more research regarding the affinities between CST and Ostrom's economic theory, also state that "case studies and experiments in adapting CST categories for deliberative policy appraisal and… other emerging frameworks for pluralistic ethics-based deliberation" (1352) would help fill crucial gaps. Puggioni's (2019) review specifically targets the affinities of *Laudato Si'* and claims "there is the need to study more in depth the social doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church, as well as other religious social doctrines, from the perspective of Degrowth doctrines" (32). Both Christie et al (2019) and Puggioni (2017) see CST as having a critical role to play in the advancement of more sustainable socio-economic systems, but more preliminary research regarding specific affinities between CST and other approaches is necessary. My thesis will draw upon the cited sources and respond to these very questions by exploring the affinities of CST and degrowth in depth.

Liberation Theology

Liberation theology has contributed significantly to the social doctrine of the RCC, and to Catholic social thought in general. The theology of liberation certainly galvanized many in the faith tradition, and outside of it, to take a more critical stance against dominant forms of development.

Gregory Baum (1991), at the time of his writing, stated that “Liberation theology is the most recent and vibrant development of Catholic social doctrine” (78), reflecting on the important influence LT has had. The school of thought was born in Latin America in the 1960s amidst extensive suffering that was seen as intrinsically tied to an international socio-economic system. Liberation theology thus emerges as a powerful theological and social framework for engaging the world and working toward justice.

According to Michael Zweig (1991), the doctrines of Vatican II act as the foundational doctrines of liberation theology. It was a moment in the history of the RCC that sparked more active engagement from clergy and laity in socio-political issues. Zweig (1991) recognizes Marxism’s important influence on the theology of liberation, too. Prominent leaders in the movement used the framework offered by Marxism to better analyze patterns of injustice. He states that “To understand how history actually works, and how people can be active agents of their own history, Gutierrez and other liberation theologians turn to Marx” (17). Robert Puggioni (2016) and Zweig (1991) note that this important link to Marxism resulted in tension between proponents of LT and the Vatican. Puggioni states that “The tensions between the leadership of the RCC and representatives of the theology of liberation is based on ‘certain forms’ of liberation theology, mainly because they were considered to adhere too closely to Marxism” (230). Zweig (1991) expands on this acknowledgement, highlighting exactly what it is about Marxism that RCC leaders reject. He states:

> Catholic social doctrine since Leo XIII has condemned the atheistic nature of Marxism, but since Vatican II less emphasis has been placed on the point as the Church has sought out more cordial working relations with people of other faiths. Rather than dwell on the issue of atheism, Catholic and main-line Protestant churches focus on the materialist philosophy embedded in Marxism (40).

Initially Marxism's atheistic nature drew condemnation from Roman Catholics and stifled dialogue. Later, it was a more focused critique of Marxism's material philosophy. Puggioni (2016) outlines well the dynamic between the RCC and LT, pointing out that while there is tension between the RCC and LT the Vatican has nonetheless issued documents on the theology of liberation and what is to be "accepted." Furthermore, both Puggioni (2016) and Zweig (1991) are quick to mention that LT in fact criticizes Marxism. Zweig (1991) states "To be sure, they approach Marxism with a range of critiques and disclaimers, putting distance between themselves and the mechanical materialism and economic determinism so often exhibited by Marxist writings" (17). Puggioni (2016) states that "Unfortunately, in depicting that situation, the criticism of Marxism by liberation theologians is often ignored as well as the fact that these theologians use Marx's reflections in an instrumental way without any attempts to absolutize his thought" (230).

In addition to Marxism, according to Uzochukwu Jude Njoku (2007), dependency theory was another important framework that informed the critical approach of the theology of liberation. He states that "Dependency theory became a tool in the socio-economic analysis of the Latin American liberation theologians" (240). It helped clarify the dynamics of poverty derived from an international socio-economic system and helped those in LT circles relate it back to faith. Furthermore, Njoku (2007) makes it clear that this "tool" helped LT position itself against the dominant narrative that underdeveloped nations should implement policies promoted by wealthier world powers.

Liberation theology is, according to Zweig (1991), a movement concerned with issues of social justice from a faith perspective. He states that "Liberation theology interprets religious teachings as a call to social action toward the goal of social justice" (4), recognizing its roots in

faith traditions, specifically Christianity. Theologians of liberation claim that their faith compels them to recognize that which causes suffering and work to promote justice, even if it means alterations to systems of a socio-economic nature. On this note, Puggioni (2016) states that “Liberation theologians are interested in changing a state of things that makes injustice and oppression the norm” (233), noting an inherent quality of LT to challenge systemic mechanisms of injustice. Puggioni (2016) highlights a central tenet of LT as being the “preferential option for the poor.” According to Puggioni (2016), “The liberation theology’s discourse about justice is about social justice, which addresses the option for the poor’” (233). He goes on to say that this “option for the poor” “implies choosing the side of the poor, while looking for the cause of the situation” (233). Zweig (1991) agrees with Puggioni (2016) that the “preferential option for the poor” is central, and includes it in his “four unifying themes” of LT. In addition to this theme, Zweig (1991) notes that the theological school encourages the church, both clergy and laity, to be actively engaged in society. Additionally, from the perspective of LT, individual acts of charity are not enough. Institutions and systems perpetuating injustices must be analyzed and then challenged to change. And finally, social analyses of poverty and oppression are needed in conversation with the social sciences (Zweig 1991).

The influence of the theology of liberation on more authoritative Catholic social teaching is well explored. Njoku (2007) and Baum (1991) outline striking similarities between LT and CST as developed by John Paul II such as the concepts of “structural sin” and “universal solidarity.” It has had a particularly important influence on Pope Francis’ work as we will explore.

Ivan Illich

Martínez-Alier et al (2010) claim that his work as a social critic has made him "probably the main reference for the culturalist intellectual criticising the notion of development" (1742), and they locate Illich as an important "source of inspiration" for degrowth, particularly in the francophone literature. Much of this is due to his concepts of technological thresholds that, when surpassed, become counterproductive and even harmful. Demaria et al (2013) affirm this, highlighting his influence in degrowthers' understanding of development. Illich has been particularly important in another facet of the degrowth literature. Cattaneo et al (2012) state that "As regards questions of democracy, a first key influence on the degrowth literature is the work of Ivan Illich" (516). Demaria et al (2013) show how Illich's concept of thresholds is related directly to issues of democracy. Illich argues that the health of democracy declines as certain technologies scale up. These, among related conceptualizations like conviviality, which is explored in more detail later, has led many to hold Illich as a seminal figure for degrowth and has led to him being cited numerous times in the degrowth literature. Despite Illich's obvious influence, Samerski (2018) claims that within degrowth literature Illich's work has not been drawn upon sufficiently, stating that "Discussions about technology and degrowth, even when they draw on Illich's concept of convivial tools, exclusively focus on material devices" (1637). Samerski (2018) argues that Illich's work can and must be used to examine social technologies as well, and intangible effects of technology in general that "increasingly shape self-perception and subjectivity" (1638).

David Cayley (Illich and Cayley 1992), in his transcribed conversation with Illich titled *Ivan Illich in conversation*, describes Illich as an "anomaly among modern scholars because he insists that the habits of the heart are as crucial as the habits of the head." Cayley goes on to say, by quoting Illich, that it is Illich's formation within the Roman Catholic Church that nurtured an intellectual reflection that balanced the head and heart.

The critical nature Illich's intellectual reflection took on was perhaps first evident in his critique of the Roman Catholic Church, specifically the "institutionalization" of the priesthood. Fitzpatrick (2002) states that " It is interesting to note that before he gave his attention to schools, medicine, and language his first critical effort was aimed at the Catholic Church and the way the Church had institutionalized the priesthood" (40). Miller (2017) states that, despite his controversial opinions toward the Roman Catholic Church, upon his death, Illich "was, and had always been, a Catholic priest in good standing with the Vatican, as Cardinal Ratzinger had verified a few years earlier" (81). Speaking to this on a more personal level, Fitzpatrick (2002) reflects on Illich's role as a priest stating that "In fact, with all the notoriety of his super critiques of modern institutions (and I have profited enormously from all of that), I often feel I am with the real Ivan when we say a few evening prayers together, or when he devoutly assists at my masses" (41).