

# **Human Development and the Catholic Social Tradition**

## Towards an Integral Ecology

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First published 2021

ISBN: 978-0-367-63961-7 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-0-367-63963-1 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-003-12153-4 (ebk)

## **Introduction**

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DOI: 10.4324/9781003121534-1

The OA chapter is funded by: Laudato Si' Research Institute



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LONDON AND NEW YORK

# Introduction

It is now two decades since religion entered development studies as a research subject. The World Bank study *Voices of the Poor* (Narayan et al. 2000) was a turning point in the relationship between development organizations and faith communities, and between development research and religion. The study gathered the voices of more than 60,000 people across more than 40 countries on how they understood what it meant to live well and on their experience of being poor. Among the findings from this extensive participatory exercise were the observations that, for many people, religion permeated people's conception of living well, that sacred places held an important place in people's lives (Narayan et al. 2000: 38, 234), and that religious institutions were often more trusted than state institutions – though they did not excel in accountability and participatory decision-making (Narayan et al. 2000: 179). From something deemed private with no public or development implications, or something deemed superstition which would disappear as people became more educated, religion became something that had to be reckoned with for anyone or any organization concerned with reducing poverty and improving people's lives. Not least, the World Bank study brought to the fore the reality that religious organizations, known in the literature as faith-based organizations, were significant providers of social services – such as health and education – among the poorest communities worldwide, leading to a new interest in faith-based organizations as key development actors.<sup>1</sup>

The adoption of Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and their 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in September 2015 as a 'shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet'<sup>2</sup> led to further interest in the role of religion and faith-based actors in development (Tomalin et al. 2019).<sup>3</sup> An international partnership for religion and development was formed to bring governmental and intergovernmental entities together with civil society and faith communities to promote the SDGs.<sup>4</sup> However, in the midst of this

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greater rapprochement and collaboration, concerns have also been raised about the dangers of instrumentalizing faith communities for the sake of an externally imposed agenda (Petersen and Jones 2011; Tomalin 2020) and about the lack of interest in how faith communities themselves conceive of the SDGs and how they translate and transform them within their own frames. While people within one perspective might speak of ‘protecting life below water’ and ‘protecting life on land’ (cf. SDG 14 and 15), those with a different one might speak of ‘protecting all of God’s creation’; and while one might say ‘no poverty’ and ‘zero hunger’ (SDG 1 and 2), the other might say ‘attend to your sister and brother in need’.

The SDGs have been the subject of criticism for focusing too much on measurable results and not enough on processes and structural causes of climate change and poverty and inequality. They have also been criticized for glossing over conflicting, or incompatible, goals, such as SDG 8 on economic growth vis-à-vis the climate change-related goals (SDGs 12–15).<sup>5</sup> As much as faith actors have embraced the SDGs as part of a shared journey towards improving people’s lives and addressing climate change, they are also urging policymakers and development practitioners ‘to go beyond the SDG-agenda in order to redefine notions of growth, wealth and well-being’ (Wuppertal Conference on Eco-Theology and the Ethics of Sustainability 2019: 12) and to start a genuine dialogue on the meanings and processes of global development and prosperity in an age of climate emergency.<sup>6</sup> The International Panel on Social Progress (IPSP 2018: 80–1) similarly urged for a genuine dialogue with religions, arguing that, because ‘most spiritual belief systems address relationships between humans and the world around them, including non-human of all kinds’, they have something to contribute to how we can reimagine how our societies can be organized and how they can be transformed.

At a time when a global zoonotic disease pandemic has revealed the human costs of the degradation of natural habitats,<sup>7</sup> and a global movement to ‘build back better’ is emerging,<sup>8</sup> this Routledge Research in Religion and Development Series Focus book examines what can be learned from faith communities about their own views on development and prosperity, what they see as desirable goals, and how these goals can be pursued. It also aims to bring the ‘religion and development’ research agenda to a new phase, beyond analysing religion and development as two independent variables which can form instrumental partnerships for achieving certain common goals, towards dialogue for mutual transformation. How could development theory and practice itself benefit from greater engagement with sources of wisdom coming from religious traditions? What can it learn from their perspectives on how we are to live, relate to others and to nature, and move into the future as a society? And could religious traditions themselves benefit

from such engagement? These questions are at the core of this Routledge Focus book.

The notions of growth, wealth, prosperity, well-being, and ‘change for the better’<sup>9</sup> have been at the core of development narratives since the first UN Development Decade in the 1960s. Since then, development has undergone a geographical transformation, from being about processes of change in developing countries – a broad term encompassing most ex-colonized countries but now categorizing different types of economies, social achievements, and state–society relations<sup>10</sup> – to being about addressing the problems of poverty and inequality globally (Horner and Hulme 2019). Development has unsurprisingly undergone many changes in meaning over the course of its history: from economic development; to social development; to sustainable development; to climate-compatible development (Nunan 2017); to abandoning the concept of development altogether (Rist 2014; Ziai 2017); to the SDGs; and to addressing the integrated challenges of poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation globally.<sup>11</sup> Development has also undergone a disciplinary transformation, from the dominance of economics and other social sciences to the greater inclusion of the natural sciences (Alff and Hornidge 2019). There is currently a move to decolonize development, to recognize the legitimacy and validity of different sources of knowledge (Schöneberg 2019), and to construct a ‘new vision’ for thinking about and doing development, which ‘reflect[s] not only interdisciplinarity but also the trans-disciplinarity found in respect for multiple forms of knowledge’ (Oswald, Leach and Gaventa 2019: 135).

This book aims at laying some building blocks for a transdisciplinary construction of a new vision of development by exploring the contributions of forms of knowledge coming from religious traditions to development studies. It explores how these two visions can mutually enrich each other and be combined to construct a new vision of development.

From within development studies, the vision selected as conversation partner is the one proposed by economist and philosopher Amartya Sen; it is known as the capability approach to development and has been translated as ‘human development’ by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in its *Human Development Reports*.<sup>12</sup> Amartya Sen has, more than anyone in the field of development research, dealt with the fundamental normative questions of what constitutes development’s ultimate ends and sought to shift the foundations of economics from utilitarian ethics to what some have called ‘capabilitarian’ ethics (Robeyns 2017). Sen’s main critique of economics was that it reduced human well-being to considerations about utility, income, or subjective states of mind, and the human person to a rational self-interested maximizer (Sen 1977). His works have underlined the importance of value judgements for collective decision-making and

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policy. They have proposed a broader framework to that of utilitarianism for assessing whether one situation is better than another. For example, how to comparatively evaluate the merits of a city which has greater biodiversity and better air quality but lower income per capita, and a city with a higher income per capita but poorer air quality and biodiversity? Sen has argued for extending the information used to evaluate whether situation  $x$  is ‘better’ than situation  $y$  beyond information about utility or income or consumption to include considerations about what people are able to be and do, what he calls ‘capabilities’ (Sen 1993). His works have also sought to transform the reductive view of the human being as a utility maximizer to that of a person who exercises freedom and responsibility, for her life and that of others (Sen 1985).

As much as Amartya Sen has brought to the core of development studies the normative questions of how one should live, what constitutes ‘better’ social arrangements and outcomes, and how a society should move into the future, he has never proposed a specific moral standpoint from which to answer those questions. Even regarding the question of which criteria to use to assess whether someone’s life is poorer than another’s, Sen leaves the question to be settled through processes of public reasoning, that is, different viewpoints coming together in order to find common agreements (Sen 2017).

Like Sen’s works, religious traditions have also sought to deal with the normative questions at the core of development regarding what constitutes a good or ‘better’ life and which social arrangements and outcomes are better than others. This book has selected the Roman Catholic tradition as the conversation partner. It has chosen such a focus because this particular religious tradition has developed over the last 130 years a body of texts which discuss, from a normative perspective, socio-economic and political issues, and which, since 1963, has been addressed to every person of goodwill, of all faiths, and none. Catholicism is also the denomination with the largest number of adherents within the Christian religion, which is the largest religious group, followed by Islam and Hinduism.<sup>13</sup> It is also of particular importance in Latin America, from where many of the illustrative examples of this book have been drawn.

The Christian social tradition goes back to the practice of early faith communities that cared for the sick, the hungry, the widows, the orphans, and the marginalized groups of the time, and it has developed to this day, if often in less than adequate ways.<sup>14</sup> In the late nineteenth century, the publication of *Rerum Novarum* (RN, *On New Things*) by Pope Leo XIII marked a new departure within the Catholic Church with its constructive analysis of distinctly modern socio-economic realities from the perspective of the Gospel. *Rerum Novarum* discussed how to respond

to the ‘new things’ that the world was experiencing with the Industrial Revolution and the exploitation of factory workers. It pressed on governments to legislate for minimum wages and labour rights, such as protection against illness and accidents. It also affirmed the right of workers to form unions.<sup>15</sup>

Since then, subsequent popes have issued documents that expanded on the analysis of their predecessors, given the new realities they were facing. To name a few:<sup>16</sup> as the Cold War was settling in, Pope John XXIII issued *Pacem in Terris* (*Peace on Earth*) in 1963; during the first UN Development Decade and after decolonization in many countries, Pope Paul VI issued *Populorum Progressio* (*On the Progress of Peoples*) in 1967; as Latin American dictatorships were coming to an end in the 1980s and a communist system was in place in Eastern Europe and elsewhere, Pope John Paul II issued *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (SRS, *On Social Concerns*) in 1987; as the world was dealing with the socio-economic consequences of a global financial crisis, Pope Benedict XVI issued *Caritas in Veritate* (CV, *Charity in Truth*) in 2009; as the devastating effects of climate change and the limits of certain models of development or progress based on infinite economic growth and resource exploitation became more pressing, Pope Francis issued *Laudato Si’: On Care for our Common Home* (LS) in June 2015, breaking with the century-long tradition of naming papal documents (encyclicals) by their first two words in Latin;<sup>17</sup> and as national populist political systems had advanced in many democracies, Pope Francis issued *Fratelli Tutti* (FT, *Brothers and Sisters All*) in October 2020, whose title also comes from St Francis of Assisi.

This book will focus on the encyclicals that deal more specifically with reflections on socio-economic progress and global justice (namely *Populorum Progressio*, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, *Caritas in Veritate*, *Laudato Si’*, and *Fratelli Tutti*). These documents constitute what is known as Catholic social teaching. In addition, the book will refer to wider reflections on socio-economic matters that are emerging from the whole body of the Catholic Church, such as academic work, and responses of faith communities on the ground to the socio-economic processes they are experiencing.<sup>18</sup> These broadly form what is known as the Catholic social tradition. The Catholic Church’s social analysis has a dynamic character. It seeks to respond to novel circumstances, starting from the perspective of the conclusions of past analysis and then taking them to new contexts. As the next chapters will discuss, what started as ‘integral human development’ as the Catholic Church’s vision of development in the 1960s in response to decolonization and the UN Development Decade has evolved today towards ‘integral ecology’ in response to the climate emergency.

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The theoretical and conceptual discussion of the next chapters is accompanied by illustrative examples drawn mainly from the Amazon region and other contexts of socio-environmental degradation. The Amazon region is a place where a process has already begun for translating the conclusions of *Laudato Si'* into actions at the social, economic, social, political, cultural, and ecclesial levels. This process has started with a Special Assembly of all the bishops of the Amazon region, delegations of indigenous peoples, representatives of civil society organizations, and pastoral workers to discuss the current situation in the region and discern new paths for an integral ecology. The Assembly, known as the Amazon Synod, took place in Rome in October 2019.<sup>19</sup> The Amazon region also plays an essential role in the world's ecosystems (Hubau et al. 2020; Nagy et al. 2016; Nobre et al. 2016) and is a paradigmatic illustration of what is happening elsewhere, such as in the Congo basin and the rivers and forests of the Asia-Pacific region.

This book is written with a range of disciplinary and professional audiences in mind: the disciplinary audiences of development studies, theology, and religious studies, and the professional audiences of teachers, researchers, postgraduate students, and workers in development organizations. It aims to cater for readers wanting to engage with the human development and capability approach literature and for those interested in the Catholic social tradition. The book is structured around three areas: the concept and meaning of development (Chapter 1); its underlying conception of being human (Chapter 2); and pathways for transformation (Chapter 3). Each chapter is structured in a similar way. It starts by discussing the perspective of Amartya Sen's capability approach to development; it then examines the perspective of the Catholic social tradition and its contributions. It concludes with some critical remarks on points of tension and pending agendas in the conversation. In its striving to offer a critical engagement between 'secular' and 'religious' understandings of development for a mixed audience, the book will seek to avoid development and theological jargon. However, the reader will have to bear with the unavoidable key development studies concept of 'capability' and the unavoidable Catholic social tradition concept of 'integral', which the next chapter unpacks.

## Notes

- 1 See, among others, Barrera (2019), Clarke and Jennings (2007), Clarke (2013), Koehrsen and Heuser (2020), Marshall and van Saanen (2007). See also the special issue on 'faith-based health care', *The Lancet*, 7 July 2015 (vol. 386, no. 10005), and the special issue on 'Faith and health in development contexts', *Development in Practice*, July 2017 (vol. 27, no. 5).

- 2 Taken from <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>, accessed 5 January 2021.

- 3 See also the conference on Religions and the Sustainable Development Goals held in March 2019 at the Vatican, [www.humandevlopment.va/en/eventi/2019/religions-and-the-sustainable-development-goals-7-9-marzo-2019.html](http://www.humandevlopment.va/en/eventi/2019/religions-and-the-sustainable-development-goals-7-9-marzo-2019.html), accessed 5 January 2021.
- 4 See [www.partner-religion-development.org/about/vision-and-structure](http://www.partner-religion-development.org/about/vision-and-structure), accessed 5 January 2021. The partnership is funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).
- 5 See Fukuda-Parr and McNeill (2019), Pogge and Sengupta (2016), Sachs (2017), Spangenberg (2017).
- 6 For the urgency of addressing climate change, see the reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change at [www.ipcc.ch/](http://www.ipcc.ch/), and the sixth synthesis report on climate change scheduled in 2022. The report on impacts and adaptation is set to be released in October 2021, see [www.ipcc.ch/report/sixth-assessment-report-working-group-ii/](http://www.ipcc.ch/report/sixth-assessment-report-working-group-ii/), accessed 5 January 2021.
- 7 See the July 2020 report of the United Nations Environment Programme on 'Preventing the next pandemic – Zoonotic diseases and how to break the chain of transmission' at [www.unenvironment.org/resources/report/preventing-future-zoonotic-disease-outbreaks-protecting-environment-animals-and](http://www.unenvironment.org/resources/report/preventing-future-zoonotic-disease-outbreaks-protecting-environment-animals-and), accessed 5 January 2021.
- 8 In the UK, see [www.buildbackbetteruk.org](http://www.buildbackbetteruk.org). The Vatican has set up a special Covid-19 commission to prepare the future: [www.humandevlopment.va/en/vatican-covid-19.html](http://www.humandevlopment.va/en/vatican-covid-19.html). The OECD set up a policy response team: [www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/building-back-better-a-sustainable-resilient-recovery-after-covid-19-52b869f5](http://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/building-back-better-a-sustainable-resilient-recovery-after-covid-19-52b869f5), accessed 5 January 2021.
- 9 For the transformational character of development and its seeking of making situations better, see Aarsal and Dasgupta (2015) and Sumner and Tribe (2008).
- 10 The category 'developing' has been intensely debated; see, for example, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/should-we-continue-use-term-developing-world>; [www.qeh.ox.ac.uk/content/what-do-we-mean-development-studies-reflections-after-20-years-mphil](http://www.qeh.ox.ac.uk/content/what-do-we-mean-development-studies-reflections-after-20-years-mphil), accessed 5 January 2021.
- 11 See the statement of the UK Development Studies Association at [www.devstud.org.uk/about/what-is-development-studies](http://www.devstud.org.uk/about/what-is-development-studies), accessed 5 January 2021.
- 12 See [www.hdr.undp.org](http://www.hdr.undp.org).
- 13 In 2018, there was an estimated 1.329 billion people baptized in the Catholic Church, or about 18 per cent of the global population; see [www.laciviltacatolica.com/church-numbers-in-the-world](http://www.laciviltacatolica.com/church-numbers-in-the-world) (accessed 5 January 2021). In 2010, according to Pew Forum data, 15 per cent of the world's population was estimated to be Hindu, 23.2 per cent Muslim and 31.5 per cent Christian; see [www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-exec](http://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-exec), accessed 5 January 2021.
- 14 For a discussion on the writings of the early Church and implications for contemporary social ethics, see Brown (2014) and Leemans, Matz and Verstraeten (2011). For a discussion of contemporary faith communities taking care of the sick, the hungry, and the marginalized, see Calderisi (2013).
- 15 For an introduction to Catholic social teaching, see Dorr (2016), Hornsby-Smith (2006), and PCJP (2005).
- 16 A list of all the documents of Catholic Social Teaching till 2015 can be found at [www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/](http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/)

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- foundational-documents, accessed 5 January 2020. For a discussion on how each document responds to the socio-economic context of the time, see Catta (2015, 2019), Dorr (2016).
- 17 The title *Laudato Si'* comes from the Canticle of St Francis of Assisi in Old Italian 'Praise Be to You'.
  - 18 See Ivereigh (2010), Verstraeten (2013), and Mich (1998) for a discussion of the interaction between the social action of faith communities and the Catholic social tradition and their mutual upbuilding.
  - 19 See [www.sinodoamazonico.va/content/sinodoamazonico/en.html](http://www.sinodoamazonico.va/content/sinodoamazonico/en.html), accessed 5 January 2021.

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