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Tracing the Affinity between the Social Thought of Karl Polanyi and Pope Francis

The vigorous denunciation of neoliberal capitalism in Pope Francis exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* has surprised political commentators, *The Guardian* of August 24, 2014 published the editorial "The Pope is not a Marxist." An article in *The Atlantic* argued that the Pope's vehement rejection of today's capitalist system is an echo of Karl Polanyi's voice.¹ Karl Polanyi's critique of the unregulated free market differed from that of Karl Marx, the article says, because Polanyi made use of ethical arguments and paid attention to cultural values. The article "Pope Francis and Karl Polanyi" by Alberto Robilotta, published in a Latin American review², also recognizes an affinity between Polanyi and Francis. Robilotta quotes the opinion of Leonardo Boff, the internationally known Brazilian liberation theologian, that the Pope's condemnation of "the economy of exclusion" is an echo of Karl Polanyi's indictment of an economy "disembedded" from society.³

In the present paper I wish to inquire whether an affinity does in fact exist between the critical thought of Karl Polanyi and Pope Francis. I do not suggest that Polanyi's *The Great Transformation* had a direct influence upon Jorge Bergoglio, the present Pope. My question is simply whether there is a *Wahlverwandschaft* – to use Max Weber's term – between the two thinkers. Over 15 years ago I mentioned in a small book of mine on Karl Polanyi that there existed a certain similarity between the *recent* papal social teaching and Polanyi's socio-political theory.⁴ I have underlined the word *recent*, because in the 19th century and the first part of the 20th the social teaching and the political sympathies of the popes were hostile to modern, liberal society. Because the evolution of Catholic social teaching is not well-known, I will offer a brief summary of its history.

The evolution of Catholic social teaching

Right after the French Revolution and throughout the 19th century, the papacy rejected the idea of popular sovereignty and the institutions of human rights, freedom of speech and religious liberty. Embedded in the feudal-aristocratic society, the Church demanded that Catholics obey their prince, stand against the separation of church and state, and defend the Catholic civilization that have inherited.⁵ In 1891 Leo XIII denounced the exploitation of labour by the capitalist economy, but he still opposed the emerging democracies and the separation of church and state.⁶ He tolerated that Catholics living as minorities in modern society approved of democracy and actively participated in it.⁷ Three decades later, the papacy (Pius XI and Pius XII) still sought to protect the Catholic civilization by accepting a concordat with Mussolini in 1929 and by supporting Catholic bishops in the 1930s and 40s to back a reactionary political party in Austria, fascist governments in Spain and Portugal, the Vichy regime in France during World War II, and – more harmlessly – the government of Maurice Duplessis in Quebec. At the same time Catholic political actors in Western societies respected democracy and favoured civil rights and freedoms. Catholic intellectuals produced philosophical and theological arguments supporting the separation of church and state (*la laïcité de l'État*), democratic pluralism and responsible citizenship. I will simply mention the work of Jacques Maritain⁸ and Emmanuel Mounier.⁹ Both of these authors, each in their own way, rendered an account of the new self-understanding of Catholics living in modern

society. This self-understanding differed from the individualism fostered by economic and philosophical liberalism and from various forms of collectivism, communist, fascist or Catholic conformism. These Catholics saw themselves as persons-in-community, as dependent upon society in their coming to be, and as co-responsible for the society to which they belonged. Mounier insisted that persons were summoned by the Gospel to become responsible citizens; he actually argued that justice demanded that they become socialists.

According to this new Catholic social ethics, often referred to as “personalism,” Catholics no longer saw themselves as obedient subjects of a prince; they now understood themselves as urged by reason and the Christian message to become responsible actors in society, defending human rights, respecting pluralism and promoting freedom, justice and peace. In this context, freedom does not mean the right of an individualist to satisfy his desires without measure and buy and sell as he pleases; freedom, according to personalist thought, refers to people’s right to participate in the building of their society, enjoy free speech, follow their conscience, be well informed about what goes on in society and contribute the decision-making process of the government.

The personalist ethics was eventually endorsed by the Catholic Church at the Second Vatican Council. Here are two sentences that are often quoted:

Throughout the whole world there is a mounting increase in the sense of autonomy as well as of responsibility... We are witnesses of the birth of a new humanism, one in which persons are defined first of all by their responsibility for one another and for history.¹⁰

The personalist ethics found expression in the social teaching of John XXIII, Paul VI and John Paul II. The latter introduced a vocabulary not previously used in Catholic social teaching: he insisted that people are “subjects”; they are not “objects” manipulated by a government, but moral agents responsible for their own life and that of society.¹¹ John Paul II even professed that workers are not “objects of production;” they are meant to be “subjects of production,” co-responsible for the industrial process.¹² We shall return to this distinction when we compare Polanyi’s and Francis’s understanding of the alienation of labour.

After the Second Vatican Council a social movement in the Catholic Church added a new dimension to the personalist ethics, the so-called preferential option for the poor. But before explaining the meaning of this emancipator commitment, I wish to examine the ethical foundation of Karl Polanyi’s thought.

Karl Polanyi on ethic and economics

Most social and political scientists do not reflect on the presuppositions of their research and their theories. Karl Polanyi did. He asked himself philosophical questions to gain a better understanding of his work as a scholar. In my *Karl Polanyi on Ethics and Economics*¹³ I studied in particular two essays written by him in Vienna in the 1920s, entitled “Behemoth” and “Über die Freiheit,” and the essay “The Essence of Fascism” written in the 1930s in England. In these writings, Polanyi developed his idea that persons are ethical beings and that their ethics affects their perception of the world, including their scientific research and social analyses. The following is a brief summary of his ideas.

Polanyi argues that we experience ourselves as ethically related to other people and to society. *Der Lebensweg*, the daily living, makes us aware that we are ethical beings, trying to relate ourselves responsibly to ever wider social contexts. We are people of conscience. Polanyi admits with Max Weber

that in fact most people are only half-heartedly ethical and prefer compromise, yet Polanyi holds that they continue to be summoned by their conscience to live responsibly. Responsible living, he argues, includes personal ethics as well as commitment to social justice. He rejects the idea often entertained by the Left that the attention to ethics is conservative, fostering an ideology in defense of the status quo. He also rejects the idea of a certain Right that personal ethics demands withdrawal from worldly involvement in society. Polanyi insists that the ethics to which we are called has the two dimensions, personal and social. He clearly anticipated the personalist ethics formulated in France a few years later.

Polanyi insists that our self-experience as ethical beings is convincing evidence that we have free will: we can deliberate, decide and act. Polanyi laments that economists and even social scientists increasingly see people's activities defined by laws, overlooking the fact that people are free agents. For Polanyi even the poor and marginalized remain actors capable of resisting and inventing alternative practices. Marguerite Mendel notes that Polanyi does not refer to people suffering oppression as 'the oppressed', since they remained imaginative agents, capable of finding new ways of helping themselves. In her commentary on *The Great Transformation*, Kari Polanyi Levitt writes that because her father looked upon human beings as free agents, he rejected deterministic interpretations of history, such as the orientation towards the classless society or the society of abundance.¹⁴ Polanyi opposes the positivism of the Right implicit in the dominant economic theories and the positivism of the Left assumed in the scientific understanding of Marxism. Scientists think of their research as value-free are unaware that their 'objectivity' is the stance of the dominant culture, a defense of the status quo, disguising the lot of people in the margins. For Polanyi and Francis, reliable social scientific research must be guided by an ethical commitment. The researcher must be a person of conscience who sees not only what is, but also what ought to be.

Personal conscience, Polanyi thinks, has evolved in history. He argues that living in a democratic society has created in people "ein bürgerliches Gewissen," a civic conscience yearning for conditions of freedom, justice and equality. This yearning, he thinks, is the unfolding of the teaching of Jesus. In a remark that makes him an original existentialist thinker, Polanyi says that the yearning of conscience created by democratic society cannot be at rest in this society as long as it is wedded to liberal capitalism. Conscience, he argues, makes people yearn for a moral socialism.

In England in the 1930s Polanyi meets members of the Christian Left that fully shared his understanding of humanity's ethical vocation. The Scottish philosopher John McMurray had rejected — just as Mounier in France — liberal individualism and communist collectivism, recognizing instead both people's freedom and their need of one another. Humans are persons-in-community, he wrote, linking the three words by two hyphens. I have not forgotten this unusual spelling since the early 1940s when I read texts of McMurray in the Student Christian Movement at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario. With McMurray and other members of the Christian Left, Polanyi co-authored the book *Christianity and the Revolution*,¹⁵ for which he wrote his article of fascism.

Polanyi wrote this essay on fascism to convince the British working class of the dehumanizing power of fascism. The workers were already opposed to fascism, but Polanyi thought that their objections might be too superficial. He showed in his article that collectivism is not only the ideal of communism in Russia, but that it is also an essential feature of fascism in Germany, enforcing the unanimity of the nation and denying personal freedom. Even in his early essays written in Vienna, Polanyi had claimed that the ideal of the dignity and the freedom of the human person in keeping with the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth. Now writing in London, associated with the Christian Left, he attributes world-significant importance to Jesus' invention of the supreme value of the human individual. In actual fact, many

chapters in the Old Testament, the Hebrew Scriptures, already recognize the supreme value of the human being. Polanyi now argues that German Nazism rejects the Christian notions of moral conscience and for this reason is in principle opposed to Christianity and determined eventually to turn against the Churches. Some ministers and priest, he writes, are already in concentration camps.

The Catholic call for 'the option for the poor'

I shall now return to the development in the Catholic Church that added to the personalist ethics the so-called preferential option for the poor. Advocated by Latin American liberation theology, it was formally adopted by the Latin American Bishops Conference held at Medellin, Columbia, in 1968.¹⁶ A new look at the New Testament convinced the bishops that Jesus, in solidarity with the poor people of the land, was critical of the religious leaders, especially the temple priest, who protected law and order to satisfy the Roman colonial government. Even though his messianic promises provoked opposition and led to his capital punishment on the cross, Jesus' resurrection assured the believing community that the messianic promises were to be fulfilled. The reign of the Roman Emperor was destined to be overcome, to be replaced by God's reign of love, justice and peace.

Echoing the radical stance of the Hebrew prophets and Jesus himself, the Latin American theologians and bishops defined the option for the poor as a twofold commitment i) to look upon society and its culture from the perspective of the poor and oppressed, and ii) to give public witness of solidarity with their struggle for greater justice. While this option was controversial in the Church, it was endorsed by worldwide network of politicized believers, among them theologians, bishops and priests, known as the Catholic Left. The option for the poor was endorsed by several national bishops conferences, among them the Canadian one¹⁷ and influenced Pope John Paul II when, in his encyclical *Laborem exercens* of 1981, he expressed the Church's solidarity with the labour movement in Poland and with the struggle of all oppressed or marginalized people for greater justice.

To achieve social justice in the various parts of the world, in the various countries, and in the relationships between them, there is a need for ever new movements of solidarity *of* the workers and *with* the workers. This solidarity must be present whenever it is called for by ... growing areas of poverty and even hunger. The Church is firmly committed to this cause, for she considers it her mission, her service, a proof of her fidelity to Christ, so that she can truly be the "Church of the poor".¹⁸

The option for the poor is strongly emphasized in Francis's exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*. The entire fourth chapter deals with the social meaning of the Christian message.

Each individual Christian and every Christian community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor and for enabling them to be fully a part of society. (no. 187) ...This means working to eliminate the structural causes of poverty and to foster the integral development of the poor (no. 188)... For the Church the option for the poor is primarily a theological category... It is implicit in the Christian faith in a God who has become poor for us, so as to enrich us with his poverty. That is why I want a Church that is poor and for the poor (no. 198)

The cognitive dimension of the option for the poor, i.e. the reading of society from the perspective of the poor, reveals the dark side of society largely disguised by the dominant culture. To arrive at a true understanding of society, we have to listen to its victims. What is demanded is a rereading of the

existing culture, its institutions and its literature, to uncover its ideological character as well as its hidden resources for social reconstruction. Pope Francis fully agrees with liberation theology that we cannot truly understand the biblical message of salvation, unless we listen to it with ears made sensitive by our solidarity with the poor and oppressed.

It follows from this brief explanation of the option for the poor that, in the search for the truth, researchers in the social and economic sciences must adopt a liberationist perspective. If they claim to be value-free and objective, they uncritically embrace the presuppositions of the dominant culture and thus tend to legitimate the established order. With Karl Polanyi and other critical thinkers, liberation theology insists that the human sciences must be guided by an ethical stand point, an option for the poor, an emancipatory commitment.

The critique of liberal capitalism

I now wish to compare Karl Polanyi's and Pope Francis's critiques of the unregulated market system. Both of them invoked ethical and cultural arguments, quite different from scientific Marxism that focuses exclusively on the economic infrastructure, looking upon ethics and culture as purely derivative, as ideas appertaining to the superstructure. Still, the young Marx writing in Paris in 1844 paid attention to ethics and culture: he offered a brilliant analysis of "the alienation of labour," i.e. the dehumanizing impact on workers of the capitalist organization of labour. As a young man in Vienna, Polanyi had no use for Austrian Marxism, yet when living in England he was greatly impressed by the Paris Manuscripts of the young Marx which has just been made public.¹⁹

I believe that John Paul II and the theologians who helped him write his encyclical on labour, *Laborem exercens*, were also impressed by Marx's Paris Manuscripts. The encyclical accounted in an original way for the alienation of labour described by Marx. It proposed that on account of their human dignity workers were meant to be 'subjects' of production, not simply 'objects' of the productive process. In the capitalist and communist economies, the encyclical continued, workers were manipulated and disposed of like objects, like the raw material used in production, while justice demands that they be respected as agents co-responsible for the organization of labour and the goods produced by it. Looking at human labour, the encyclical went on, one must distinguish two dimensions: the 'objective pole' referring to the goods produced and the 'subjective' pole referring to the effect of labour upon the workers. Justice demands that priority be assigned to the subjective pole. More important than the goods produced is the self-realization of workers through their productive activity — a fulfillment denied to them in the capitalist and communist factory system. In the social economy, as we shall see, workers are in fact 'subjects' of production.

Let us return to Polanyi's and Francis's the critique of liberal capitalism. Polanyi recognized with Marxism the economic exploitation of workers, yet he put greater emphasis on the deleterious cultural impact of industrial capitalism. As he documents in *The Great Transformation*, industrial capitalism removes workers from their local community, making them rootless, robbing them of the inherited values that gave meaning to their lives. In traditional societies labour confirmed people's place in their community and strengthened the bonds that kept society united, while labour in capitalist enterprises "disembeds" workers from society, disconnecting them from their community and reducing the meaning of their work simply to the struggle of survival.

Not economic exploitation, as often assumed, but the disintegration of the cultural environment of the victims is the cause of the degradation. the lethal injury to the institutions in which his social existence is embodied.²⁰

To separate labour from other activities of life and to subject it to the laws of the market was to annihilate all organic forms of existence and to replace them by a different type of organization, an atomistic and individualistic one.²¹

Added to this Polanyi shows that the unregulated market system “disembeds” the entire economy from society, making it operate according to the law of supply and demand, independently of the needs and the well-being of society.

The control of the economic system by the market is of overwhelming consequence to the whole organization of society: it means no less than the running of society as an adjunct of the market. Instead of economy being embedded in social relations, social relations are embedded in the economic system.²²

A market economy must comprise all elements of industry, including labour, land and money....But labour and land is no other than the human being themselves of which every society consists and the natural surroundings in which it exists. To include them in the market mechanism means to subordinate the substance of society to the laws of the market.²³

For Polanyi labour, land money are treated as commodities - fictitious commodities, he calls them – undermining the human well-being of the masses. As society is becoming an appendix of the capitalist economy, poverty and rootlessness spread in ever wider sectors of the population and ever greater damage is being inflicted upon the natural environment. In response to these evils, Polanyi tries to show – as we shall see further on – that a counter movement is taking place that tries to “re-embed” labour and the entire economy in social relations, making people increasingly the shapers of their economy, thus constitution themselves as co-operative commonwealth.

Pope Francis’ critique of liberal capitalism is somewhat different from that of Polanyi. While the latter studied the conditions of the working class and the poor in Western industrial society, Francis, the Argentinian intellectual, a native of Latin America, studies the conditions of his own continent, the region of the world marked by the greatest inequality.²⁴ Despite the millions of people lifted out of poverty over the last decade, almost a third of the population still lives in conditions of poverty, 73 millions of which in extreme poverty, excluded from society with no access to education, health care and other social services. These are the landless people in the country and the slum dwellers in the cities, the first the victims of the semi-feudal latifundia system and the second the victims of the liberal capitalist economy with its centre in the North. It is not surprising that Pope Francis, in solidarity with poor, reflects on the situation of the excluded, and not – as Polanyi did – on the conditions of industrial labour. Francis argues that the globalization of the free market economy favours the rich and the comfortable classes, yet increases the public neglect of the poor.

In chapter 2 of his exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* Francis utters a radical denunciations of the economy of exclusion. He writes, “Just as ‘Thou shalt not kill’ safeguards the value of human life, ... so we now have to say ‘thou shalt not’ to an economy of exclusion and inequality, for such an economy kills.” (no. 53) This rebuke is followed by four sections with provocative subtitles: “No to an economy of exclusion!” (no. 53), “No to the new idolatry of money!” (no. 55), “No to a financial system that rules rather than serves!”(no. 57) and “No to the inequality w. hich spawns violence!”(no. 59)

In his talk given on October 28, 2014 to the representatives of the popular movements, Francis argues that treating land, shelter and labour as commodities, as this is done in liberal capitalism, has devastating social consequences. It makes available for sale to the highest bidder what people need for leading a modest life with dignity. His critique is an echo of Polanyi's 'fictitious commodities.'

The present economy, Francis argues, does more than impoverish the multitude, it has a harmful effect on the dominant culture. It fosters egotism, competitive zeal, vulgar utilitarianism and obsessive consumerism, avoiding deep reflection and causing "the globalization of indifference" in regard to the suffering of the excluded. Even though Polanyi and Francis look at very different kinds of capitalist societies, they analyze the dehumanizing impact of liberal capitalism in similar ways. They share a common humanistic concern and social solidarity with the people pushed to the margin of society.

What should be done to promote greater justice?

The thesis of Polanyi's *The Great Transformation* is that a counter movement is taking place that seeks to 're-embed' workers in community and the economy into society, thus aiming to protect the well-being of people and their natural environment. While Francis makes no such claim, he does recognize the resourcefulness of civil society and the creativity of people at the community level. With Polanyi he acknowledges the importance of rebuilding society from the bottom up. Francis and Polanyi advocate the democratization of society's economic and political institutions; both are reformers, not revolutionaries. They do not envisage the abolition of markets nor of private property. Both of them regard markets as important human inventions. What they demand is that markets be regulated so as to make them serve the common good of society. They must be "re-embedded" in society, in Polanyi's own terms; or as Francis puts it, they must be part of an economy that is "ever more inclusive." Both of them look forward to a very social form of social democracy.

We note that Polanyi does not assign priority to the political struggle for social reconstruction. Because he thinks that people are not ready for a participatory society, he assigns priority to the struggle for the reorganizing of labour, making workers co-responsible for the industries and assuring that the goods produced serve the local community and society as a whole. Polanyi called this the re-embedding of labour in society. He looked with favour upon guild socialism, the cooperative movement and Robert Owen's industrial organization in 19th century Britain. Here workers were subjects of production, in John Paul II's vocabulary; these were economic ventures that "put persons at the centre," an expression used by Francis.

At the present time, the re-embedding of work in society is taking place in the social economy, also called community economic development, which recognizes workers as co-responsible agents of production and serves the needs of the local community. Since the social economy operates according to principles at odds with the capitalist organization of production, it is a creative form of resistance to the dominant economy, generating a critical consciousness and the longing for an economy that serves the well-being of society. Polanyi believed that the re-embedding of labour in society would give birth to a new political consciousness that in the long run would support a political movement aimed at the reconstruction of society.

Pope Francis wants all Christians to resist the dominant capitalist economy. His first point is that the Gospel summons believers to become socially engaged. This theme, running through the entire exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, is developed especially in the section running from no. 177 to no. 183. In no 187, Francis writes, "Each individual Christian and every Christian community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be fully a part

of society.” He continues, “The Church, guided by the Gospel... , hears the cry [of the poor] for justice and responds to it with all her might...This implies working to eliminate the structural causes of poverty and to promote the integral development of the poor, as well as small daily acts of solidarity in meeting the real needs which we encounter. “(no. 188)

In their resistance to the globalized capitalist economy, Catholics are to cooperate with other Christians, with the followers of the world religions and with secular citizens and their organizations. (no. 238-254) We live in “a society of encounter,” says Francis, which means that we respect others, listen to them, engage in dialogue with them, and seek common values that allow us to work together for justice and peace.²⁵

Since *Evangelii gaudium*, Francis explains (no. 185), is not a social encyclical, it only hints at what should be done to promote greater justice today. Francis recognizes the importance of political action, but his main emphasis is on social and economic activities in civil society that enable people to overcome indigence and exclusion. Eventually the entire market system must be reconstructed so that all economic activity respects the dignity of persons and fosters the well-being of society (no. 203).

The hints and proposals Francis made in *Evangelii gaudium* were explored in the Vatican workshop “Towards a More Inclusive Economy” organized by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace in July 2014. Addressing the invited participants — all prominent economists and social activists — Francis repeated that needed in today’s society is “an economy that puts the human person at the centre” He then added, “When the person is not at the centre [of the economy], another thing will be at the centre, and then the person will be at the service of this other thing.”²⁶ Economic activity that puts human beings at the centre is exactly what Karl Polanyi meant by the re-embedding of the economy in society.

The Vatican workshop was concluded by a brief presentation of Cardinal Peter Turkson, the president of the Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace, summarizing the practical suggestions of the participants that made more concrete the hints and proposals of *Evangelii gaudium*.²⁷ An economic system oriented toward greater inclusion, they all agreed, must be pluralistic, encouraging the contributions of collective initiatives such as cooperatives, non-profit organizations, micro-credit banks, social enterprises and jointly-owned businesses. People overcome exclusion by participating in the economy. “The experience of the social economy demonstrates that people can be active in creating their own work and enterprises and so make a future for themselves.” People here become subjects of production. Working in cooperative enterprises is not alienating labour, but creative activity building community.

The conclusion

The preceding analysis has shown certain similarities between the social thought of Karl Polanyi and Pope Francis. Both of them assign an important place to ethics. I see in their thought three distinct ethical concerns. 1) Rejecting the idea that the social and political sciences are value-free, they both insist that social and political analysis must focus on the victims of society and be guided by the researcher’s emancipator commitment. Polanyi wants to rescue workers in industrial capitalism from the alienation inflicted on them, and Francis has made an option for the poor, extending his solidarity to the excluded. 2) Both thinkers advocate an economy that puts human beings at the centre or, in Polanyi’s terms, an economy re-embedded in society. Both of them envisage workers as subjects of production, fabricating goods that serve the well-being of society. Polanyi calls this a moral socialism. 3) Both thinkers insist that it is not enough to have good institutions — institutions that foster justice, equality and shared responsibility —; required is also that people themselves want to be good themselves. Since the best institutions are vulnerable to abuse and corruption, economic and political life demands people commitment to an ethic of citizenship.

Both Polanyi and Francis denounce the human damage produced by liberal and neo-liberal capitalism. Polanyi prefers to refer to this as “the unregulated market system” and Francis simply as “the present economy.” They do not confine this human damage — as scientific Marxism does — to the resulting material poverty; they emphasize the cultural damage self-regulating capitalism inflicts upon all classes of society. I noticed here a certain affinity with Marx’s early essays on the alienation of labour. The great difference between Polanyi’s and Francis’s critical analysis is that they look at the capitalist economy in different historical situations: Polanyi criticizes the industrial capitalism in 19th and early 20th century Europe and Francis the late 20th and 21st century globalization of neo-liberal capitalism invading the Global South. Polanyi focuses on the damage done to workers in the industries, while Francis looks mainly at the suffering of the excluded, people not needed as workers and deprived of the services of society.

Despite this difference, the two authors recognize the importance of markets, they are reformist thinkers, not revolutionaries. They want markets to be regulated. They think that the State is meant to promote equality, redistribute wealth and foster a pluralistic economy that allows the great majority to participate. Both authors hold that what is needed under the conditions of injustice is creative resistance.

The many similarities allow me to conclude that there is an affinity between Polanyi’s and Francis’s social thought.

The co-operation of secular and religious people

I am impressed by another similarity between Polanyi and Francis. Both of them advocate the co-operation between religious and secular people committed to justice. Already as a young man in Vienna, Polanyi was affected by the Christian message. He mentioned in particular the influence of Tolstoy. In his early essays he presents his ethical reflections as in line with the teaching of Jesus. In England, as I mention above, he became associated with the Christian Left. In his essay on fascism, published in *Christianity and Revolution*, he speaks of Jesus as the author of the universal truth, the infinite value of the human person, including the poor and despised, a value not respected by communism, fascism and liberalism. In his *The Great Transformation* of 1942 he continues to speak of “the Christian discovery of the uniqueness of the individual and of the oneness of mankind, which is negated by fascism”²⁸ and, I would add, by all ideologies that create exclusions. At the same time Polanyi was aware of the ambiguity of Christianity’. Felix Schaffer tells us that Polanyi “refused to identify Christianity with the Church; “he recognized in particular the reactionary role plaid by the Catholic Church in Austria. Even though the Catholic and Protestant Churches in Germany did not speak out against the Nazi regime, he is aware that critical priests and ministers have been put into prison.”²⁹

At the same time Polanyi is keenly aware that secular people or people hostile to religion are not necessarily socially progressive. Those who call themselves free thinkers may not be free at all, trapped instead in the dominant liberal culture of self-concern and self –promotion. Secular people, just as Christian believers, had to be awakened to an ethics of citizenship. Polanyi was one of the few secular left-wing intellectuals who called upon secular and religious people to work together for justice and peace in society.

In this context I wish to mention that the only time I met Polanyi and heard him speak was at a large Christian gathering in the early 1960s, to be precise, an ecumenical conference of the Student Christian Movement held at the MacDonald Campus of Mc Gill University at Ste Anne de Bellevue, Quebec.

Cooperation of believers and non-believers in movements of justice and peace was also the wish of Pope Francis. He realizes that Catholics as a whole are not socially involved. The reason for their indifference, he writes, may not be the pursuit of their material self-interest; their indifference may be due to a “mundane spirituality” (no. 93), i.e. a piety that focuses on God alone, turning its back on the world and is deaf to the cry of the poor. In the past the flight from the world, *fuga mundi*, was a spirituality fostered in many religious congregations. Francis now calls upon believers to become socially engaged and make an option for the poor, as he has done. Social concern must be alive even in contemplative prayer.

The cooperation of Catholics and secular people in the service of justice and peace was already recommended by Vatican Council II.³⁰ In *Evangelii gaudium* Francis repeats this invitation. He tells us that he feels close to secular people who explore and follow their conscience. He writes,

As believers, we also feel close to those who do not consider themselves part of any religious tradition, yet sincerely seek the truth, goodness and beauty which we believe have their highest expression and source in God. We consider them as precious allies in the commitment to defending human dignity, in building peaceful coexistence between peoples and in protecting creation. (no. 257)

Polanyi and Francis favour the cooperation of believers and non-believers in social movements for justice and peace. And both of them recognize with regret that, in their own day, only a minority in each of these groupings is committed to justice and solidarity. What Francis adds to Polanyi’s recommendations is daily prayer and hope in Jesus, Saviour of the world.

¹ Heather Horn, “Pope Francis’s Theory of Economics,” *The Atlantic*, Nov. 26, 2013

² Alberto Rabilotta, “Pope Francis and Karl Polanyi,” ALAI (América Latina en Movimiento) Jan. 22, 2014

³ Leonardo Boff, “El Papa Francisco y la economía política de la exclusión,” <http://alainet.org/active/70130>

⁴ Gregory Baum, *Karl Polanyi: On Ethics and Economics*, (Montreal: McGill Queen’s University Press, 1996)52-53

⁵ Gregory XVI, encyclical *Mirari vos* (1832)

⁶ Leo XIII, encyclical *Rerum novarum* (1891)

⁷ Leo XIII, encyclical *Longinqua* (1895)

⁸ Jacques Maritain, *Humanisme intégrale*, 1936

⁹ Emmanuel Mounier, *Manifeste au service du personalisme*, 1936

¹⁰ Conciliar document *Gaudium et spes*, no. 55

¹¹ John Paul II, encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (1987) # 15, the encyclical *Centesimus annus* (1991) # 13

¹² John Paul II, encyclical *Laborem exercens* (1981) # 6

¹³ Gregory Baum, *Karl Polanyi on Ethics and Economics*.

¹⁴ Kari Levitt, “The Origins and Significance of The Great Transformation” in *The Life and Work of Karl Polanyi*, Kari Levitt, ed.(Montreal: Black Rose Books,1990) pp 111-124, 114

¹⁵ Karl Polanyi et al, eds. *Christianity and the Social Revolution* (New York: Scribener, 1935)

¹⁶ Joseph Grermillion, ed., *The Gospel of Peace and Justice* (Orbis Books: Maryknoll, NY, 1976) 445-476

¹⁷ In the 1970s the pastoral letters of the Canadian bishops adopted the perspective of liberation theology, see .

¹⁸ John Paul II, the encyclical *Laborem exercense* (1981) no. 8.

¹⁹ T.B. Bottomore, ed., *Early Writings of Karl Marx* (Londeon: Watts, 1963)

²⁰ Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (1944) (Beacon Press: Boston, paperback edition, 1957) 157

²¹ *Op.cit.*, 163

²² *Op.cit.*, 57

²³ *Op.cit.*, 71

²⁴ The UN Human Development Report 2013/14

²⁵ Francis, Address at the Meeting with the Brazilian Bishops on July 27, 2013.

²⁶ Francis, Address at the Workshop “Toward a More Inclusive Economy”, July 12, 2014

²⁷ The Tablet, July 18, 2014

²⁸ Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, p. 258

²⁹ Felix Schaffer, “Vorgartenstrasse 203,” in Kenneth McRobbie and Kari Polanyi Levitt, eds. *Karl Polanyi in Vienna* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2000) 328-346, 344

³⁰ *Gaudium et spes*, no. 20