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Wolfgang Sachs

The Sustainable Development Goals and the encyclical *Laudato si'*: varieties of Post-development?

How naive we were to pompously declare the „End of the Age of Development“! In autumn 1988 in Barbara Duden's house at the Pennsylvania State University, we had invited our friends to 'living room consultations'. Accompanied by spaghetti, red wine and roll-mats, we conceived the heady idea to publish a „Development Dictionary“. ¹ It was to be no ordinary handbook, it had to be critical and dissect „Development“, a key term in world politics of the 20th Century, in a Foucauldian manner. According to Foucault, knowledge and power are inseparable, although power does not necessarily refer to repression, rather to – canalised – freedom. As a consequence „Development“, in our understanding, was the matter from which plans, forecasts and dreams were made of. Basically, a view of the world that wields power by social consensus. Moreover, the history of the idea of „Development“ is typical for many ideas: a once historic innovation became a convention in time, eventually ending in frustration. Our *spiritus rector* who sat in our midst, Ivan Illich, realized that the idea would fit perfectly in the Archaeology of Modernity he was planning to write. For Illich, one could only talk about „Development“ in the gesture of an obituary.

In retrospect, it is surprising what we didn't know or at best guess back then. For instance, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War and its implications for the idea of Development that President Truman had brandished against Communism; the sieve-like perforation of the nation-state system by the globalisation of markets; an increasingly polycentric world order that is disarranging the hierarchy of nations and undermining especially the USA's hegemony; the internet and later the smartphone that is creating a global communication space; and finally the rise of newly industrialized countries that has relinquished the usual categories such as „Third-World“ and „Donor-Countries“ into the rubbish heap of history.

All in all, we were opposed to the idea of Development², in chronopolitical, geopolitical and civilisational terms.³ Chronopolitically, it seems as though all of humanity is moving forward on a single path while ultimately, the goal of social and economic progress is never fully attained. On the other hand, geopolitically, the first movers (the developed nations) are leading the way of Humanity. The once confusing global diversity of humanity has been clearly ranked into rich and poor nations. Finally, from a civilizational perspective, the „Development“ of a nation is measured by its degree of economic performance, i.e the gross domestic product. Societies that have just emerged from colonial rule are required to place themselves under the custody of the Economy.

So what happened to the idea of Development? It became a plastic word, an empty word that lends positive valence to the most contradictory of intentions⁴. Nevertheless, „Development“

has survived as a worldview which has been embedded in an international network of institutions; the UN, ministries, and even NGOs. However, it is possible to trace Developments' extraordinary transformation until the present day. In 2015 there was a noticeable consolidation of the Development discourse: there was the papal Encyclical *Laudato Si'* in June, the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations in September and lastly the Paris Climate Agreement in December. Are these international statements still obliged to Development? Or can one, to the contrary, consider them proof of post-development thinking?

The transformation of „Development“ in the SDGs

By agreeing to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and adopting the Agenda 2030, the General Assembly of the United Nations initiated a programme that is expected to guide world politics for the next 15 years.⁵ The SDGs were a result of two processes: the Millennium Goals of 2000, and the documents of the 2012 Rio+20 Summit that had continued where the Agenda 21 of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit had left off. The SDGs had a relatively long forerun with consultations in 88 countries, intergovernmental consultations, a high-ranking, prestigious Panel and a notably high participation of civil society. Eventually, 17 goals and 169 sub-goals ranging from „No Poverty“ „Education for All“ to „Renewable Energy“ were agreed upon. As a result, the SDGs are a complex matter; a comprehensive manual that is at once ponderous and visionary but that is non-binding, and lacks a sanction mechanism. It is no wonder that some say its vague demands and inflated goals could well be an invitation to inaction for governments.⁶

Admittedly, perennial noncommittal avowals are indispensable for the governments of the world. The Paris Climate Agreement of December 2015, which combined a formidable goal with vague obligations is the latest example. Who does not remember the frequent United Nations campaigns against hunger and climate change? These have been mere rhetorical pawns, at least since the 1963 World Food Conference in Washington and the 1972 UN Conference on Human Development in Stockholm. Even benevolent governments find themselves in an awkward position. On one hand, they have to give in to the objective urgency of the problem and the strength of the civil society but on the other hand, they are simultaneously obliged to both the capitalist markets and the consumption wishes of their respective societies. It follows that a certain degree of simulative potential is inherent in the declarations of the United Nations⁷. They act as if... while the market logic already shines through. A considerable amount of self-illusion rather than chicanery is at play here. Unfortunately, the United Nations is a perfect stage from which to declare noble goals top-down, and then retreat back to *realpolitik* when push comes to shove. As a result, a disconnect between international rhetoric and national measures has become a structural trait of politics. How else can the declaration „We commit ourselves to working tirelessly for the full implementation of the Agenda 2030“⁸ be understood other than as a practise in simulation when the same governments support coal mining, land grabbing or the international finance industry?

Survival instead of Progress

The time when Development was still a promise, when „young“, and „aspiring“ nations were on the Road to Progress is long gone. Indeed the chronopolitical, geopolitical und civilizational politics of development constituted a monumental historical promise, a promise

that eventually all societies would be able to close the gap between the rich and the poor and to reap the fruits of industrial civilisation.

Development thought suffered two setbacks from which it has not quite recovered yet: the persistence of poverty and the finitude of nature. Development aid, conceived especially for the purpose of fighting poverty is confronted by the enduring reproduction of poverty at an alarming rate even after the expiry of the Millennium Development Goals. Of course the number of people suffering from absolute poverty has gone down in emerging economies, however, it has remained constant in poorer countries. Additionally, the politics of poverty reduction often comes at the price of increasing inequality and environmental degradation. Secondly, global warming, the drastic loss of biodiversity and the latent poisoning of oceans and landmasses have tarnished the belief that developed nations are at the head of social evolution. On the contrary, progress has often turned out to be regression, since the economic system of the Global North cannot do without systematic exploitation of nature. Analyses, from „Limits to Growth” in 1972 to „Planetary Boundaries” in 2009, are crystal clear: Development-as-Growth is leading to a planet that is inhospitable of human life ⁹

Indeed, the SDGs make-do without high-flying plans for sky-high growth, instead, they try to secure a minimum for a dignified life universally. In the “call to action” of the SDG document, it reads: “We can be the first generation to succeed in ending poverty; just as we may be the last to have a chance of saving the planet. The world will be a better place in 2030 if we succeed in our objectives.”¹⁰ Apart from the obtrusive use of the word “we” (who is being addressed? Governments? Well-wishers? Or Humanity?) the appeal is elated and noble. However, it still fails to hide the fact that the once rousing model “Development” is more and less narrowed down to requirements for survival. Seven goals are dedicated to human vulnerability (ending poverty, ensuring food security, universal health, universal education, gender equality, universal access to water and sanitation and access to sustainable energy sources) and 5 Goals to ecological vulnerability (sustainable cities, sustainable methods of production and consumption, tackling climate change, conservation of oceans and landmass ecosystems). This constitutes nothing more than a due appropriation of human rights obligations and ecological imperatives highlighted with specified targets. The classical development narrative is conspicuously missing.

Conflating Development with security has been commonplace since the 1990s, a time during which a change in perception of poor countries by the old industrialized countries occurred. Previously hailed as bearers of hope for catch-up Development, they were now seen as risk zones that were dealt with accordingly, by the use of crisis prevention strategies. They were perceived as points of origin for job seekers and refugees, or as hotbeds of destabilisation and terror. Every reasonably rich country tried to protect themselves through conflict prevention projects in poorer countries. The German chancellor Angela Merkel’s remarks on the refugee crisis, that posit Africa’s well-being as being in the interest of Germany¹¹ and Bayer boss Walter Baumann’s claims that the merger with Monsanto was meant to fight global hunger¹² are some recent examples of the crisis prevention mode described above. Be that as it may, the *development* in SDGs is a semantic delusion. The *Sustainable Development Goals* should more fittingly have been called SSGs – *Sustainable Survival Goals*.

One world in lieu of North-South

In hindsight, the 2000 Millennium Summit was merely a commemoration of the 20th century, not an anticipation of the 21st century. In New York all those years ago, the pattern of the last

50 years was reproduced: the world, neatly divided in North and South where donors hand down capital, growth and social policies to beneficiary countries to recondition them for the global race. This pattern is a familiar sediment of colonial history and was, just as the catch-up imperative, omnipresent in the post war years. What happened to catching-up, an idea so fundamental to the idea of Development?

For a possible answer, it is necessary to quote a passage from the SDG proclamation document: “This is an Agenda of unprecedented scope and significance. It is accepted by all countries and is applicable to all, taking into account different national realities ... These are universal goals and targets which involve the entire world, developed and developing countries alike.”¹³ The SDGs stress their globality and universality. The mental rupture could not have been formulated more clearly: The geopolitics of development embodied by the old-industrialised countries serving an example for poorer countries to follow was ceremoniously disposed of. All the planning and passion, the amount of resources and romance that went into realizing the dream of catching up! Secular eschatology became a thing of the past. Just as the Cold War era withered away in in 1989, the myth of catching-up followed suit in 2015. Myths have rarely been buried as quietly and informally as this one. What sense would development make, if there is no country that can justifiably be called developed? All of a sudden, it was no longer a provocation to call industrialised nations developing countries.

All of this did not fall from heaven. Paragraph §7 of the 1992 Rio Declaration enshrines the principle of *common but differentiated responsibilities* in environmental policy. On the basis of this principle, developing countries were not required to reduce emissions in accordance to the Kyoto Protocol. Twenty years on, due to the changes in the economic geography of the world, this exemption could no longer be upheld.¹⁴ At the 2011 Durban climate conference as well in the Rio+20 conference, developing countries had to get used to the idea that they had a responsibility to bear with regards to biospheric damage. Likewise, developed countries could not escape the fact that their economic system, from global agri-business to labour markets and even climate impact, had repercussions on poorer countries. After long and intricate political beating-around-the-bush, there was no denying that the sustainable goals were to be valid for all countries alike.

This is a late manifestation of the replacement of the Development era by the Globalisation era. Across nation states, a transnational world emerged, a world connected by value chains, similar consumption patterns and globalist thought. The rise of emerging economies and the strengthening of the global middle classes bear witness to this turn of events. Most spectacular remains of course the rise of China, and the speed at which it rose. As of 2014, China was the best-performing economic power in the world, although the USA’s economy was double its size as recently as 2005. The seven largest emerging economies have since superseded the old-industrial countries who enthuse over global economic hegemony as the G-7. The creation of the G20 was politically cognisant of the changing dynamic of the global economy.

Additionally, a new transnational middle class has emerged. Between 1990 and 2010, members of the middle class based in the Global South rose from 26% to 58% and will probably rise to 80% by the year 2030.¹⁵ They also shop in shopping malls, buy high-tech gadgets, watch similar Films and TV series, regularly travel for leisure and have access to a

crucial homogenizing medium: money. They are an integral part of a transnational economic complex that is developing its markets globally. *Samsung* supplies them with Gadgets, *Toyota* with automobiles, *Sony* with TV sets, *Siemens* with refrigerators, *Burger King* with fast food and *Time-Warner* with movies. This is an enormous success for the development industry, a success that has come not only at an enormous cultural cost, but at an ecological cost as well. Currently, the only way out of poverty and powerlessness is a direct simultaneous entry into the ecological robber economy.

Social Indicators instead of GDP

In the post war decades, there were a number of critical inquiries into whether the civilizational politics of Development was misleading. But the GDP as the magic number retained predominance. It also birthed the Development idea by allowing the conception of a hierarchy of the world on supposedly objective terms.¹⁶ Based on an economic world view and a statistical toolbox, experts conceptualised “Development” as Growth of production and per capita income. Since the 1970s a dichotomisation of development discourse occurred that saw development-as-growth confronted with development-as-social-policy. Institutions such as the World Bank, IMF and the World Trade Organisation revered the idea of development-as-growth while the UNDP and UNEP as well as a majority of the NGOs subscribed to the idea of development-as-social-policy. In this way, the term “Development” became an all-purpose adhesive which could refer to building an airport or to drilling of a borehole. The Millennium Development Goals and the Sustainable Development Goals are rooted in this legacy.

Over and over again, the relationship between social indicators and economic growth has revealed itself to be a thorny issue. On the one hand, the Agenda 2030 recognizes the decline of ocean-ecosystems or the increasing social inequality, but on the other hand, it calls for economic growth¹⁷, (at the rate of at least 7% for the poorest countries) and affirms the WTO trade regime.¹⁸ To overcome the strain, or rather the contradiction between growth and sustainable goals, “inclusive growth” and “green growth” are often been called upon. This disregards the fact that, for a while now, it has been clear that inclusive growth driven by the financial markets is an impossibility, as it constantly reproduces inequality. The same can be said for the slogan of green growth. Even at the highest echelons of the G7 Summits, the fact that fossil-fuelled economic growth is not feasible in the medium-run has done the rounds. Although the decarbonisation of the global economy was unanimously proposed in 2015, nobody seems to know how it would work without further depleting biodiversity. All recipes for green growth rely on decoupling environmental degradation from growth even as absolute decoupling (increasing growth while decreasing environmental degradation) has never been achieved in history.¹⁹ The Agenda 2030 fails to speak about prosperity without growth, even for the old industrialised countries. This was simply off the table.

Regardless, the development idea has proven its resilience. Social indicators have replaced GDP in determining the performance of a country in various dimensions. This is one of the reasons why statisticians all over the globe have joined hands to declare the *data revolution*. Citing the UN Secretary General during the preparation phase of the SDGs: „Data are the lifeblood of decision-making. Without data, we cannot know how many people are born and at what age they die; how many men, women and children still live in poverty; how many children need educating; how many doctors to train or schools to build; how public money is being spent and to what effect; whether greenhouse gas emissions are increasing or the fish stocks in the ocean are dangerously low; how many people are in what kinds of work, what

companies are trading and whether economic activity is expanding“ (Independent Group 2014).²⁰ The data revolutionaries are operating under Lord Kevin’s maxim reckoning that one can only improve what one has previously measured (“If you cannot measure it, you cannot improve“). Thanks to digital technology, the monitoring of several areas of life is currently undergoing a transformation in terms of the amount, the degree of detail, and the speeds at which the data is exchanged. Complex fields such as education, health, oceanology or food security can now be summarized into indices and easily compared with other datasets.

Political actors, governments and NGOs have learnt to take advantage of the simplification and complex reduction that numbers and quantification offer and regularly use these as short formulas.²¹ But beneath these short formulas, there is history, a plethora of social struggles and cultural world views and practises. As a result numbers have an enormous homogenizing effect, all the diversity and difference in the world boils down into a scale of numbers. Additionally, the data revolution has not been successful in emerging from the shadows of the development creed, on the contrary, the development idea has been living off of the dictatorship of comparison. Wherever one looks, quantitative data serves to enable comparison in time and space that constructs deficits along the time axis between groups as well as nations. Ironically, this very deficit-creation dynamic has given the development idea a purpose to exist for the last 70 years. The Human Development Index, like the GDP is a deficit index; it categorizes countries according to a hierarchy, thereby presupposing that there is only one kind of social evolution. The SDGs, with the scales and indices of the 17 goals and 169 sub-goals, follow in this legacy. Because numbers now constitute the framework of multi-dimensional development, the Agenda 2030, aside from all the noble goals, is an attempt at measuring the world.

***Laudato si’*- renouncing the development discourse**

Pope Francis’ greeting *buonasera*, as he emerged from the loggia of St. Peters Cathedral on the evening of 13th March 2013, surprised the crowd of thousands of people, for it was neither ceremonial nor in Latin. The newly elected Pope had hit the ground running with his modesty and brotherhood. In his second, rather gawky sentence, he went the long way around, speaking in a way that would mark his pontificate: „It seems that my fellows Cardinals have gone to the ends of the Earth to get one... but here we are...“. As a matter of fact, Francis is Argentinian and the first non-European (and from the southern hemisphere at that) to occupy the chair of St. Peter. He brings a Latin-American perspective to the church and to the world. His nonchalance towards Dogma and church-law, his emphasis on compassion towards the poor, refugees and other marginalized communities and his outspokenness on environmental degradation cannot be understood without his Latin-American background.

With the Encyclical *Laudato si’* of June 2015, the Pope declared and celebrated his view of the world, and the wider global public paid attention. It is worth remembering that his stance in the encyclical constituted a first step of the diplomatic offensive that led to a thawing of relations between Cuba and the USA where the Pope, the son of immigrant parents, urgently warned against xenophobia in Congress and subsequently also at the UN General Assembly, where the SDGs were enacted on the same day. *Laudato si’* covers a lot of ground, spanning from the destruction of creation, the unjust global order to the individual responsibility that each of us bears. Can one classify the Pope’s sentiments under the heading of Postdevelopment ?

A declaration of mutual dependency

It is well known that the Pope successfully carried out a significant coup with this encyclical, especially amongst environmentalists. For the first time ever, the epochal environmental crisis was the subject of an encyclical. Once more the adage that the church thinks in centuries, or at least half-centuries, turned out to be true. Indeed, 50 years lie between the *Communist Manifesto* and the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*. A similar span is identifiable between the wake-up call that was Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* and the *Laudato si'*. The wait seems to have been worth it, the *Laudato si'* is a forceful, stylistically elegant document, and most importantly, a timely one.

From the perspective of a development expert, the encyclical makes for a paradoxical read: the experts are affirmative even as the idea of development does not seem to play a role. The unconventional language might be surprising, but the fact that the chronopolitics of Development are conspicuously absent from the encyclical is inescapable. Progress, and other promises for the future are non-existent in the document and one gets the impression that the arrow of time that has shaped historical perception for two centuries has simply been done away with. Instead of progressive optimism, linear improvement and thrilling expectations for the future, only sober, nuanced contemplations on the present await readers.

It was different in the encyclical *Populorum Progressio* during the reign of Paul VI in 1967. Back then, the magisterium trailed behind the development discourse, claiming that the poorer parts of the world were on their way towards the richer parts of the world, towards true human development. As a side note, the environment did not feature anywhere in the said encyclical. Contrastingly, in *Laudato Si'* the rejection of the arrow of time is so extreme that evolution is completely absent, even as nature is prominently discussed. With this implicit rejection, the encyclical denies itself the opportunity to speak to a cosmological interpretation of the belief in creation in the way that French theologian and natural scientist Teilhard de Chardin or the US-American theologian and cultural historian Thomas Berry did in the early and late 20th century respectively.

Instead, the papal circular replaces the arrow of time with spatial consciousness. Space has been able to garner more prominence than time in the current global mindset: the combination of things in virtual or geographical space appears to be more important than their sequence in time. This epochal change of consciousness is partly responsible for the demise of the development idea. Even so, the encyclical is decidedly space focused, a position clearly demonstrated in the subtitle „On care for our common home“, the pivotal element being the vulnerability of creation. The document further criticises the various threats to nature and the mass vilification of human life, thus speaking out on issues that the SDGs are intended to address. Additionally, it hears „both the cry of earth and the cry of the poor“²² and prefers healing to management. Above and beyond all physicality, it conceives of the exploitation of nature and humanity as irreverent of the systemic connection all living things – including human beings – share.

It is not accidental that the encyclical places emphasis on relationships: the relationship to nature, to others, to oneself, and to God. “It cannot be emphasized enough how everything is interconnected. Time and space are not independent of one another, and not even atoms or subatomic particles can be considered in isolation. Just as the different aspects of the planet – physical, chemical and biological – are interrelated, so too living species are part of a network which we will never fully explore and understand.”²³ While the Agenda 2030

bureaucratically logs the unpleasant state of affairs in detail, the papal encyclical proposes a wholesome view, seeking to arrive at a transformatory and engaging narrative.²⁴ Indeed the encyclical can be read as a *declaration of interdependence* replacing the *declaration of independence* of the nation-state era. Irreverence of the life context is not only a sin, it has cumulative side effects that destabilize the whole. Adding the dimension of time, one can say that the encyclical is indeed a warning against a hostile future. In that way, the development idea has been flipped on its head.

No Sufficiency, no Justice

Much like chronopolitics, geopolitics are also conspicuously absent from the document. In the encyclical, the North-South scheme is only visible between §170-175, where the international compensation and financing modalities for global climate policy are discussed. In the rest of the document, the guiding principle is that „Interdependence obliges us to think of one world with a common plan“.²⁵ Upon favourable interpretation, this stance would appear to be very close to that of the SDGs, as both documents appear to distance themselves from the geopolitics of Development.

However, in contrast to the SDGs, the encyclical presumes that the looting of the planet has already exceeded the ecological limits without solving the problem of poverty.²⁶ This, the major dilemma of our day, is far from being addressed by the Agenda 2030. The document recognizes neither the boundaries nor the limits that a number of scientists have demonstrated, for instance in *Limits to Growth* (1972) and *Planetary Boundaries* 2009.²⁷ Instead terms such as risk and scarcity are preferred. According to calculations by the Global Footprint Network, the planet is already being drastically strained, with humanity consuming 1.6 times the available resources in the biosphere annually. Overfished oceans, extinct plant and animal species and the climate chaos bear witness to this state of affairs.²⁸ By ignoring the status quo, the Agenda 2030 is protecting the growth model, a model which has always been prioritised over protection of nature. This turn of events is traceable to the 1972 UN environmental conference, the 1987 Brundtland Report and now the Agenda 2030 as well. The Pope chooses the path less trodden by clearly mentioning both ecological and social limits, and by holding the industrial growth model accountable for its various shortcomings. At one point, he even goes as far as recommending degrowth for the more affluent parts of the world.²⁹ In other words, he advocates a reductive rather than expansive modernity.³⁰

When more and more people live on a limited planet, social inequality becomes an ecological problem. Usually, the rich consume resources that are then no longer available to the poor. For instance, high meat consumption occupies land where food for human consumption would otherwise have grown, full motorisation means less space for pedestrians and cyclists and more oil and ore mining and mass use of smartphones and computers is contingent on supply of electricity, rare earth elements and other materials that are linked to land alienation and precarious working conditions. In summary, the global middle and upper classes are leading an imperial lifestyle³¹ which is why the encyclical links poverty and the environment, as „both everyday experience and scientific research show that the gravest effects of all attacks on the environment are suffered by the poorest“.³² Goal 12 of the Agenda 2030 seeks to *Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns* by emphasising efficient use of resources, a demand which falls behind a document from 1992: the Agenda 21. *Laudato si'* suggests a strategy of sufficiency embedded in cultural change, it is indeed the rich who have to change, not the poor, it is wealth that needs to be alleviated, not poverty. By requiring the rich to refrain from appropriating the surroundings of the poor the powerless are accorded

more freedom. This is made especially clear over a couple of pages of the encyclical where the term „ecological debt” is used.³³ Though the wealthy of the global north have accumulated significant ecological debts, they have suppressed consciousness of this fact because the Global South seems distant, geographically, temporally and socially. More than anyone else, the poor are paying the price for the wealth of the Global North. In light of this, sufficiency could perhaps already be defined as mere refusal to live at the expense of others.

Common Good against Technocracy

The Common Good is the great unknown of neoclassical economics. In a pluralistic democracy, the search for the common good is a permanent process. As long as one subscribes to the idea that society ought not to be the plaything for power- and individual interests, the term common good is indispensable. As a consequence, the term has dominated political philosophy in various shades since antiquity, and reappears emphatically in the encyclical. From a civilizational perspective, the encyclical argues that the common good – as political and social well-being but also as ecological well-being – should be brought to fruition in various societies.

By citing well-being as a normative principle, the encyclical also gained some ground for criticism. It declares that: “The failure of global summits on the environment makes it plain that our politics are subject to technology and finance. There are too many special interests, and economic interests easily end up trumping the common good and manipulating information so that their own plans will not be affected.”³⁴ Here again, the encyclical attacks the power-interests of the economic and financial systems that perforate and disregard the common good. This is in stark contrast to the Agenda 2030, which fails to explain the reasons for the constant reproduction of poverty and the decline of the biosphere that have made the *sustainable development goals* necessary. Neglecting the root causes is typical for UN documents and comfortable for governments, but fatal for any therapy.

The encyclical drills deep and reprimands the technocratic paradigm that has proven to be fatal for modernity. In a chapter entitled *Human Roots of the Ecological Crisis* the Pope accuses modernity of inner contradictions: while science and technology have brought humans unprecedented power, humans have repeatedly proven themselves to be unable to deal with it accordingly. The immense increase in power has been largely void of responsibility and foresight: „The technocratic paradigm also tends to dominate economic and political life. The economy accepts every advance in technology with a view to profit, without concern for its potentially negative impact on human beings. Finance overwhelms the real economy. The lessons of the global financial crisis have not been assimilated, and we are learning all too slowly the lessons of environmental deterioration.”³⁵ An instrumental gaze has transformed too many things, humans and other living things alike, into mere means for achieving ever more specific goals. According to the Pope, this is the reason for rapid degradation of the world and the systematic lack-of-focus on the "whole" during societal decision making. Save for an explanation of their more abstract ideas, one finds traces of the phenomenological and critical philosophy of the 20th century, such as Heidegger and Horkheimer, in the encyclical.

Can the technocratic paradigm be overcome? According to the Pope, it can: By way of a brave „cultural revolution”.³⁶ Human freedom only has to limit technology and orient it

towards life serving goals. One finds examples in the encyclical: Renewable energy, clean production, social investments, fair trade, modest lifestyles. The encyclical touts for reflexive action that constantly incorporates a responsibility to wholeness (of humanity and nature). It dismisses institutional routines such as the habitual blindness of decision makers that prevent it. Prudence and foresight paired with empathy are the markers of non-technocratic behaviour. One must instinctively think about a feature of many religions, the perpetual struggle between good and bad. It appears in a more contemporary form in the encyclical, not in a dogmatic, but in an endearing one full of vivid imagery: "An authentic humanity, calling for a new synthesis, seems to dwell in the midst of our technological culture, almost unnoticed, like a mist seeping gently beneath a closed door. Will the promise last, in spite of everything, with all that is authentic rising up in stubborn resistance?"³⁷

The Creation and universal Brotherhood/Sisterhood

When Francis of Assisi (1181-1225) – whose name the Pope chose – called all animals and plants, even matter itself, his brothers and sisters, he meant it in a literal sense. As children of one God, all creatures have a godly roots and dignity and are connected to each other as siblings. With *Laudato si'* Pope Francis propagated a Franciscan version of the theology of creation which implies that the actual focus of ecology is the fellowship of all living things and the responsibility of human beings towards this fellowship. Undeniably influenced by the Brazilian Leonardo Boff,³⁸ the Pope's horizontal conception of creation rejects the hierarchical conception that puts Humans at the centre of all creation.

But first, the spoil pile that has gathered over the centuries has to be done away with. God's word in Genesis 1,28 "fill the earth and subdue it" can no longer be an ethical justification of the present. This blessing from the Old Testament has been used to legitimize a number of grotesque things in the modern era: from René Descartes declaration of humanity as "master and conqueror of nature", to American republicans who defended coal mining and fracking on the basis of this bible verse. Pope Francis was left with no other choice than to dispose of *dominium terrae*.³⁹ It certainly helps that there are two creation stories in the bible. In Genesis 2,4ff, humankind is required to "cultivate and care for" the garden of Eden. In this account, humankind is required to show brotherly and sisterly love to all fellow creatures. The fact that all are created by the same God underlies the inherent connection of all living things on a planetary and evolutionary scale. In light of this fact, the "cry of nature and the cry of the poor" ought to be heard in all corners of the earth physically and spiritually, as it is an offence to our common fraternity and sorority. Injuries also have spiritual feedback effects, moreso than physical ones.

Additionally, many interpretations of the creation are double coded, theologically and scientifically.⁴⁰ Scientists have a systematic view of life based on the assumption that networks constitute the basic unit of organisation of living things.⁴¹ Nature is no longer seen as a machine, but as a network of relationships, physical, chemical, mental and communicative. The relationships between the parts constitute the whole. The connectedness of all manifestations of life; bacteria, chimpanzees and human consciousness alike, is emphasized by both science and the encyclical.

At least two ethical consequences can be drawn from this kind of creation theology. First, nature is understood as commons, belonging to all living things. How else could it be when nature is a gift from god and is systematic in character? Individual and national ownership of

the biosphere only come second to the fact that the gifts of the earth are for all to enjoy. Private ownership of land has always been viewed critically in catholic social teaching, accordingly, ownership of ground water, the ocean and the atmosphere is not legitimate. As the encyclical reiterates, "The climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all".⁴² Although the Pope emphasises that „The natural environment is a collective good, the patrimony of all humanity and the responsibility of everyone“, he keeps himself away from the potentially subversive consequences of his comments.⁴³ In this context, mining, oil-mining, air pollution and landscape destruction come to mind.

Secondly, plants, animals and human beings, as all living things in nature are worthy in their own right, independent of their utilizable worth for humans. Nature is not primarily a resource like it is in the modern era, it is primarily a gift of god, for non-believers, it constitutes the commons. A strong propensity towards anti-utilitarianism is recognizable throughout the encyclical. It pillories the “excessive anthropocentrism” and denies humans the exclusive right of use over the earth, a right which ants, monkeys, oceans and deserts possess as well. All living things have the right to exist independent of human purposes. “We can speak of the priority of being over that of being useful ... each creature possesses its own particular goodness and perfection.”⁴⁴ All creatures are dignified, the idea of an existence value (as opposed to a use and exchange value) has strong Christian roots.

Outlook

Comparing the Agenda 2030 of the United Nations and the *Laudato si'* by the Pope, both authored in 2015, one point stands out: the Development enthusiasm of the 20th century is gone. In its place, we are now dealing with the demise of expansive modernity. The motto of the previous century (playing on words of Lord's Prayer) “...on Earth as in the West” now seems like a threat. The world is in crisis roundabout: the biosphere is being shattered and in more ways than one, the gap between the rich and the poor is widening. While both publications agree that the global economic model can now be considered old iron there are equally significant differences. While the Agenda 2030 seeks to repair the existing global economic model significantly, the encyclical calls for a pushing back of economic hegemony and for more ethical responsibility on all levels. While the Agenda 2030 envisions a green economy with social democratic hues, the encyclical foresees a post capitalist-era, based on an cultural mindshift toward eco-solidarity..

The era of expansive modernity is over. The more this insight sinks in globally, the more the talk of development and thus also of post-development will fade. Mental frameworks will shift, problems that societies face will no longer be conceived as development problems. Currently, thinking in fortress terms is popular, even as the globalisation narrative and an eco-solidary ethic line up in resistance.⁴⁵ Fortress thinking feeds on a mixture of nationalism, xenophobia, authoritarianism and a proper dose of wealth chauvinism. Often, it serves the longing for a strongman with whom the marginalised parts of society can identify. On the other hand the globalisation narrative continues to wield the promise of economic growth and more well-being worldwide despite all limitations. But it provides multi-lateral governance and politics generally with more space for manoeuvre than in neo-liberal times. The Agenda 2030 largely follows this thinking. The ethics of eco-solidarity, opposes fortress thinking as well as the globalization narrative. It advocates cultural change both at the local and the global level that is based in cooperative economics and politics for the common good. For the sake of fairness, it is about undeveloping, about winding-up the imperial lifestyle of the transnational middle classes. Doubtlessly, the papal encyclical belongs in this category. The

paradigmatic debates in the coming decades will revolve around this discourse, while Development, just like monarchy and feudalism will disappear into the haze of history. Consequently, it is about time that someone declared the end of the post-development era, some 25 years after we declared the end of the development era.

Notes

- ¹ Sachs et al., Development Dictionary
- ² Esteva, „Development: Metaphor, Myth, Threat“; Escobar, *Encountering Development*; also Rist, *History of Development*
- ³ Sachs, „Development. The Rise and Decline“
- ⁴ Pörksen, *Plastikwörter*
- ⁵ UN, *Transforming the World: The 2030 Agenda*
- ⁶ Easterly, „Trouble with the SGDs“; Rivera, „Wieviel Entpolitisierung vertragen die SDGs“
- ⁷ Blühdorn, *Simulative Demokratie*
- ⁸ UN, Agenda 2030, also Ziai, *Development Discourse*
- ⁹ Rockström et al., „Safe Space“
- ¹⁰ UN, Agenda, §50
- ¹¹ Die Zeit, 42/2016
- ¹² faz.net, 18.9.2016
- ¹³ UN, Agenda 2030, §5
- ¹⁴ Pauw et al., *Common but Differentiated Responsibilities*
- ¹⁵ UNDP, HDR 2013, 14
- ¹⁶ Speich-Chassè, *Erfindung des Bruttosozialprodukts*; Fioramonti, *Gross Domestic Problem*
- ¹⁷ UN, Agenda, §8.1
- ¹⁸ UN, Agenda, §68
- ¹⁹ Jackson-Webster, *Limits revisited*
- ²⁰ Independant Group, *A World That Counts*
- ²¹ Fioramonti, *How Numbers Rule the World*
- ²² Pope Francis, *Laudato si'*, §49
- ²³ Ibid., §138
- ²⁴ Hickel, „Pope vs UN“
- ²⁵ Pope Francis, *Laudato si'*, §164
- ²⁶ Ibid., §27
- ²⁷ Rockstrom et al, „A Safe Space for Humanity“
- ²⁸ WWF, *Living Planet Report*
- ²⁹ Pope Francis, *Laudato si'*, §193
- ³⁰ Sommer-Welzer, *Transformationsdesign*
- ³¹ Brand-Wissen, *Imperiale Lebensweise*
- ³² Pope Francis, *Laudato si'*, §48
- ³³ Ibid., §51f.
- ³⁴ Ibid., §54
- ³⁵ Ibid., §109
- ³⁶ Ibid., §114
- ³⁷ Ibid., §112
- ³⁸ Boff, *Cry of the Earth*
- ³⁹ Pope Francis, *Laudato si'*, §67
- ⁴⁰ Bals, *Sucessful Provocation*
- ⁴¹ Capra-Luisi, *System View of Life*
- ⁴² Pope Francis, *Laudato si'*, §23
- ⁴³ Ibid., §95
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., §69
- ⁴⁵ Raskin, *Journey to Earthland*

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