

# Pastoral Criticism, Structural Collaboration: The Role of Ecclesial Power Structures in Modernization and Economic Individualization

DANIEL MINCH  
*University of Graz*

*This article analyzes the complex processes of modernization and individualization, as well as how the church has structurally fostered individualization despite its public criticism. First, the article demonstrates how modernization and individualization have gradually restructured human self-understanding into an economic image of humanity: the human person as homo oeconomicus. Second, this article examines the church's relation to modernity, and specifically its critiques of liberalism and economic individualism. However, the church has often generated the conditions and structures for individualization, and by extension the processes of acceleration and economization of the life-world that it criticizes. Three areas in intra-ecclesial discourse that foster individualization are examined: the interiorization of faith, ecclesial centralization and clerical bureaucracy, and the promotion of corporatism and digital immediacy. The article concludes by examining recent papal efforts at structural reform and the degree to which they address previously entrenched problems and point toward a renewed, non-economic anthropology.*

**Keywords:** Catholic Social Teaching, ecclesiology, economics, hierarchy, individualism, liberalism, social acceleration, theological anthropology

**A**MONG the major lessons of the past decade in theological and philosophical critiques of “post/late modernity” is the intrinsic interconnectedness of multiple processes and ideological programs. There is no one theory that will adequately explain the multitude of changes and upheavals experienced by contemporary society. One of the more innovative and convincing new approaches is that of the German sociologist Hartmut Rosa. Rosa has proposed “social acceleration” as a new theory of modernity, but this theory has no stable “core” in terms of definitive ideological or

*Daniel Minch is Assistant Professor of Dogmatic Theology at the Institute of Systematic Theology and Liturgical Studies, University of Graz. Minch's research includes economic and political theology, Christology, and eschatology. He is the author of Eschatological Hermeneutics: The Theological Core of Experience and Our Hope for Salvation (T&T Clark, 2018).*

sociological causes.<sup>1</sup> Rather, Rosa presents three “motors” that fuel acceleration and are fundamentally interrelated. Related to acceleration and economization of life are functional differentiation and the phenomenon of “individualization,” a process whereby people become increasingly independent from traditional social structures and wherein they conceive of themselves primarily as individuals rather than as members of a family or social group.

Lieven Boeve has defined the distinction here between process and program: “individualisation as a structural trend, and thus as a descriptive category, ought to be strictly distinguished from individualism as an ideology, from egoism as a moral qualification and so forth.”<sup>2</sup> Therefore, programmatic “individualism” as an ideology extols the virtues of individualization, arguing that human beings are first and foremost independent and autonomous by nature, while all other social activity is a secondary aspect of human life. This program is based on either philosophical (or “ideological”) liberalism, beginning from the rights of humanity as free individuals who form society, or from economic liberalism, where people are conceived of as individual rational economic actors who must each maximize their own utility and act in their own self-interest. Often these go together, but increasingly we see that the economic rationale dominates the philosophical one: the free *economic being* of humanity is the pattern for freedom in politics, and not vice versa. Human self-understanding is increasingly dominated by economics as a foundational principle. Rather than *homo religiosus*, or *homo faber*, we now conceive of ourselves, either implicitly through everyday practices or explicitly in our ideologies, as *homo oeconomicus*.

The Roman Catholic Church has, in most historical and theological analyses, had a rather hostile relationship to liberal modernity. The church helped to produce the modern world and the thought patterns that continue to govern it. The conciliarist tradition helped produce medieval constitutionalism, thereby providing a crucial bridge to modern constitutionalism, or government by consent.<sup>3</sup> Although the church engaged fruitfully, albeit briefly, with Enlightenment thought prior to the French Revolution, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are very much a story of resistance to modernity and its principles. The Second Vatican Council changed the antagonistic

<sup>1</sup> Hartmut Rosa, *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*, trans. Jonathan Trejo-Mathys, New Directions for Critical Theory (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Lieven Boeve, “Consumer Culture and Christian Faith in a Post-Secular Europe: Reflections on Individualisation, Critical Agency and Reflexivity,” *ET Bulletin* 17 (2006): 112.

<sup>3</sup> Brian Tierney, “Medieval Canon Law and Western Constitutionalism,” *The Catholic Historical Review* 52, no. 1 (1966): 1–17.

stance of the church to some degree, but in many areas the “conflict” mentality has not gone away. Since its explicit modern beginnings under Leo XIII, Catholic Social Teaching has been rather consistent in its hostility to liberalism, both economic and philosophical.<sup>4</sup> Successive popes have criticized liberalism and individualism in particular as sources of moral and social ills. Most recently, Pope Francis has written: “Individualism does not make us more free, more equal, more fraternal. The mere sum of individual interests is not capable of generating a better world for the whole human family ... Radical individualism is a virus that is extremely difficult to eliminate.”<sup>5</sup>

What is consistently left out of papal encyclicals and ecclesial rhetoric, however, are the ways in which the church has often generated the conditions and structures for individualization, and by extension the processes of acceleration and economization of the life-world espoused by various forms of liberalism. The church has often contributed to the shape of contemporary culture that it so sharply criticizes, and so it is important to point to where and how this has occurred as well as the impact that these actions have on the church.

I will proceed in this article by first illustrating how economics, individualization, and social acceleration are linked together. This will differentiate between individualization as a process and individualism as a program, while acknowledging the praxical inseparability of the two. It is important to clearly see the links between these elements of modernity in order to understand the context in which human self-understanding has been restructured around an economic image of humanity. Second, I will argue that despite the critiques of individualization and liberalism, especially in papal encyclicals of the last century, the church has been either complicit or active in promoting individualization at a structural level, and thereby also implicitly affirming an economic anthropology. This occurs in three different areas: the interiorization of faith, ecclesial centralization and clerical bureaucratization, and through corporatization of the church including the promotion of digital immediacy. Each of these areas must be addressed from a theological and cultural perspective in the future if the church is to advance meaningful critiques of modern society and if it is to remain a faith community capable of critical self-reflection. Finally, I will address

<sup>4</sup> Bernard P. Prusak, *The Church Unfinished: Ecclesiology through the Centuries* (New York and Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2004), 252–54.

<sup>5</sup> Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti: On Fraternity and Social Friendship* (hereafter cited in text as *FT*), October 3, 2020, 105, [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20201003\\_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html). This article was mainly written prior to the publication of *Fratelli Tutti*, and although this encyclical will be touched on in some places, it will not be dealt with extensively.

some of the recent developments in the papacy of Francis, in particular his social and economic critiques and attempts at structural reform within the church.

### **I. Contemporary Economic Anthropology—*Homo Oeconomicus* Self-Interest and Universal Utility**

In the mid-twentieth century, neoliberalism emerged to reshape the dominant Fordist economic paradigm. As an economic program, neoliberalism combines the Keynesian centralized control mechanisms with the implicit trust in the “free market” that characterized economic liberalism and the price system that will deliver efficient outcomes. The contemporary neoliberal economic framework conceives of progress as affected by rational individuals who use all available information to maximize their own self-interest, but with the added feature of explicit government help. This has resulted in the contemporary neoliberal political philosophy of “centralized deregulatory” policies that seek to use governmental structures to dismantle protections and brakes on market activity in order to allow for greater freedom for individuals within the market.<sup>6</sup>

Here, the “rational actor principle” governs economic conceptions of humanity and human activity.<sup>7</sup> This is a preunderstanding of humanity that conceives of “individuals” who always necessarily exist in relation to the market system, as opposed to “persons.”<sup>8</sup> By bracketing out historical and social contexts as factors in economic considerations, individuals can be conceived of as self-interested and as “rational” in all situations (defining rational according to economic presuppositions).<sup>9</sup> Individuals are fundamentally “economic” by nature, and are not, in the first instance, members of societies, organizations, traditions, or families. These relations are secondary and external. Such assumptions lead to the broad conception of humanity as *homo oeconomicus*: human beings are primarily and naturally economic beings, and a capitalist market system is the natural form of humanity.

The presuppositions of this anthropology correspond to what Joseph Schumpeter termed a “vision,” or the “preanalytic cognitive act that supplies

<sup>6</sup> See Milton Friedman, “Neo-Liberalism and Its Prospects,” *Farmand*, February 17, 1951.

<sup>7</sup> Zachary Karabell, *The Leading Indicators: A Short History of the Numbers That Rule Our World* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), 95.

<sup>8</sup> Charles M. A. Clark, “Catholicism and Economics: Toward a ‘Deeper Reflection on the Nature of the Economy and Its Purposes,’” *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 78, no. 2 (2019): 411.

<sup>9</sup> Clark, “Catholicism and Economics,” 412–13.

the raw material for the analytic effort.”<sup>10</sup> A vision always relies on some prior assumptions, and that opens “a wide gate for ideology to enter into this process.”<sup>11</sup> In this “vision,” what is most “natural” is considered to be good. The economic being of humanity must be either constructed or “returned to” by dismantling all of the “unnatural” restraints placed on people and their essential economic freedom. In an interesting way, this continues the Enlightenment bias against received tradition by implementing various attempts to return to or instantiate the “natural form” of humanity and uncompromised human freedom. The form that this takes in late modernity, however, is that of a pure or unfettered free market capitalism.

The turn to the individual and prioritization of individual self-interest raises the question of what “self-interest” actually means given it is integral to our basic assumptions about all human beings. The neoclassical political economist Francis Edgeworth, in his characterization of human beings as pleasure-oriented machines to justify the use of mathematics as the basis of the social sciences, famously wrote that the “first principle of Economics is that every agent is actuated only by self-interest.”<sup>12</sup> *Self-interest*, broadly defined, generally means the best “ends” for the individual subject as decided upon by each respective individual. By framing self-interest in this way and assuming its mathematical compatibility, decisions have to be framed as: “If you are observed to choose  $x$  rejecting  $y$ , you are declared to have ‘revealed’ a preference for  $x$  over  $y$ . Your personal utility is then defined as simply a numerical representation of this ‘preference,’ assigning a higher utility to a ‘preferred’ alternative.”<sup>13</sup> Here, “utility” is conceived of in terms *outcomes*, and more specifically, through comparing and measuring the outcomes of specific actions that are meant to aid us in pursuit of “self-interest.” The fact that self-interest *can be measured* through looking at specific “outcomes” also means that there must be *a way of quantifying* preferences in order to mathematically evaluate outcomes. This requires that specific interests are, to some extent, measurable on the same scale.

The widespread introduction of rank-based models of discipline in Western societies places all behavior “in the field between good and bad

<sup>10</sup> Joseph A. Schumpeter and Mark Perlman, *History of Economic Analysis*, ed. Elizabeth Boody Schumpeter, reprint (London: Routledge, 2009), 38–40, esp. 39. Many thanks to the anonymous reviewer who pointed me to this helpful perspective from the history of economic theory.

<sup>11</sup> Schumpeter and Perlman, *History of Economic Analysis*, 40.

<sup>12</sup> Francis Ysidro Edgeworth, *Mathematical Psychics: An Essay on the Application of Mathematics to the Moral Sciences* (London: Kegan Paul, 1881), 15–16, esp. 16.

<sup>13</sup> Amartya K. Sen, “Rational Fools: A Critique of the Behavioral Foundations of Economic Theory,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 6, no. 4 (1977): 322.

marks, good and bad points. Moreover, it is possible to quantify this field and work out an arithmetical economy based on it."<sup>14</sup> Such quantitative logic of rank and evaluation has been heavily internalized in late-capitalist societies. We have consistently favored quantitative reasoning over other forms, thereby compressing different types of qualitative value into the logic of "less/more," converting or closely associating different forms of value with quantitative value that is measurable and convertible. Utility is defined as a measure of usefulness and exchangeability, and exchangeability is essentially quantitative—it must be measured on one quantitative scale in order for all "interests" to be convertible. Ludwig von Mises "famously argued that the price system was the only conceivable means of converting values into commensurable metrics of calculation," while Milton Friedman's foundational essay on neoliberalism likewise praises the "unparalleled efficiency" of the price system.<sup>15</sup> Thus, "individual self-interest" is essentially quantitative *economic* interest, which ultimately takes the form of money—something that is supremely convertible in terms of exchangeable value and prices.<sup>16</sup> Money, as the expression of exchange value, is the ultimate measure of utility and therefore also self-interest. Utility maximalization is an economic description of fulfilling one's self-interest, meaning that one has, through expending resources, gained the maximum exchange value in a particular situation.

This elevation of money as the supreme measure of utility becomes a problem, however, because insofar as all interests become convertible and measurable in the same way, then "self-interest" is not truly an "individual" interest, but something quasi-universal and defined in broadly convertible, quantitative terms. This means not only that all individual interests are *evaluated* in the same way (quantitatively as money), but that all individual interests are fundamentally presupposed to be economic interests. Use value and exchange value can both be compressed into one concept: utility, or "preference," and preferences are, without social, cultural, and temporal context, effectively coded as economic choices expressed by money.<sup>17</sup> *Utility* is defined as a measure of usefulness and exchangeability, and exchangeability

<sup>14</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 180.

<sup>15</sup> William Davies, "The New Neoliberalism," *New Left Review* 101 (2016): 121–34; Friedman, "Neo-Liberalism and Its Prospects." Friedman explicitly also characterizes neoliberalism as a kind of "faith."

<sup>16</sup> Robert Urquhart, "The Price of the Market: Pursuit of Self-Interest as Annihilation of Self," *International Review of Economics* 59, no. 4 (2012): 435, doi:10.1007/s12232-012-0159-8.

<sup>17</sup> Urquhart, "The Price of the Market: Pursuit of Self-Interest as Annihilation of Self," 437.

is essentially quantitative—it must be measured on one quantitative scale in order for all “interests” to be convertible.

Monetary gain is quantitatively measurable and comparable, and the universally desired measure of self-interest is money. All other particular “interests” are defined formally in terms of the pursuit of money such that “my” interest is not qualitatively different from “yours”; what we both desire as our own interest is ultimately measurable by and convertible into money. The only real difference between our respective interests can be *quantitative* because that is the only way to measure good or bad outcomes. We are, therefore, faced with a situation in which, at the micro-level, everyone is encouraged to pursue their own self-interest, but on the *structural level*, that interest is presupposed as quantitative, economic, and universally measurable, which “flattens” qualitative difference into simple quantity. Far from being merely an academic theory for how to effectively measure preferences and outcomes, the dominance of economic rationality has real effects on how societies are structured and how people become themselves in the world.

#### ***Self-Interest, Competition, and Reflexive Individual Identity Creation***

Austrian neoclassical economics prioritized self-interest, but also took the step of universalizing it as an anthropological motive, and not merely as one motive among many that falls within the economic part of human life—economic life is not a means to an end, but the whole of human life itself. The neoclassical turn locates this drive for economic self-interest as a part of the natural state of humanity: humanity is an economic being, or *homo oeconomicus*. As Karl Polanyi puts it, many thinkers in the nineteenth century already assumed that “man [*sic*] strove for profit” and that “in his economic activity he would tend to abide by what they described as economic rationality, and that all contrary behavior was the result of outside interference.”<sup>18</sup> From here, it is easy to assume that if rationality is essentially economic rationality, controlled by particular natural laws, then markets are themselves natural and come into being automatically. “Thus,” writes Polanyi, “nothing could be more normal than an economic system consisting of markets ... and a human society based on such markets appeared, therefore, as the goal of all progress.”<sup>19</sup>

The turn from neoclassical economic analysis to a neoliberal political program has involved the application of economic preconceptions to constructivist political goals, “rendering market-based metrics and instruments

<sup>18</sup> Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 257.

<sup>19</sup> Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 258.

the measure of all human worth, not only inside the market but, crucially, outside it as well.”<sup>20</sup> Economic theory, and specifically neoclassical economics, acts as a “soft constitution” for government whose primary objective is to dismantle regulatory brakes on freedom, defined in economic terms, and enable the acceleration of growth, which is also defined economically.<sup>21</sup> By “reimagining the household precisely as the site of indefinite accumulation,” and by transmuting normative reflections on values into quantitative terms of efficiency and worthiness, neoliberalism adds a moral-ethical dimension to its political program.<sup>22</sup>

The preconditions of a thoroughly marketized society include the very real threat of exclusion from that society and from the pursuit of economically defined self-interest due to a lack of money, and so the pursuit of self-interest *is* the pursuit of monetary gain.<sup>23</sup> The pursuit of my own self-interest is therefore subject to the dictates of the market before I have even begun to act or choose. In order to be successful, I must cultivate skills that allow me to compete in market relations, thereby *presupposing competition* with other people. Thus, self-interest as quantitatively defined utility begins from the anthropological assumption that people are “asocial” and selfish, and therefore that all gain must come about through competition, which we continue to hold as an attribute of *homo oeconomicus*.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, our implicit assumption about *homo oeconomicus* now extends to the natural state of social relations as inherently antagonistic because all are interested in gaining over against the interests of the other, or by instrumentalizing the other in a form of self-serving cooperation. Competition and the cultivation of abilities that make one successful are made into a moral imperative because economic success and failure are linked with the inherent nature of people as economic and competitive.

This economic view of humanity relies on *a priori* assumptions about human beings, but by making these assumptions part of everyday practice it also essentially *forces* people to participate in the market system with the threat of exclusion both from society through starvation and also from humanity by social exclusion.<sup>25</sup> Market relations are conceived of as

<sup>20</sup> Davies, “The New Neoliberalism,” 129.

<sup>21</sup> Davies, “The New Neoliberalism,” 128.

<sup>22</sup> Adam Kotsko, *Neoliberalism’s Demons: On the Political Theology of Late Capital* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018), 71.

<sup>23</sup> Philip Goodchild, *Theology of Money*, New Slant: Religion, Politics, Ontology (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 117–19.

<sup>24</sup> Eve Poole, *Capitalism’s Toxic Assumptions: Redefining Next Generation Economics* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 11–15, 23–26.

<sup>25</sup> Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 121–31.



*inherently antagonistic*, and this is actually a good thing.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, throughout history the threat of starvation has been used to force rural communities into industrial labor, and commerce was seen by colonizers as a sign of progress and humanity over against less developed, and therefore less human, native populations, and less “deserving” populations often correlating with poor and marginalized classes and BIPOC.<sup>27</sup>

This is not a theoretical or historical example, but one we are currently living out in the COVID-19 pandemic. The needs of the economy have been consistently placed over public health concerns. A vivid illustration is the suggestion of the lieutenant governor of Texas, Dan Patrick, that vulnerable elderly people should go to work and risk infection rather than “sacrifice” the economy, which he equated with the United States itself. More disturbing perhaps is the debate around enhanced unemployment benefits and the notion that such benefits, which are higher than the earned wages of many workers, are incentivizing people not to return to jobs that pay poverty wages and make them highly vulnerable to infection. The implicit, and at times even explicit, argument is that people should have to choose between either working for an unlivable minimum wage or the alternatives of losing benefits, eviction, becoming unhoused, and even starvation. This is particularly ghoulish because the “free market” solution would simply be to raise wages and improve working conditions, revealing that resistance to enhanced benefits is an internalized *moral argument* amounting to the kind of “punitive neoliberalism” described by William Davies—poverty wages, like austerity programs, are somehow what people *deserve* because of their individual choices.<sup>28</sup>

One core driver of this view of humanity is the ideological and ethical program of *individualism*, which absolutizes the economic individual as the primary actor and ultimate end of human society. Modern processes have had a reciprocal influence on the development of this economic individualism: people are increasingly unanchored from social structures and traditions; people relate to themselves primarily as single individuals, and they reflexively build their identities in relation to society.<sup>29</sup> The increased pace of life, and the increase in the amount of content that individuals must

<sup>26</sup> Duncan K. Foley, *Adam's Fallacy: A Guide to Economic Theology* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 205–06.

<sup>27</sup> Michael Perelman, *The Invention of Capitalism: Classical Political Economy and the Secret History of Primitive Accumulation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 13–24, 38–58; Kotsko, *Neoliberalism's Demons*, 71–96.

<sup>28</sup> Davies, “The New Neoliberalism,” 129–32.

<sup>29</sup> Lieven Boeve, *God Interrupts History: Theology in a Time of Upheaval* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 23–24.

relate to in consumer society, means that this “reflexive” individualization must occur more quickly and with even less impact on one’s long-term “identity.” Identities are constructed moment to moment, with less regard for a broader, future-oriented narrative, and centered around choosing commodities (including aspects of religious and cultural traditions) that define identity as a personal “brand.”

### *Social Acceleration and Individualization*

As a principal part of the modernization process, individualization is also subject to the broader trend of *social acceleration*, or the aggregate acceleration of technology, social change, and the pace of life that has been the underlying trend of modernity as a whole.<sup>30</sup> Hartmut Rosa has identified three primary dimensions of acceleration that represent particular areas of life, as well as three motors that drive acceleration. The three areas consist of: technical acceleration (more innovation and different technology), the acceleration of social change (social structures and traditions change more rapidly), and the acceleration of the pace of life (there is an experienced lack or scarcity of time).<sup>31</sup> The three motors are economic, cultural, and structural.

The economic “motor” of acceleration is easy to conceptualize in terms of ever-increasing efficiency, which is something that most people in the working world, from universities to the hospitality industry, are intimately familiar with: the pressure to produce more in less time. This also corresponds to technical acceleration, whereby advances in technology can make us more efficient in producing value, but this also includes the fact that technology and technical systems are designed to work faster. However, economics alone does not fully support the acceleration of life and of economic individualization. The fact that we have the potential to increase economic productivity does not, by itself, explain why people would actually *want to increase* in speed and the pace of production.<sup>32</sup> In fact, historically there was a great deal of resistance to increased technical efficiency, industrial output, and even the idea of wage labor as a desirable “career choice.”<sup>33</sup> In order to give people the expectation that ever-increasing growth is the means to utility maximalization, and that this is actually

<sup>30</sup> Hartmut Rosa, “Social Acceleration: Ethical and Political Consequences of a Desynchronized High-Speed Society,” *Constellations* 10, no. 1 (2003): 1–33.

<sup>31</sup> Rosa, *Social Acceleration*, 71–80.

<sup>32</sup> Rosa, *Social Acceleration*, 174–75.

<sup>33</sup> Perelman, *The Invention of Capitalism*, 38–58, 121–23.

something desirable or simply necessary for human life, there must be corresponding changes in social structures and in culture.

The “structural motor” of acceleration facilitates individualization through functional differentiation, or the specialization of different areas of society to meet the needs of government and of the populace.<sup>34</sup> The modern history of the West is, however, largely a history of nation-states evolving toward more centralized forms of exercising power, creating a strange situation where societies have become more structured, planned, surveilled, and disciplined, while also becoming markedly more individualized. According to the analysis of Michel Foucault, the modern state is “simultaneously a factor for individualisation and a totalitarian principle,” such that the application of modern political rationality produces the “inevitable effects” of “both individualisation and totalisation.”<sup>35</sup> This includes broad areas such as governance, science, and art, but above all includes the centralization and bureaucratization of institutions as instruments of measurement and discipline, which, by breaking down processes to their individual elements, increase speed and efficiency.

Foucault demonstrates the implementation of quasi-universal rules of discipline in institutions like the military, education, prisons, and hospitals, and how these regimes of uniformity actually have the effect of individualizing populations.<sup>36</sup> The advent of political economy in modernity brought with it special forms of functional differentiation: primitive accumulation and the social division of labor, which were violently imposed on the lower classes of society from above in order to convert them into a specialized “working class.” As characterized by Foucault: “A capitalist economy gave rise to the specific modality of disciplinary power, whose general formulas, techniques of submitting forces and bodies, in short, ‘political anatomy,’ could be operated in the most diverse political regimes, apparatuses or institutions.”<sup>37</sup> Separating life areas from one another opens up new possibilities for the future through an increase in complexity, contingency, and specialized knowledge.<sup>38</sup>

The hierarchical and bureaucratic structures built up by modern states and economies, especially in the nineteenth century, increased efficiency and the speed of production, whether of products in the factory, the

<sup>34</sup> Rosa, “Social Acceleration,” 14–15.

<sup>35</sup> Michel Foucault, “Pastoral Power and Political Reason (1979),” in *Religion and Culture*, ed. Jeremy R. Carrette, Manchester Studies in Religion, Culture and Gender (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 152.

<sup>36</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 135–228.

<sup>37</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 221.

<sup>38</sup> Rosa, “Social Acceleration,” 14.

passing on of knowledge in schools, or the regulation of a population by prisons and the police. At a certain point, however, social acceleration overtook the original structures that enabled it because these centralized, (mostly) governmental structures cannot keep up with the speed demanded by the decentralized market and they begin to act as “brakes” on production.<sup>39</sup> This represents the “hinge” between classical modernity and late modernity and the definitive turn to neoliberal late-market capitalism, which demands ever-increasing deregulation of centralized structures in order to allow for greater economic acceleration. Functional differentiation thereby facilitates an internal pluralization of society.

The increase in processing capacity within society that results from functional differentiation and pluralization leads to further acceleration: the creation of more options necessitates acceleration of life in order for people to be able to experience as many of them as possible. The “cultural motor” of acceleration goes hand in hand with the economic and structural motors, and can generally be defined as the cultural expectation and desire for acceleration in order to experience more possibilities within one lifetime.<sup>40</sup> In terms of individual utility maximalization, the contemporary individual has more options of choice, but they are all already economically framed.

An increase in options is followed by the demand for more time and more money, both of which are necessary to both make more options available and to be able to actually exercise them, and thus to achieve the best outcomes. This creates a feedback loop of acceleration. Within a neoliberal market system, the pace of structural social change corresponds to both the increase in consumer goods and the commodification of all elements of human life, including social relationships, as options for the future.<sup>41</sup> These options can be selected by the individual consumer, but acceleration is necessary to ensure that the individual can experience more and more as the options multiply. This reinforces individualization as a *process* because decision-making is forced into an economic frame of reference and social structures are increasingly reorganized around individual decision-making in and for optimizing individual utility. In order to choose one thing now, something else must be set aside or decided against. In order to experience more in the future, other priorities must be turned away to focus on accumulating money in the present that can then be used later.

<sup>39</sup> Rosa, *Social Acceleration*, 200–01.

<sup>40</sup> Rosa, “Social Acceleration,” 13–14.

<sup>41</sup> See William T. Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire* (Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2008), 16–17.

The continuous proliferation of options almost guarantees that accumulating money, which, as compressed exchange value is the interchangeable form of all other life options, is the most important activity because it theoretically enables future enjoyment of life options. But ever-increasing demand makes it nearly certain that this awaited “future” never arrives, except perhaps in small doses. The process of economic decision-making spurs individualization by making everything a matter of individual choice and utility maximalization. Ideological economic individualism precludes the idea that there are any other options but to live in this way and to continually accumulate money, which slowly has become less of a means to access more opportunities and more of an end in itself thanks to the universal convertibility of money. Individualization is, therefore, strongly linked with other modern processes, such as economization and social acceleration, both of which are also mutually reinforcing.

The different elements of social acceleration cannot be wholly separated from one another without artificially narrowing our assessment of the situation. This makes the contemporary situation difficult to diagnose and critique, but the complexity and depth of these structures make effective assessment and criticism even more urgent. The church has certainly attempted to give a counter-narrative to the modern narratives of emancipation and progress, and this counter-narrative is founded in a deep skepticism toward modernity itself. Looking back on several centuries of capitalist colonial expansion, industrial warfare, various periods of economic collapse, and the contemporary realization of how fragile and abusive this supposedly “natural” capitalist market system really is in the face of even a temporary disruption, it seems safe to say that much of the ecclesial skepticism was theologically and historically well founded. As always, however, the history of this skepticism is complicated. Of particular interest to us is the degree to which the “modern” church, even in light of its critical stance toward so many aspects of late modernity, has been deeply enmeshed in those same structures and has even aided the processes of modernization and individualization.

## **II. Ecclesial Structures and Individualization**

Throughout modernity, the church, and particularly the ultramontane church that coalesced around the time of the First Vatican Council, has been heavily critical of liberalism. After a brief and fruitful engagement with Enlightenment ideas and even with the French Revolution itself, the shock of anti-Catholic violence after 1791, then the confinement of Pius VII by

Napoleon, turned European Catholicism in a different direction.<sup>42</sup> Leo XII and Gregory XVI are remembered as particularly anti-modern, repressive, and authoritarian for creating “a police state” to suffocate dissent, reinstating Jewish ghettos, and banning modern innovations like railroads and gas street-lamps.<sup>43</sup> For people in Europe and beyond who were wary of liberalism, particularly after the violence of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars, and for people in search of dependable authority, the papacy became an attractive option.

By mid-century, Pius IX’s attitude toward liberalism had hardened, resulting in the promulgation of his *Syllabus Errorum* (1864) as a clear attack on modern ideas, both political and philosophical. It was indicative of an increase in papal instructions, which were meant to be authoritative for all of the faithful throughout the world.<sup>44</sup> The *Syllabus* was preceded by Pius IX’s *Tuas Libenter* (1863), which effectively coined the concept of the “ordinary magisterium” (*magisterium ordinarium*) in order to compel obedience to non-definitive and undefined positions taught by the pope.<sup>45</sup> Following *Tuas Libenter*, many more encyclicals, *motu proprio*, instructions, and other traditionally “non-dogmatic” documents and instructions were published in comparison with past papacies, with the result that the ordinary magisterial teachings further developed and defined elements of the faith in a way that was meant to be binding and authoritative for all Catholics, even those living in liberal countries.<sup>46</sup> Nineteenth-century popes struggled constantly to assert their temporal authority over increasingly “liberal” nation-states, while in the Papal States, they were constantly under threat of popular revolt and revolution.

### *An Intransigent Tradition*

Leo XIII’s 1891 encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*, shifted the church’s criticisms to a specific focus on economic liberalism and the unbearable conditions that it created for the working classes who suffered under

<sup>42</sup> Ulrich L. Lehner, *The Catholic Enlightenment: The Forgotten History of a Global Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 206–16.

<sup>43</sup> John W. O’Malley, *Vatican I: The Council and the Making of the Ultramontane Church* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018), 49–54.

<sup>44</sup> Prusak, *The Church Unfinished*, 252–54.

<sup>45</sup> Hubert Wolf, “‘Wahr ist, was gelehrt wird’ statt ‘Gelehrt wird, was wahr ist’? Zur Erfindung des ‘ordentlichen’ Lehramts,” in *Neutestamentliche Ämtermodelle im Kontext*, eds. Thomas Schmeller, Martin Ebner, and Rudolf Hoppe, *Quaestiones disputatae* 239 (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2010), 236–59.

<sup>46</sup> Wolf, “‘Wahr ist, was gelehrt wird’ statt ‘Gelehrt wird, was wahr ist’? Zur Erfindung des ‘ordentlichen’ Lehramts,” 255.

industrialization. This was a significant moment in the evolution of church doctrine, political theology, and for the church's resistance to modernity. This encyclical was so important that it was commemorated and explicitly commented upon in encyclicals marking the fortieth and one hundredth anniversaries of its publication. The economist Bernard Laurent has argued that the encyclicals and evolution of Catholic Social Teaching from *Rerum Novarum* until and including Benedict XVI's *Caritas in Veritate* (2009) represent a Catholic "intransigent tradition" that is fundamentally anti-liberal.<sup>47</sup> This tradition has gone through different phases, in accordance with the challenges of each successive era in modern history, but the core of Catholic Social Teaching is its critical stance toward "the individualism of the Enlightenment and the atheism of socialism [which are] responsible for economic and social upheavals."<sup>48</sup>

Laurent argues convincingly that beginning with *Rerum Novarum*, the social encyclicals "established a link between ideological Liberalism and economic Liberalism. From the point of view of the Church's social doctrine, the competitive market system was not just a technical system; it was a political concept."<sup>49</sup> He tends to see political liberalism as leading to economic liberalism and the economization of the world, and argues that the early social encyclicals extrapolate that the Enlightenment's promotion of the autonomous individual leads necessarily to "promoting the play of competitive market forces that regulate modern society."<sup>50</sup> Previously, we have seen that this progression from the autonomous individual to humanity *homo oeconomicus* is not so linear, and the "economic" motivations were already present quite early on, leading to the growth of ideological and philosophical liberalism. In many documents, "liberalism" is specifically and explicitly criticized by name, alongside socialism and communism. In *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), Pius XI even makes the accurate but rarely heard point that "Liberalism is the father of this Socialism" and therefore also of Bolshevism.<sup>51</sup> This point is left out of many neoliberal readings of Catholic Social Teaching, which often wish to portray it as critical of left-leaning

<sup>47</sup> Bernard Laurent, "Caritas in Veritate as a Social Encyclical: A Modest Challenge to Economic, Social, and Political Institutions," *Theological Studies* 71, no. 3 (2010): 518, doi:10.1177/004056391007100301.

<sup>48</sup> Laurent, "Caritas in Veritate as a Social Encyclical," 518.

<sup>49</sup> Bernard Laurent, "Catholicism and Liberalism: Two Ideologies in Confrontation," *Theological Studies* 68, no. 4 (2007): 837, doi:10.1177/004056390706800404.

<sup>50</sup> Laurent, "Catholicism and Liberalism," 823.

<sup>51</sup> Pope Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*, May 15, 1931, 122, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-xi\\_enc\\_19310515\\_quadragesimo-anno.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19310515_quadragesimo-anno.html).

ideologies alone, while leaving out the deeper more fundamental critiques of modern economic narratives, theories, and practices.

This “intransigent tradition” with regard to liberalism consistently and rightly targets economization and individualism. One of the major critiques of individualism and economization is the consistent condemnation of private ownership and private property as an *absolute right*. This gives rise to many of the abuses of capitalism because it denies the duties of the individual toward others, including respecting and making room for their rights; this is a denial of the very fact that human beings naturally exist relative to one another in society. The right to private ownership is always relative, and John Paul II was explicitly critical of the “exclusive right to private ownership of the means of production as an untouchable ‘dogma’ of economic life.”<sup>52</sup> This is part of a broader elevation, especially by John Paul II, of workers over capital, and the subordination of economy to morality, ethics, and spirituality—John Paul consistently begins with “persons” and not economic individuals.<sup>53</sup> Each document both affirms the rights of individuals (in earlier documents, this should be seen as the right to practice Catholic faith without state interference), while also confirming the legitimacy of social, collective, and state authority. Thus, Catholic Social Teaching can acknowledge and balance the goods provided by market economies and collective bargaining, while also condemning unbridled (neo-)liberalism, socialism, and communism because each deprives both individuals and communities of their proper rights in relation to others.

Despite the important and often prophetic tradition of criticism of what have become damaging economic and anthropological trends, there remain two problematic aspects of the church’s theological and political tradition in this area. First, the existence of an “intransigent tradition” against modernity, which, in spite of the supposed “openness” to the world inaugurated by Vatican II, seems hard to dispute factually. Second, we have seen that social and structural changes support individualization as a process and align with individualism as a program, which in turn reciprocally reinforce the dominant economic anthropology of *homo oeconomicus*. As a social and political body, we should make ourselves aware of the extent to which the church’s structures are also complicit in at least the *process* of individualization. In fact, the church has and continues to actively foster what it criticizes and thereby contributes to the radicalization of economic programs that have

<sup>52</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, September 14, 1981, 14, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_14091981\\_laborem-exercens.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091981_laborem-exercens.html).

<sup>53</sup> Clark, “Catholicism and Economics,” 409–11, 421–22.



caused so much suffering in recent centuries. I will focus on this second point and briefly highlight three areas where the church contributes to economic individualization: first, the interiorization of faith as primarily pertaining to individual salvation; second, the modern centralization and bureaucratization of both church and law; and third, the post-Vatican II changes to ecclesial authority via “digital immediacy” and corporatization. These areas correspond with the “motors” of acceleration, mainly the cultural and structural motors, especially through individualization and functional differentiation, but, as we have seen, none of the motors can be artificially separated from one another. As with the modern state, the modern church likewise applies the tools of pastoral power in a way that produces both totalization and individualization—despite their contradictory appearance, they are both process and product.

### *The Interiorization of Faith*

The trend in early modernity toward the interiorization of faith comes from several sources, including the influence of the Protestant Reformers on Catholic thought and practices, and the rejection of “baroque” forms of popular piety by elite thinkers representing the Catholic Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Later, we see the adoption of highly individualistic approaches to salvation in neoscholastic theology and the more thorough application of pastoral power and discipline in education and piety. The Lutheran theological principle of “*sola fidei*” certainly had some influence on Catholic theology and the turn of European culture toward the subject. This occurred in conjunction with Catholic humanism and Italian “civic humanism,” which gave individuals a larger role than ancient patterns of thought, but which were still very much communitarian.<sup>54</sup> Jansenism had a lasting influence on Catholic thought, especially in matters of conscience and individual piety, as did the Jesuit reaction against Jansenism, which was also focused on the spiritual and ethical development of the individual and individual faith experiences.<sup>55</sup> Each of these helped to radicalize the interiorization and individualization of faith, effecting a cultural shift in industrializing Western societies that had a significant impact on their structural and economic makeup.

Gunda Werner has argued that an essential part of the process is the establishment of the necessity for individual, auricular confession at the Fourth Lateran Council (1215 CE) and that this was the only acceptable form of

<sup>54</sup> Luigino Bruni, *Civil Happiness: Economics and Human Flourishing in Historical Perspective* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 24–30.

<sup>55</sup> Lehner, *The Catholic Enlightenment*, 19–25.

the sacrament, outside of exceptional circumstances.<sup>56</sup> The controversial decision of the Lateran Council was confirmed by Trent, on the initiative of Charles Borromeo, and penance moved definitively from the altar to the “closed” confessional. Since Trent, the sacrament was subject to greater individualization and privatization than any other, in both form—individual, removed from others, and shut up in a confessional booth—and content.<sup>57</sup> The institution of private, auricular confession and its mandated use of a confessional booth, especially in the 1917 Code of Canon Law, confirmed the priority of individual conscience in the believer’s relationship with God and the church, which productively empowered the individual in some respects. However, it also robbed the individual believer of responsibility or agency for their conscience because conceptions of “sin” were strictly controlled and imposed on the one confessing by the priest who offered absolution and the church and culture, which shaped and regulated the language of sin.<sup>58</sup> This was particularly the case with the *Summas*, which were produced for confessors after the council, as well as in the practice of priests as defined in canon law to “‘enquire diligently’ into all the circumstances of the penitent and his [*sic*] sins, on the clear presumption that the penitent himself was incapable or even untrustworthy.”<sup>59</sup>

Under this system of discipline, the faithful were implicitly presupposed to be less competent than the priest-confessor in the examination of their own conscience, creating a clear power dynamic as well as a potential mechanism for control. By restricting penance to auricular confession, the understanding of sin itself was further “subjectivized” as a moment of responsibility as a human subject and with the focus on the specific “sinful deeds” of the individual, reinforcing the emerging “modern” understanding of human freedom as individual liberty. The dual focus on individual acts of sin and the interiorization of conscience had the double effect of weakening the

<sup>56</sup> Gunda Werner, “Specifically Catholic: At the Intersection of Power, Maleness, Holiness, and Sexualised Violence. A Theological and Historical Comment on Power,” *Journal of the European Society of Women in Theological Research* 27 (2019): 147–74, doi:10.2143/ESWTR.27.0.3286560.

<sup>57</sup> Peter Krämer, “Einzelbeichte. Einzige oder eine Form des Bußsakramentes?,” *Trierer theologische Zeitschrift. Pastor Bonus* 107 (1998): 214. See also John W. O’Malley, *Trent: What Happened at the Council* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2013), 152–54.

<sup>58</sup> See Michel Foucault, “On the Government of the Living (1980),” in *Religion and Culture*, ed. Jeremy R. Carrette, Manchester Studies in Religion, Culture and Gender (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 154–57.

<sup>59</sup> John Mahoney, *The Making of Moral Theology: A Study of the Roman Catholic Tradition*, Reprint, Clarendon Paperbacks (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 21.

bonds of penance with its ecclesial and social aspects and reinforcing the hierarchical ordering of the laity under the power of the clergy.<sup>60</sup>

This continued well into nineteenth- and twentieth-century manualist theological training for priests, which assigned direct rubrics for various sins and their corresponding penalties, essentially commodifying the individual's relationship to the sacrament and to forgiveness itself. Sins and their corresponding penances could be computed *quantitatively* in numbers of specific prayers that acted almost like currency, or at least a type of exchange. As a method of self-reflection and spiritual direction, the implementation of auricular confession and its later economized forms exemplifies how modern centralized hierarchies function as a system of surveillance from top to bottom, while also functioning from the bottom up.<sup>61</sup> The individuals at whom pastoral power is directed internalize the discipline and reflexively apply it in their relation to the whole. Further, in Catholic eschatology, the near total separation of "church" from "world" during this period led to over-emphasis on individual salvation, without consideration for the social and political aspects of salvation as something corporate and even affecting all of creation. Hence, Henri de Lubac's 1947 book *Catholicism*, with its original subtitle, *Les aspects sociaux du dogme* (The social aspects of dogma), and a chapter on "Person and Society," was not only an innovation, but also theologically controversial.<sup>62</sup> The legacy of this theology continues to be felt in the present day, particularly in the confessional on the few occasions when Catholics in the industrialized West actually do attend and receive this increasingly rare sacrament. As such, it constitutes a cultural and structural shift toward individualization and acceleration.

### *Centralization of Church and Law*

The advent of the Ultramontane Church in the nineteenth century followed the secular models of bureaucratization and centralization of the modern nation-states in many ways. The pope was styled as an absolute monarch who was empowered with divine authority to govern the church

<sup>60</sup> Gunda Werner, "Bildung und Kontrolle. Historische Rückführung des Narrativ eines 'gesunden' Sündenbewusstseins in exemplarischen lehramtlichen Verlautbarungen nach dem Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil," in "Unheilige Theologie." *Theologie und sexueller Missbrauch*, eds. Magnus Striet and Rita Werden, *Katholizismus im Umbruch* 9 (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2019), 153–55.

<sup>61</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 177.

<sup>62</sup> Joseph A. Komonchak, "Theology and Culture at Mid-Century: The Example of Henri de Lubac," *Theological Studies* 51, no. 4 (1990): 591–94; Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, trans. Lancelot C. Sheppard and Elizabeth Englund, OCD (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988).

in all areas of the world. With Pius IX's *Tuas Libenter* and the introduction of the concept of "ordinary magisterium," an "official" magisterium was placed between theology and the sources of faith, thereby reducing theology to explaining the official magisterium.<sup>63</sup> Theology existed to further clarify papal teaching and to "demonstrate it from the sources of faith or defend it against opposition."<sup>64</sup> The theological plurality of previous centuries was standardized through the suppression of "German" theology, the imposition of the neoscholastic method, and the eventual separation of positive theology from speculative theology.<sup>65</sup> In fact, as demonstrated by Hubert Wolf, "ordinary magisterium" as a concept emerged out of the polemic between "Roman" and "German" theology.<sup>66</sup> It was invented around 1855 by the Jesuit theologian Joseph Kleutgen as a justification for suppressing the use of new philosophical methodologies in theology, particularly in discussing matters that had not been dogmatically defined.

The concept of ordinary magisterium allowed for new opinions and discussions on philosophical and theological topics previously thought to be "open" to be closed through an appeal to nondogmatic statements or teachings. Kleutgen likely stands behind *Tuas Libenter*, which was an intervention against the 1863 gathering of theologians in Munich (*die Münchner Gelehrtenversammlung*), including Ignaz von Döllinger, and therefore also against much of the language used at Vatican I.<sup>67</sup> Previous engagements with liberalism, the Enlightenment, and political philosophy, as well as ecclesial-political programs like Gallicanism, Febronianism, and Josephism, virtually died out by the middle of the nineteenth century, with Vatican I as the definitive end of such diversity. The later Americanist and Modernist crises were political and theological reactions against this centralization, but both of these were short lived and condemned by Roman authorities. Modernism cast a long shadow, however, and the effects of that crisis, regardless of whether there had ever been

<sup>63</sup> Prusak, *The Church Unfinished*, 253.

<sup>64</sup> Wolf, "'Wahr ist, was gelehrt wird' statt 'Gelehrt wird, was wahr ist'? Zur Erfindung des 'ordentlichen' Lehramts," 255. My translation.

<sup>65</sup> Walter Kasper, *Die Methoden der Dogmatik: Einheit und Vielheit*, Kleine Schriften zu Theologie (Munich: Kösel-Verlag KG, 1967), 23–29.

<sup>66</sup> Wolf, "'Wahr ist, was gelehrt wird' statt 'Gelehrt wird, was wahr ist'? Zur Erfindung des 'ordentlichen' Lehramts," 239–52.

<sup>67</sup> Wolf, "'Wahr ist, was gelehrt wird' statt 'Gelehrt wird, was wahr ist'? Zur Erfindung des 'ordentlichen' Lehramts," 253–54; Franz Xaver Bischof and Georg Essen, eds., *Theologie, kirchliches Lehramt und öffentliche Meinung: Die Münchener Gelehrtenversammlung von 1863 und ihre Folgen*, Münchener kirchenhistorische Studien. Neue Folge 4 (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 2015).

any historical “modernists” strictly speaking, continued to be felt until Vatican II.

Advances in communications technology (i.e., structural and economic) increased the speed with which the pope was able to govern the church, while also enabling him to govern ever more aspects of ecclesial life and to control the development and communication of theology and faith. The measures taken against modernism, including censorship, diocesan watch committees, and mandatory reporting to Rome at three-year intervals, would certainly not have been thinkable or possible without modern means of communication and even surveillance.<sup>68</sup> Such communication enabled more individualized forms of discipline to be quickly and centrally overseen and exercised.

Important examples of this discipline can be found in the modernist crisis. The old curial system and the *règlement* of Benedict XIV created some checks and balances that slowed the exercise of disciplinary power. The Congregations had become obstacles for the work of Pius X and his anti-modernist cardinals, and so they undertook a program of modernization and “of centralised and effective rule, control, and swift action against dissidents.”<sup>69</sup> Despite resistance, Pius took several modernizing steps that continued after his death. First, the promulgation of *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* in 1907 and the anti-modernist oath in 1910 provided tools to directly combat dissent and impose discipline. The surveillance and censorship performed by *La Sapinière* can also be counted as part of the “technology” of discipline, along with the means of modern communication that allowed it to exist and to enforce *Pascendi*.<sup>70</sup> To speed up the working of the Index, the *Consistoriale* under Cardinal Gaetano de Lai was ordered to “assist the Index with the prohibition of books for use in seminaries.”<sup>71</sup> Then, after Pius X’s death, Cardinal Rafael Merry del Val became Secretary of the Holy Office, with the result that he

<sup>68</sup> See Pius X, *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*, September 8, 1907, 44–58, [http://www.vatican.va/content/pius-x/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-x\\_enc\\_19070908\\_pascendi-dominici-gregis.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/pius-x/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-x_enc_19070908_pascendi-dominici-gregis.html).

<sup>69</sup> Claus Arnold, “The Roman Magisterium and Anti-Modernism,” in *Religious Modernism in the Low Countries*, eds. Leo Kenis and Ernestine van der Wall, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 75 (Leuven and Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2013), 167.

<sup>70</sup> Arnold, “The Roman Magisterium and Anti-Modernism,” 167–68; Claus Arnold, “Pius X, Merry Del Val and the Cases of Alfred Loisy and George Tyrrell: Institutional Aspects of Antimodernism,” in *Le Pontificat Romain Dans l’époque Contemporaine/The Papacy in the Contemporary Age*, ed. Giovanni Vian, Studi Di Storia 5 (Venice: Università Ca’ Foscari Venezia, 2018), 21–22, <http://edizionicafoscari.unive.it/libri/978-88-6969-256-7/pius-x-merry-del-val-and-the-cases-of-alfred-loisy/>.

<sup>71</sup> Arnold, “The Roman Magisterium and Anti-Modernism,” 168.

centralized and expanded its disciplinary powers, even reabsorbing the Congregation of the Index in 1917.<sup>72</sup>

Thus technical-economic, cultural, and social acceleration all worked together: the popes took over modern advances in technology to more efficiently disseminate centralized teachings (which also increased in number and frequency), reorganized the traditional local hierarchies on a more centralized and bureaucratic model, standardized the “Tridentine” liturgy, and affected a cultural separation of Catholics from non-Catholic or secular societies in which they lived. Beginning with Pius X, we see the implementation of a modernized decisionistic form of “executive” procedures and the use of new *technologies*, both in the common and Foucauldian sense of the word, for surveillance, communication, and discipline broadly communicated but directed at the individual conscience. This both allowed for and reinforced the spiritual individualization of faith, particularly given the church was in some ways cut off from civil society and Catholic identity focused on salvation through the now highly individualized experience of receiving the sacraments dispensed by the priest.

Likewise, dogmatic functional differentiation, especially in the concepts used and popularized by Matthias Scheeben, further reinforced the divide between the *ecclesia docens* and *ecclesia discens*, creating more subgroups and specializations within those two already separate parts of the church, especially within the former. The “Teaching Apostolate,” or *ecclesia docens*, in particular consists of the pope and the bishops.<sup>73</sup> This is presented as active, “a living organism, and consequently has the power of producing auxiliary members to assist in its work, and of conferring upon them the credentials required for their different functions.”<sup>74</sup> Such auxiliary members include subgroups delegated by the bishops and the pope. The “listening” church, or “Body of the Faithful,” although united “organically” are essentially passive unless they are directly part of the Teaching Apostolate or an auxiliary

<sup>72</sup> Arnold, “Pius X, Merry Del Val and the Cases of Alfred Loisy and George Tyrrell,” 57: “There were very clear theological and political choices behind the measures taken by Pius X and Merry del Val against Tyrrell. It would be more precise to characterise this way of handling as *executive*. The doctrine of the papal primacy enables the Roman pontiff to act directly and freely at any time, even without the help and advice of his own Congregations in the Roman Curia.”

<sup>73</sup> See Otfried Müller, “Zum Begriff der Tradition in der Theologie der letzten hundert Jahre,” *Münchener Theologische Zeitschrift* 4 (1953): 164–86. Cf. Thomas Söding, ed., *Der Spürsinn des Gottesvolkes: Eine Diskussion mit der Internationalen Theologischen Kommission*, Quaestiones disputatae 281 (Freiburg and Basel and Vienna: Herder, 2016).

<sup>74</sup> Joseph Wilhelm, DD, and Thomas B. Scannell, DD, eds., *A Manual of Catholic Theology Based on Scheeben’s Dogmatik*, 4th ed., vol. I (London and New York and Cincinnati and Chicago: Kegan Paul, Trench Trübner and Co./Benzinger Bros., 1909), 40.

thereof, and this includes theologians who, despite formerly holding a distinct form of magisterium, are now part of the *ecclesia discens*.<sup>75</sup>

The codification of canon law into one modern code in 1917 was a major step in functional differentiation, just as with liberal modern nation-states who centralized and codified civil and criminal law codes. Against the previous traditions, this universalized and particularized the reach of Roman jurisprudence to each individual Catholic, bypassing the traditional jurisdiction of the bishops and local communities. Thus, the individual believer's relation to the faith could be directly correlated with and guided by the law, as well as through the exercise of Christian morality, which was now explicitly subordinated to a legal code. Here, the "moral life" was increasingly seen as "the handmaid of canon law," furthering the interiorization and individualization of faith, in particular through the sacrament of penance, which, after Trent, increasingly lost its liturgical context and was seen primarily as a juridical act.<sup>76</sup> The Code of 1917 heavily emphasized this aspect, explicitly granting the priest juridical authority over penitents, underlining the legalistic character of the sacrament.<sup>77</sup> Strangely, despite the regulation of individual faith-life and conscience via the law, the laity is barely an object of the Code of 1917, with only one canon (can. 682) out of 2,414 applying to laypeople.<sup>78</sup> If canon law is indeed "applied ecclesiology," then it is difficult to see "the church" as including the laity except peripherally and as subject to the authority of the ordained.<sup>79</sup>

### *Corporatization and Digital Immediacy*

The church is often portrayed as having changed course entirely after Vatican II "overcame" much of the earlier neoscholastic focus on individual salvation. The International Theological Commission went so far as to assert that Vatican II had the effect of:

<sup>75</sup> Wilhelm and Scannell, *A Manual of Catholic Theology Based on Scheeben's Dogmatik*, I:43-45. At 45: The "Teaching Body [possesses] Active Infallibility, that is, inability to lead astray; in the Body Taught it is Passive Infallibility that is, incapability of being led astray."

<sup>76</sup> Mahoney, *The Making of Moral Theology*, 35.

<sup>77</sup> Krämer, "Einzelbeichte," 212-13.

<sup>78</sup> Norbert Lüdecke and Georg Bier, *Das römisch-katholische Kirchenrecht: Eine Einführung* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2012), 98-99.

<sup>79</sup> Robert Ombres, OP, "What Future for the Laity? Law and History," in *Governance and Authority in the Roman Catholic Church: Beginning a Conversation*, eds. Noel Timms and Kenneth Wilson (London: SPCK, 2000), 92.

Banishing the caricature of an active hierarchy and a passive laity, and in particular the notion of a strict separation between the teaching Church (*Ecclesia docens*) and the learning Church (*Ecclesia discens*) the council taught that all the baptised participate in their own proper way in the three offices of Christ. In particular, it taught that Christ fulfills his prophetic office not only by means of the hierarchy but also via the laity.<sup>80</sup>

This is not entirely the case, however, especially with regard to the process of individualization on a structural level. Despite the Council's ecclesiological pronouncements, the realized ecclesiology of the church retains a form of two-tiered ecclesiology because of "subtle but effective hierarchical safeguards built into the teaching of the Council."<sup>81</sup> *Lumen Gentium* asserts the "true equality" (LG 32) of all the faithful, but in a way that could be interpreted as "equality of dignity," and not in the contemporary sense of "equality of rights."<sup>82</sup> And although the Council recovered the three offices of Christ in their application to all the baptized, as acknowledged by the ITC, it also drew an essential distinction between the universal and hierarchical priesthood (LG 10). According to John P. Beal, this distinction was interpreted by later canonists and especially by John Paul II to be an ontological difference, which then reinforces the divide between clergy and laity.<sup>83</sup>

The proliferation of life-options in the market forces choice—integrating one option into self-identity while thereby excluding the others and disassociating oneself from them. The obligation to choose forces us to become more hyper-specialized as the number of options available to us grows consonant with social acceleration, making identity formation even more radically individualized. Under these conditions, Catholic identity becomes another form of branding that is consumed individually—it is integrated into the "brand" of the individual. The "culture wars" and use of the opposing terms "culture of life" and "culture of death" have aided this process by drawing

<sup>80</sup> International Theological Commission, *Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church* (2014): 4, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_cti\\_20140610\\_sensus-fidei\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20140610_sensus-fidei_en.html).

<sup>81</sup> Lüdecke and Bier, *Das römisch-katholische Kirchenrecht*, 101. My translation.

<sup>82</sup> Lüdecke and Bier, *Das römisch-katholische Kirchenrecht*, 101.

<sup>83</sup> John P. Beal, "Something There Is That Doesn't Love a Law: Canon Law and Its Discontents," in *The Crisis of Authority in Catholic Modernity*, ed. Michael James Lacey and Francis Oakley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 142: "Despite the fact that the Second Vatican Council clearly intended its identification of the 'secular' character and vocation of the laity to be merely descriptive of the typical situation of the lay faithful, it has become, especially in the teaching of John Paul II, an ontological definition of the lay state." Beal considers this to be a "misinterpretation" of the text that has nevertheless been made the more or less official interpretation.



boundaries for individual Catholic identity. Terminology like this, and the more recent use of “religious freedom” as a cause célèbre by the US bishops, is both symptom and cause of the “sequencing” or digitalization of time, wherein temporality is increasingly broken into a series of moments punctuated by decisions in the moment between multiple subjective options.<sup>84</sup> The “choice” for or against Catholic identity is taken out of its context as living tradition and placed in a sphere more akin to modern marketing and consumer culture. It is no longer a social imaginary or life-world that we inhabit in various ways over a long period of time, but a series of moment-to-moment decisions for or against different aspects or objects that represent the brand. For the individual believer, this becomes a part of “identity branding,” which is further reinforced by practices associated with social media.

Insofar as this “branding” or commodification of Catholicism participates in the process of social acceleration, it also fosters an increasingly individualistic type of Catholic faith where the individual believer really only needs to have an “immediate” relationship with a representative of the church’s *authority*, rather than being embedded in the faith of a community. This is nowhere more evident than in the problem of “digital immediacy,” as argued by Anthony J. Godzieba.<sup>85</sup> The digital dissemination of information makes it easier for the church to exercise its authority in the world and to directly address specific individuals; encyclicals and condemnations can arrive digitally and immediately, and this acceleration and direct association with *individual authority* leads to a kind of “flattening,” or an inability to distinguish between different levels of magisterial teaching: “The immediately available aesthetic object is tradition-less and self-interpreting.”<sup>86</sup>

Statements or teachings of lower levels on the traditional order of types of magisterium can be isolated from their context and absolutized as representative of “Catholicism” or “the church” writ large. There are two aspects to this: first, the degree to which digital immediacy is helpful for the hierarchy and used to present a unified and immediate message; and second, the way in which the contemporary media ecosystem, informed by the twenty-four-hour news cycle and social media, treats every story the same: sensational, context-free, and decisive.<sup>87</sup> Hence why statements by Pope Francis

<sup>84</sup> Douglas Rushkoff, *Present Shock: When Everything Happens Now* (New York: Current, 2013), 110–15.

<sup>85</sup> Anthony J. Godzieba, “The Magisterium in an Age of Digital Reproduction,” in *When the Magisterium Intervenes: The Magisterium and Theologians in Today’s Church*, ed. Richard R. Gaillardetz (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 140–53.

<sup>86</sup> Godzieba, “The Magisterium in an Age of Digital Reproduction,” 147.

<sup>87</sup> See Rushkoff, *Present Shock*, 43–58.

given in interviews with journalists are treated by the media as definitive, and how similar statements by previous popes on celibacy, the liturgy, Christology, or end-of-life care were elevated to high-level magisterial status by specific sectors of the Catholic world that often happen to represent conservative interests.<sup>88</sup> When everything is available *now* it all appears equally relevant, and the only question is what the self-interpreting individual decides is meaningful for optimizing self-interest in the context of individual branding. It is a distinctly modern phenomenon that, when searching for official church teaching on a matter, we very often refer to “what the pope says,” bypassing the various levels of magisterial and theological authorities, tradition, and the interwoven realities of the particular and universal churches and the *sensus fidelium*.

There are two main driving factors behind this trend: first is the gradual expansion of, or uncertainty concerning what constitutes “ordinary magisterium,” or at least what can be presented as falling under this category of teaching. The many forms of papal statements, and the statements of Roman Congregations, appear in digital format, able to be widely disseminated and seemingly, without context. Their availability and lack of contextual embeddedness makes it easier for media outlets and political interests to present things as authoritative and even definitive or infallible, and therefore all the more important for the Catholic “brand.” Second, there is the wider contemporary problem of mistaking “data” for narrative, or the eschewal of narrative altogether in favor of the idea that the availability of vast amounts of information makes the data contained therein inherently meaningful. This is apparent in the many solutions to societal problems pushed by tech companies, which generally involve more automation and increased data collection. The inherent prejudices of the people and, more often, programs collecting data, are often overlooked or dismissed altogether, with the corporations presenting their “data-based solutions” as if they were objective and inherently self-interpreting.

Directly related to the problem of branding is the “corporatization” of the church, particularly in the late twentieth century. Increasingly, the pope has acted as the “CEO” of the church, where bishops are merely treated as middle managers and “bishops as well as theologians become mere reporters of what appears to be an already fully formed, self-interpreting message.”<sup>89</sup> The gradual marginalization of the People of God ecclesiology following the “Final Report of the 1985 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops” has contributed significantly to this trend, effectively combining centralization with

<sup>88</sup> Godzieba, “The Magisterium in an Age of Digital Reproduction,” 142–46.

<sup>89</sup> Godzieba, “The Magisterium in an Age of Digital Reproduction,” 148.

corporatization. Bradford Hinze has helpfully summarized how, rather than constructively reckon with the reception of the conciliar People of God ecclesiology, it was negatively framed and its participative and collectivist characteristics minimized.<sup>90</sup> A more heavily centralized communion ecclesiology became the “alternative” that justified “growing centralization and the reassertion of clerical authority” and “a lack of collective mutual responsibility and accountability” while also placing restrictions on constructive dialogue.<sup>91</sup>

What followed was a weakening of national and regional Episcopal conferences and their pastoral authority, as well as a restriction of diocesan synods that discourages them from discussing “critical questions and concerns about pressing issues facing the church,” along with strict oversight of synodal findings by Roman Congregations.<sup>92</sup> Beginning with Vatican II, and particularly the Decree concerning the Pastoral Office of Bishops, *Christus Dominus*, parish councils began to be implemented and the voices of laypeople became a more “official” part of church structures. Starting in 1987, however, they have been structurally marginalized or even, in many cases, dismantled, as evidenced by Hinze’s presentation of parish councils in the Archdiocese of New York. Hinze has shown the contingent and fragile nature of contemporary parish councils, highlighting that not only are they legally consultative in nature, but their role and even existence is essentially up to the local ordinary.<sup>93</sup>

As a group, the bishops are generally expected to give the “party line” message on issues and to defer to the Vatican on matters of policy, including theology and law, even swearing “submission of will and intellect” to the teachings of both the pope and college of bishops even when they do not intend to proclaim a teaching through a definitive act.<sup>94</sup> This was radicalized by the *motu proprio Ad Tuendam Fidem* in 1998 to apply to all of the faithful as a legal obligation, extending the tradition of interiorizing and individualizing the faith through the instrument of the law.<sup>95</sup> Further, digital immediacy allows centralized messaging to do an end run around the bishops altogether

<sup>90</sup> Bradford E. Hinze, *Prophetic Obedience: Ecclesiology for a Dialogical Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016), 44–48.

<sup>91</sup> Hinze, *Prophetic Obedience*, 48.

<sup>92</sup> Hinze, *Prophetic Obedience*, 50.

<sup>93</sup> Hinze, *Prophetic Obedience*, 50–64.

<sup>94</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Formula to Be Used for the Profession of Faith and for the Oath of Fidelity to Assume an Office to Be Exercised in the Name of the Church*, July 1, 1988, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19880701\\_professio-fidei\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19880701_professio-fidei_en.html).

<sup>95</sup> Wolf, “‘Wahr ist, was gelehrt wird’ statt ‘Gelehrt wird, was wahr ist’? Zur Erfindung des ‘ordentlichen’ Lehramts,” 238.

because the desired message delivered directly through digital means or reported uncritically by media outlets “appears to be an already fully formed, self-interpreting message.”<sup>96</sup> This message reaches people regardless of the role or interpretive obligations of the tradition, local ordinaries, or theologians, giving these the undesirable options of *ex post facto* interpretation (often in the sense of trying to “un-ring” a bell), seemingly open “dissent” against authority, or repetition and confirmation of what has already been said, ideally in more accessible and simplified language for consumption by a mass audience.

The relativization of Episcopal conferences by limiting their decision-making authority, failing to resolve the conflict between the relative authority of national conferences and individual bishops, and their expected subordination on theological matters to Roman Congregations both exacerbates the issue of digital immediacy and further corporatizes the episcopacy, whose members are fully dependent on the curial bureaucracy and the pope who appoints the individual bishops.<sup>97</sup> In particular, the expression of this subordination in the 1983 Code of Canon Law has had especially disastrous effects with regard to the sex-abuse crisis. Although the bishops already agreed to guidelines for handling accusations and alleged abusers in 1992, those guidelines had no legal force and, in practice, every bishop was free to proceed as he wished in his own diocese.<sup>98</sup> Canon 455 §1 of the 1983 Code stipulates that: “A conference of bishops can only issue general decrees in cases where universal law has prescribed it or a special mandate of the Apostolic See has established it either *motu proprio* or at the request of the conference itself.” The bishops did not request the relevant authority from Rome to legislate for themselves, and Rome did not intervene with a *motu proprio* that would have either forced the issue or provided the prescribed “special mandate.”<sup>99</sup> This lack of action led to another decade of victimization, and it provided the opportunity to continue to cover up abuse

<sup>96</sup> Godzieba, “The Magisterium in an Age of Digital Reproduction,” 148.

<sup>97</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Apostolos Suos*, May 21, 1998, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/motu\\_proprio/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_motu-proprio\\_22071998\\_apostolos-suos.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/motu_proprio/documents/hf_jp-ii_motu-proprio_22071998_apostolos-suos.html).

<sup>98</sup> Nicholas P. Cafardi, *Before Dallas: The U.S. Bishops' Response to Clergy Sexual Abuse of Children* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2008), 90.

<sup>99</sup> *Code of Canon Law: Latin-English Edition* (Washington, DC: Canon Law Society of America, 1983), can. 455 §1. §4 of can. 455 is also particularly relevant here for the lack of cooperation between individual bishops and the national conference with regard to the voluntary guidelines: “In cases in which neither universal law nor a special mandate of the Apostolic See has granted the power mentioned in §1 to a conference of bishops, the competence of each diocesan bishop remains intact, nor is a conference or its president able to act in the name of all the bishops unless each and every

without legal consequences. Decades later, it is hard to read this as merely a series of coincidences or individual failures, but as representing the “party line” in order to protect the integrity of the institution and therefore also protect the value of the “brand.”

As discussed previously, acceleration is a consequence of centralization and bureaucratization in classical modernity. These initially allowed social and political processes to function faster and simultaneously as they are separated into different areas of competence. In late modernity, however, social acceleration has overtaken the old, centralized structures, which, in many cases, are increasingly unable to cope with the speed of contemporary society, economy, and politics. The resulting deregulation of social and political structures in favor of economic acceleration contributes to the breakdown of liberal democratic governance by deliberately undermining the foundation of the system itself.<sup>100</sup> This same pattern repeats itself in the modern church. Centralization, bureaucratization, and high-modern corporatization attempt to reduce Catholic identity to a unified brand, thereby politicizing and polarizing personal religious identity. But just as in secular culture, this has the side effect of pluralization—the immediacy of communication necessarily creates a plurality of individual responses, which, when combined with an interiorized and individualized faith further entrenches each person in their own opinion.

The immediate availability of magisterial or other statements has the effect of both communicating a unified message and, by appealing directly to individuals or specific interest groups, convincing these parties that their own interpretation is correct; in essence, digital immediacy leads to a form of “magisterial deregulation.” The contextual and traditional “brakes” on interpretation (theological and episcopal) are removed or no longer function properly. Therefore, centralization under the absolute authority of Rome or the pope can only go so far until it begins to produce its opposite and even undermine its own authoritarian foundation. The only option in this case, other than comprehensive structural change, is to identify the “individuals” and groups that most closely and fervently adhere to the interpretation desired by the authority and confirm these as the “true” or “real” bearers of Catholic identity. This further polarizes and pluralizes the church by alienating large numbers of people in favor of a “holy remnant.” When this happens, the church has abandoned a key part of its own identity.

bishop has given consent.” Although it was possible to “agree” to the guidelines publicly, they could be ignored or selectively enforced without consequences or oversight.

<sup>100</sup> Rosa, *Social Acceleration*, 203–07.

The investigations of theologians under John Paul II and Benedict XVI, as well as in the seemingly uniform, coordinated, and centralized cover-up of worldwide abuse of minors and vulnerable adults by clergy further indicate both a corporatization of the church and the shadow side of John Paul's "personalism."<sup>101</sup> In his social encyclicals, important as they are for their economic critiques, we see that "his personalist perspective clarifies the experience of the human individual, [but] it fails to focus on the institution."<sup>102</sup> Benedict has a similar problem in *Caritas in Veritate*, where he seems to subordinate structures and institutions to responsible human action, essentially saying that it is people who ultimately make decisions and guide larger forces so their responsible free action is what is most essential for development. This is true, but only to a degree, and I think it shows a troubling degree of individualization in Benedict's understanding of human agency in society. It also ignores social inertia and the outsized influence of institutional culture on "free" decision-making. In particular, economy and finance are presented as "instruments" that "can be used badly when those at the helm are motivated by purely selfish ends," drawing a distinction between "the market" and "darkened" human reason.<sup>103</sup> But because the market system is merely an instrument, it is ultimately "not the instrument that must be called to account, but individuals" (CV 36). This is a clear qualification of, and even break with, much of earlier social teaching, which criticized economic and ideological liberalism *in se* and with some of Karol Wojtyła's earlier writings.<sup>104</sup>

The surprising lack of institutional critique in *Caritas in Veritate* is particularly difficult to understand in light of the context in which the encyclical was promulgated: directly after the onset of the 2008 economic crisis and in the

<sup>101</sup> Bradford E. Hinze, "A Decade of Disciplining Theologians," in *When the Magisterium Intervenes: The Magisterium and Theologians in Today's Church*, ed. Richard R. Gaillardetz (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 3–39.

<sup>102</sup> Daniel R. Finn, "John Paul II and the Moral Ecology of Markets," *Theological Studies* 59, no. 4 (1998): 665, doi:10.1177/004056399805900404.

<sup>103</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* (hereafter cited in text as CV), June 29, 2009, 36, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20090629\\_caritas-in-veritate.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html).

<sup>104</sup> See Gerald J. Beyer, "Karol Wojtyła's *Katolicka Etyka Społeczna* as Precursor and Hermeneutic Key to Pope John Paul II's Economic Teaching," *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 79, no. 4 (2020): 1111–45, doi:10.1111/ajes.12358. It is notable, however, that despite Pius XI's condemnation of liberalism and its many effects in his first encyclicals, *Quadragesimo Anno* 101 curiously asserts: "Leo XIII sought to adjust this economic system according to the norms of right order; hence, it is evident that this system is not to be condemned in itself. And surely it is not of its own nature vicious."

midst of the Great Recession, and long after the institutional failures of the sex-abuse crisis were widely known. Although we can see it in continuity with earlier critiques insofar as the *intentions* behind liberalism are presented as inherently selfish, atheistic, and immoral, the praise of individual initiative and failure to see structural problems speaks to the blindness of both Benedict XVI and John Paul II to the structural foundations of the sex-abuse crisis, as well as their decades-long failure to adequately address it. The highly centralized, corporate culture of their papacies is still not particularly receptive to such institutional criticism.

### *Recent Developments in the Papacy of Francis*

In 2012, Anthony Godzieba wrote, “With power and authority arranged under the pressure of immediacy, *communio* now replicates a contemporary business model that ignores history and is oriented toward short-term gains.”<sup>105</sup> This is an extremely important observation, but it reflects only one side of the problem: the church has not just adopted contemporary forms that encourage acceleration and individualization; it helped to create and foster these phenomena through various historical and theo-political forms. These include the proliferation of an exceedingly legalized and individualized theology of sin and sacrament, the theo-political form of the church and Western notions of sovereignty, as well as the perpetuation of an ecclesiology that makes institutional criticism difficult in favor of placing blame on individual “bad actors” who are portrayed as not truly representing the system that produced them. At the very least, the church has supported individualization, while also criticizing its effects in “the world” and ignoring its causes within ecclesial structures. In moral theology, it may be the case that an overly individualistic theology of sin and penance resulted in soteriological individualism.

The writings of Pope Francis have indicated a shift toward more substantive systemic and institutional critiques, especially of economization and the colonization of time by “space,” or the compression of time into the present moment, without regard for long-term consequences and possibilities.<sup>106</sup> Although *Laudato Si’* and *Evangelii Gaudium* do not name capitalism or

<sup>105</sup> Godzieba, “The Magisterium in an Age of Digital Reproduction,” 152–53.

<sup>106</sup> Pope Francis, *On Care for our Common Home: Laudato Si’* (hereafter cited in text as *LS*), May 24, 2015, 138, 176–181, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html); Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (hereafter cited in text as *EG*), November 24, 2013, 202–08, 222, [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html).

liberalism directly, *Fratelli Tutti* unambiguously criticizes an “individualistic” liberalism that works only for the powerful and specifically neoliberalism as a kind of faith in the magic of the marketplace (*FT* 155, 163, 167, 168). This marks a partial return to the previous critical tradition of Catholic Social Teaching, and one that is extremely necessary and timely. Francis argues that the problems of economic inequality and environmental devastation are structural (*LS* 48–52, 106–09, 219). As such, they require structural responses and cannot rely on individual efforts, morality, charity, or goodwill (54). These are inadequate to the task before us because:

Growth in justice requires more than economic growth, while presupposing such growth: it requires decisions, programmes, mechanisms and processes specifically geared to a better distribution of income, the creation of sources of employment and an integral promotion of the poor which goes beyond a simple welfare mentality. (*EG* 204)

Part of the impetus for such a structural and communal approach is also a critique of individualism based on a creation theology that presupposes the social nature of humanity, first in relation to God, and second in relation to creation, including other human beings in society.<sup>107</sup> Overcoming individualism would necessarily lead to changes in culture and society, and therefore to “a different lifestyle” (*LS* 208). *Fratelli Tutti* argues explicitly that social institutions are necessary to help individuals and communities work for the common good (*FT* 108) and that the concept of “charity” has a political dimension and can be practiced structurally (186). The encyclical even includes concrete policy proposals aimed at promoting the common good and changing current paradigms (129–31).

The need for a change in lifestyle and culture has been echoed in Francis’ statements on the perniciousness of “clerical culture” and clericalism within the church. These critiques also indicate a systemic-critical approach to the problems of institutional and spiritual individualism, but the actual impact of Francis’ remarks and what permanent changes to this culture will be made remains to be seen. As Francis highlights in *Evangelii Gaudium*, changes suggested or promised by Vatican II remain unfulfilled.<sup>108</sup> Citing chapter 3 of *Lumen Gentium* on the hierarchical structure of the church, he

<sup>107</sup> See *LS* 119: “Our relationship with the environment can never be isolated from our relationship with others and with God. Otherwise, it would be nothing more than romantic individualism dressed up in ecological garb, locking us into a stifling immanence.”

<sup>108</sup> Kristin Colberg, “Looking at Vatican I’s Pastor Aeternus 150 Years Later: A Fresh Consideration of the Council’s Significance Yesterday and Today,” *Horizons* 46, no. 2 (2019): 345, doi:10.1017/hor.2019.57.



states quite frankly that “the central structures of the universal Church also need to hear the call to pastoral conversion” (EG 32). This critical remark refers quite specifically to the unrealized potential of national episcopal conferences since Vatican II as a result of “excessive centralization” and the fact that their juridical status remains undefined. As a result, their authority in doctrinal matters is also ambiguous at best. Further, Francis goes on to challenge the church, in light of its pastoral mission, to “abandon the complacent attitude that says: ‘We have always done it this way’” (EG 33). This is an incredibly important insight, and it could be part of the blueprint for strengthening the local and particular churches, but that has yet to happen in a systematic way.

There are, however, some concrete attempts being made in that direction. First, there is the upcoming constitutional reform of the Roman Curia. The draft of the constitution itself, *Praedicate Evangelium*, apparently reimagines the role of the Curia as at the service of the bishops, rather than, at least practically, the other way around.<sup>109</sup> The effects of the reform on the organizational and administrative structure of the Curia, the dicasteries, and on the collegial possibilities of the bishops and their particular churches will be of long-reaching importance once the constitution has been promulgated and implemented.

Second, the “synodal” movement (*der Synodale Weg*) in Germany could produce an important collegial model for the church, at least in the industrialized West, but it also has very real dangers and limits. According to the prominent canonist Norbert Lüdecke, both the fears of a shake-up in the hierarchy and hopes for a revolution by some of the laity are likely exaggerated because of the legal framework of the process itself—the clergy hold the ability to block a two-thirds majority decision, and any decisions would, in actuality, only be consultative recommendations without the force of law.<sup>110</sup> The discussions in this area have been met with at least cautious tolerance from Rome and from Francis in particular. In his letter addressing the assembly, Francis even explicitly criticizes xenophobia as a form of “slavery” that promotes a culture of apathy, closed-mindedness and individualism.<sup>111</sup>

<sup>109</sup> Richard Gaillardetz, “Francis’ Draft of Curial Reform Fundamentally Reimagines Vatican’s Role,” *National Catholic Reporter*, June 5, 2019, sec. Commentary, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/francis-draft-curial-reform-fundamentally-reimagines-vaticans-role>.

<sup>110</sup> See “Kirchenrechtler Lüdecke: Synodaler Weg keine echte Beteiligung,” *Katholisch.de*, February 4, 2020, <https://www.katholisch.de/artikel/24420-kirchenrechtler-luedecke-synodaler-weg-keine-echte-beteiligung>.

<sup>111</sup> Pope Francis, “Brief an das pilgernde Volk Gottes in Deutschland,” June 29, 2019, [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/de/letters/2019/documents/papa-francesco\\_20190629\\_lettera-fedeligermania.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/de/letters/2019/documents/papa-francesco_20190629_lettera-fedeligermania.html). See especially paragraph 8.

Should discussions like those in Germany and the reform of the Curia lead to structural changes, however, then the results will test the degree to which the church can reckon with internal diversity after two centuries of centralization and political polarization, with the last half century further shaped by the late-modern model of “identity branding.” The issue of women deacons is being “studied,” but ultimately will have to be decided upon by the structure that already exists, giving this avenue an unclear future.

Third, the Amazon Synod produced tentative agreement on possible ordination for married men in certain circumstances, but the current and future implementation of this practice is also unclear. The apostolic exhortation *Querida Amazonia*<sup>112</sup> ultimately does not speak about this issue, but calls for the continued promotion of priestly vocations and missionary priests in the Amazon region (QA 87–90). What is significant to remember, particularly with regard to the issue of digital immediacy and the levels of magisterial teaching, is that *Querida Amazonia* (like the controversial *Amoris Laetitia*) is not a *motu proprio* or apostolic constitution with the purpose of making or altering canon law. Rather, as Phyllis Zagano has aptly said, “*Querida Amazonia* is the pope’s heartfelt commentary on the situation as it is.”<sup>113</sup> This gives it weight as an apostolic exhortation, but we need to resist the urge to overinterpret what it does not do or intend to do, and examine what it does in fact say with regard to Francis’ agenda of structural change.<sup>114</sup>

In *Querida Amazonia*, the hierarchical priesthood is spoken of in sacramental terms as fundamentally connected to the celebration of the Eucharist for the community, but without taking much distance from the firmly entrenched juridical hierarchical roles of the last two centuries. There is a call for the development of a “specific ecclesial culture that is *distinctively lay*” (QA 94). But this continues to imply a structural separation of cultures within the church along clerical/lay lines, which does not seem to address the core problems of clericalism and modern functional

<sup>112</sup> Francis, *Querida Amazonia* (hereafter cited in text as QA), February 02, 2020, <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2020/02/12/200212c.html>.

<sup>113</sup> Phyllis Zagano, “It Is Time to Ask, Formally, for Married Priests and Woman Deacons,” *National Catholic Reporter*, February 21, 2020, sec. Opinion, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/just-catholic/it-time-ask-formally-married-priests-and-woman-deacons>.

<sup>114</sup> Interestingly, *Querida Amazonia* is an Apostolic Exhortation, like the controversial *Amoris Laetitia*. The latter document is perceived as having changed the church’s stance toward divorced and civilly remarried Catholics, but no change in the law has been effected. The use of Exhortations by Francis in these instances should be examined further.

differentiation within the church. In a sense, we can see clericalism as a form of hyper-specified functional differentiation—the functions of the priest as well as other ministerial roles can only be fulfilled by one category of person in a kind of bureaucratic restriction. The concrete needs of the church in the Amazon region call for us to “broaden our vision,” which necessitates that we do not “restrict our understanding of the Church to her functional structures” (QA 100). This sounds productive, but it clashes with the notion of ministry and office presented earlier in the document. In view of “broadening our vision,” however, the priestly ordination of women is ruled out because it “would lead us to clericalize women,” and that would actually reduce the potential impact of women on the church community (QA 100).<sup>115</sup>

This is an interesting argument for two reasons: first, it implies that nothing would change if women were ordained because they would simply be included in the modern clerical apparatus; second, it seems to presuppose that “clericalization” is a functional separation from the wider church community and that there is an inherent problem with it. It could be argued that “clericalization” can be separated from holy orders and the hierarchical priesthood itself, which properly belongs to men and through which men called to this priesthood fulfill their vocation. Given the recent histories of clerical abuse and Francis’ own criticisms of clericalism, it is difficult not to see an implicit, even unintentional critique in this document of the concrete existence of a clerical class—at the very least it admits that something is wrong with the priesthood that does not *de facto* exist apart from the clerical apparatus that we have inherited from the nineteenth century. Further, given the slippery relationship between individualization as a process and individualism as a program in modernity, and as we have seen, in the late-modern church, it is also difficult not to see an analogous slippage between pernicious clericalism and the notion of a structurally distinct hierarchical priesthood, at least in its current individualized and corporatized form. This will have to be addressed at a structural level, but the issue goes deeper than ecclesiological structures to the underlying and operative assumptions regarding theological anthropology and the nature and scope of ordinary magisterium and how it operates within ecclesiological structures.

<sup>115</sup> Section 101 of *Querida Amazonia* goes on to portray the role of women within a “classical” high-modern maternal Marian paradigm, which is itself a heavily restricted view of women. Women are portrayed as “quiet caregivers,” whose presence and “tender strength” preserves the integrity of a community (QA 99, 101). In section 101, the gender of the priest is brought to the fore as “the figure of a man who presides as a sign of the one Priest. This dialogue between the Spouse [Christ/the priest] and his Bride [the church] ...” See also QA 107.

Finally, I want to briefly point to Francis' conception of a "people" as a dynamic, open-ended, and mythic category that is oriented toward the future (FT 158–60). Part of his intention here is to head off a narrow and dangerous populism that "exploit politically a people's culture" as a stable and unchanging logical identity that excludes difference and provides a justification for fear-based violence (FT 159). This open and inherently *eschatological* concept of "people" has potential for reintroducing the People of God ecclesiology into effective use, but only if the encyclical's insights and critiques of broader society are turned inward and applied within the church, which is hardly self-evident.

### Conclusion

The processes of individualization, economization, and social acceleration are, as we have seen, deeply intertwined with one another, but they are also part of the fabric of modernity itself. There is no easy way to untangle them from the lived experience of the faithful or the ecclesiological expectations expressed by the hierarchy. What is clear, however, and what Francis has unambiguously articulated, is that our efforts to address the environmental, social, and economic impacts of these processes must involve a deep restructuring of social systems and even human experience with the goal of a new non-economic self-understanding. "There can be no ecology without an adequate anthropology," and this is equally true for social and economic justice (LS 118). Such justice entails rejecting the dominant hyper-individualized anthropology of *homo oeconomicus* and the social system enabled and inhabited by this anthropology. Sooner rather than later, we must reckon with the *structural* reality that acceleration and increased efficiency due to technical means have natural and physical limitations. In order for this to occur, and in order to foster an "adequate anthropology," the church will have to engage in difficult self-reflection on areas where ecclesial structures have fostered individualization, and in some cases even economic individualism. The integration of elements of Catholic identity into the framework of corporatized branding needs particular attention. This reflection needs to be systematic-theological in character, in order to assure that it reaches to the foundations of Catholic life, practice, and self-understanding. Anything less, such as the consumerist and neoliberal focus on individual lifestyle choices, whether branded as "green/sustainable consumption" or sold as "self-care," amounts to little more than "rearranging the deckchairs" on the surface of the problem.

From the perspective of dogmatic theology, a thoroughgoing reevaluation of the scope, limitations, and the theological foundations of "ordinary

magisterium” is imperative in order to have a coherent and faithful response to the problems of individualization and digital immediacy. Outside of chapter 3 of *Lumen Gentium*, there is scant theological justification for it as a concept precisely because its origins are not very theological to begin with.<sup>116</sup> The reform of the Curia will be a praxical testing ground for a renewed or revised understanding of what ordinary magisterium is, how far it extends, and how it can be identified, above all because this involves reforming the ecclesial organs that have taken on this interpretive task. At the level of fundamental theology, we need to reevaluate both the dominant forms of theological anthropology operative in the church as well as to recognize that the image of humanity as *homo oeconomicus* is a type of late-modern “secularized” theological anthropology. The church must remain actively, but also self-critically, involved in what is now a global conversation about the coming future of humanity and whether we will in fact *have a future* worthy of being considered as such by the vast majority of humanity.

<sup>116</sup> Wolf, “‘Wahr ist, was gelehrt wird’ statt ‘Gelehrt wird, was wahr ist’? Zur Erfindung des ‘ordentlichen’ Lehramts,” 255–56.