

# Assembling an Anti-Neoliberal Spirituality from the Vision of Pope Francis<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** This essay is an attempt to construct an anti-neoliberal spirituality from the vision of Pope Francis. This paper will argue that postmodern and new age spiritualities serve today, to update Max Weber's Protestant ethic thesis, as the "spirit of neoliberal capitalism." Neoliberal capitalism requires "entrepreneurial subjects" that embody the values of atomistic individualism, consumerism, flexible, and multicultural. The destructive consequences of these values to social solidarity, compassion, social justice, and moral fabric of societies can only be arrested by the counter-cultural values of Pope Francis' anti-neoliberal spirituality.

**Keywords:** *Pope Francis, Neoliberalism, Spirituality, Option for the Poor, Justice*

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<sup>1</sup> I personally dedicate this essay to the successful and spiritually revitalizing pastoral visit of Pope Francis to the Philippines, 15-19 of January, 2015. I hope this essay can contribute to the discussion of what the pastoral visit of the "rock star" Pope meant, not only for our nation and Asia, but for the rest of the world. See also Gerry Lanuza, "'Mula sa Papa tungo sa masa:' The papal message we missed," available at, <https://www.rappler.com/views/imho/81361-pope-francis-missed-message>, retrieved September 23, 2017).

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## Introduction

The apposite description of George Weigel of Pope Francis provides a good starting point for this paper:

He is a man of compassion for the “peripheries,” who will not let the world forget what the world often wants to forget about the abuse of power, the instrumentalization of the poor, the cheapening of human life, the personal and social costs of the cult of the autonomous self.<sup>2</sup>

What does Pope Francis have to do with anti-neoliberal spirituality? Everything! When the newly elected “rock star” Pope<sup>3</sup> condemned the dictatorship of the market, the deification of unbridled capitalism, careerism, worldliness, consumerism, the neglect and exclusion of the poor, he is already advancing the fundamental values that can serve as foundations for an anti-neo-liberal spirituality. In his encyclical on ecology, Pope Francis hints what this alternative spirituality consists of:

Christian spirituality proposes an alternative understanding of the quality of life, and encourages a prophetic and contemplative lifestyle, one capable of deep enjoyment free of the obsession with consumption (No. 122).<sup>4</sup>

This paper will proceed by first providing a cursory overview of the existing market of spiritualities in the postmodern world. Next, it will link the proliferation of these privatizing spiritualities with the rise of neoliberal capitalism. And finally, the paper will build from the scattered writings, speeches, sermons, and interviews of Pope Francis a possible anti-neoliberal spirituality, which can inspire people and anti-globalization movements, who are seeking to dismantle the “structural evil” spawned by neoliberal economic doctrine and its worldwide dominance.

I am not suggesting that Pope Francis breaks away from the traditional teachings of the Church. Neither do I claim that what he says is something foreign to the existing body of Catholic social teachings. In fact, his critique of “unfettered capitalism” resonates very well with the social teachings elaborated by Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI. His social vision is rooted in the longstanding tradition of Catholic social teachings that goes back to *Rerum Novarum* of Pope Leo XIII. Also, I am not claiming that Pope Francis will agree with everything that I will say and argue in his behalf in this essay. What I hope to accomplish is to make a case

<sup>2</sup> George Weigel, Four myths about Pope Francis, *National Review*, November 13, 2013, p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> Gerry M. Lanuza, “Making and selling the “rock star Pope”: The celebrityization of Pope Francis during his five-day visit to the Philippines,” *Humanities Diliman*, 2017, 14 (1): 1-45.

<sup>4</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si, On care of our common home*. May 24, 2015. Available at [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html), retrieved October 27, 2017.

for a coherent anti-neoliberal spirituality out of Pope Francis' speeches, writings, interviews, and sermons. I believe that this kind of spirituality is what we need in an age when postmodern spiritualities saturate the consumer-driven market of new age religions and do-it-yourself spiritualities.

By doing so, I hope to show that today, Christianity, more than ever, can contribute in awakening the waning collective utopian thinking for our times and provide people and communities with the life styles that can strengthen and sustain the on-going collective and individual's resistance against global capitalism. Or as Adam Bucko and Matthew Fox put it, "I think that we need both now and that we need to combine this inner revolution with the outer revolution to have the total revolution of the spirit. Then you can build the alternatives to a collapsing system built on structural violence."<sup>5</sup>

In this paper, I will argue that one significant way to expurgate the global system of neoliberal profit-addiction that destroys human values, tears apart social and moral fabric, and threatens to annihilate the environment, is to create counter-spirituality for communities and subjects whose ethos and values run counter and resistant to the alienating and destructive values of neoliberalism.<sup>6</sup> I am not claiming that Christianity itself is immune from the creative destruction and penetration of neoliberal ethos and doctrine. Interestingly, it can be shown that Christianity today has been hijacked and co-opted by the "global culture industries."<sup>7</sup> The "Gospel of Prosperity" of various "born again" Christian denominations and sects are perfect examples of these neoliberalization of Christianity.<sup>8</sup> If the German sociologist, Max Weber (1864-1920), claimed that Calvinist ethic served as the work ethic for early capitalism, it can also be asserted today, without exaggeration, that postmodern spiritualities and various new age religions, perfectly serve as the spirit of neoliberal capitalism.<sup>9</sup> Or to paraphrase Fredrick Jameson, postmodern spirituality is the spiritual logic of late capitalism.

<sup>5</sup> Adam Bucko & Matthew Fox, *Occupy spirituality: a radical vision for a new generation* (California: North Atlantic Books, 2012), p. 13.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Bell provides a preliminary glimpse into this counter-cultural community when he writes, "As poor Christians come together in nonhierarchical, participatory gatherings to celebrate informal liturgies, as they reflect on Scripture, as they share food, visit the sick, establish a cooperative or undertake a joint work project, and occasionally engage in some form of protest or petition the ruling powers, they are clearly about politics. They are engaged in a long revolution, a struggle with the dominant order that is fought on all fronts, that recognizes no neat division of life into autonomous realms." Daniel Bell, *Liberation theology after the end of history* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 73.

<sup>7</sup> Michael L. Budde, *The (magic) kingdom of God: Christianity and global culture* (California: Westview Press, 1997).

<sup>8</sup> Lester Spense, Race, class and the neoliberal scourge. *Tikkun Magazine*, 28:4, (2013): 29-31.

<sup>9</sup> Carrette, Jeremy and King, Richard, *Selling spirituality: the silent takeover of religion* (London: Routledge, 2005); Joe L. Kincheloe, *Christitainment: selling Jesus through popular culture* (Colorado: Westview Press, 2009).

## Do-it-Yourself (DIY) Spiritualities in the Age of Neoliberal Globalization

What David Tacey (2004) calls as “spirituality revolution” in the twentieth century is basically a turning away of people from hierarchical and organized religion towards more individualizing and personalized DIY (do-it-yourself) spiritualities.<sup>10</sup> One suspects immediately that this is a reflection of the cultural logic of neoliberal capitalism, which I will deal with in a short while. This spirituality revolution is a response against crass materialism, frenzied consumerism, and bureaucratic rationalization that accompanied the rise of western capitalism. The evaporation of religion-defined ultimate values in the modern public sphere provides opportunities for re-enchantment or the religionization and spiritualization of culture. Hence, Harvey Cox is right to argue that with secular materialism creeping in western moral life, people are turning to the religions of the East.<sup>11</sup> In fact, Paul Heelas argues that while “new age” religions are prone to consumerist appropriation, nevertheless, they can also be forms of resistance against rigid and bureaucratized hierarchies of traditional religious institutions. Heelas is right to situate new age religions in the so-called postmodern age.<sup>12</sup> But Tacey’s provides a sober estimation, which acknowledges that postmodern spiritualities may also prove to be injurious to contemporary social life, when absorbed by neoliberal individualism:

Secular or private spirituality can isolate us from others and the wider community. Because so much spirituality operates behind closed doors, in the isolation of our homes or bedrooms, or in the privacy of our own minds, it has just as much capacity to shut us off from community and other people, as it does to open a door to a hidden source or divine power. We often boast about the ability of spirituality to offer us connectedness to nature, others or God, but precisely because this operates in the personal mode it frequently has the reverse effect on our social, familial and communal lives, severing bonds between ourselves and others, and alienating us still further from our social environment.<sup>13</sup>

Developing parallel, but outside Christian traditions, are various spiritualities that seek to make the individual adapt to the conflicts in the age of global capitalism. The transpersonal approach of Washburn (2003) that employs transpersonal and humanistic psychology is simply obsessed with neo-platonic recovery of the pristine self. According to the transpersonal perspective, “human development

<sup>10</sup> David Tacey, *The spirituality revolution: the emergence of contemporary spirituality* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>11</sup> Harvey Cox, “Christianity,” in *Global Religions: An Introduction*. Edited by Mark Juergensmeyer. (Oxford University Press, 2003): pp. 12-24.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Heelas, *Spiritualities of life: new age romanticism and consumptive capitalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008).

<sup>13</sup> David Tacey, *The spirituality revolution*, p. 140.

can be properly understood only if it is seen as leading beyond the stage of adult ego development to a stage of awakening and ever-deepening spirituality.”<sup>14</sup> Such spirituality, while paying lip service to “embodied spirituality,” is devoid of any social and cultural dimensions. It is mostly likely to fall into the hands of corporate CEOs to create an organizational religious program for the team building. While such spiritualities incorporate the concept of the “world” and body, these are subordinated to the all-consuming attempts to make the individual the centre of social renewal.

Another example is the organizational spirituality that makes people misrecognize the values of profit in pursuing spiritual programs (Kamoche and Pinnington, 2012).<sup>15</sup> Or, the harnessing of spirituality for profits such as “spiritual capital” proposed by a capitalist-turned minister, Ernest Chu. It can be said therefore that much of new religious movements today and spiritualities are “the “cosmic aggrandizement” of the late-modern individual.” Andrew Dawson defines “cosmic self-aggrandizement” as “the discursive universalization of the individual and his/her reach, which is achieved, among other things, by the rhetorical conflation of self-knowledge with universal comprehension and self-governance with cosmic mastery.”<sup>16</sup>

Another approach is naturalized spirituality of Robert Solomon. From philosopher’s point of view, Solomon claims, “Spirituality, like philosophy, is coming to grips with the big picture and with it our need for a larger sense of our lives.”<sup>17</sup> This Hegelian sense of coming to grips with the bigger picture is a welcome corrective to privatization of spiritualities under neoliberal globalization. Solomon is right to argue that we need to understand our place and role in the global world. “Spirituality, Solomon further adds, “is ultimately social and global, a sense of ourselves identified with others and the world. Conversely, I want to say that spirituality is the expansion of the self.”<sup>18</sup> Solomon, however, following Nietzsche’s philosophy falls short of stating and elaborating on the kind of values that people should develop when confronted with global economic inequalities, climate change, and consumerism. His naturalized spirituality remains abstract and aloof from the everyday engagement of people immersed in the dizzying consumerism, unemployment, chronic poverty, and hunger.

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<sup>14</sup> Michael Washburn, *Embodied spirituality in a sacred world* (New York: SUNY, 2004), p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> Ken Kamoche and Ashly H Pinnington, “Managing people ‘spiritually’: a Bourdieusian critique,” *Work, Employment and Society*, 2012, 26 (3) 497–513.

<sup>16</sup> Andrew Dawson, *Consuming the Self: New Spirituality as “Mystified Consumption,”* *Social Compass*, 2011, 58.3, 309–15.

<sup>17</sup> Solomon, Robert C., *Spirituality for the skeptic: the thoughtful love of life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

Atheists of course are not to be outdone. I am no fan of atheistic and non-religious forms of spirituality if they simply serve as mirror images of flipside of the same privatistic and bourgeois spiritualities developed in religious traditions. I can refer to Sam Harris, *Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality without Religion*. Harris wasted 208 pages talking about his own personal experience without touching on what is important about spirituality as understood in Christian tradition –compassion and care for the world and others. Harris misunderstood what spirituality stands for in Christian tradition by reducing it to American religion of narcissism: me-first religion. Solomon expresses what Harris missed, “The fact is that true spirituality is not something that makes itself available to our egotistical designs, but rather something that draws us into a larger world and makes us subordinate to a greater will that transcends us on all sides.”<sup>19</sup> This is simply the spirituality that Sam Harris missed. A great miss.

The equally popular book of Andre Comte-Sponville that rescues spirituality from religious monopoly, and insisting on the cosmic “silent unity of all,” does not also succeed in addressing the problem of social sufferings. While he defines spirituality as the need to “break free, at least partially and occasionally, from what Kant called our ‘precious little selves’, our precious little fears, resentments, self-interest, anxieties, worries, frustrations, hopes, compromises, and conceits,” further defining it as “a matter of ‘dying to oneself,” he does not even hint on what this “dying to oneself” would mean in everyday life of people who have lost their homes, jobs, and welfare benefits from the financial crisis, or to people who earn less than a dollar per day.<sup>20</sup>

Another popular version is “pop” Stoicism. According to one version, “We can change in a systematic and thoughtful way the inner effects unpleasant things and events have on us and thus we can cease to be at the mercy of circumstances (Wilkinson, 2007, p. 14). This kind of “happiness spirituality” simply makes one feel good amidst the problems created by neoliberal violence.<sup>21</sup> While it may talk about the political and public consequences of happiness as controlling one’s inner self, it is a superfluous posture in a “runaway world” of globalization.<sup>22</sup> It simply advocates tolerance and pluralism. Wilkinson could not even explain why obsession with one’s happiness will suddenly undermine financial systems and the institutions like IMF and WB. I would even bet that the CEOs of top transnational corporations, Donald Trump (with net worth of 4 billion USD in 2015) as well as Warren Buffett (with net

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<sup>19</sup> Sam Harris, *Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality without Religion* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2014).

<sup>20</sup> André Comte-Sponville, *The book of atheist spirituality* (New York: Random House, 2007).

<sup>21</sup> Tony Wilkinson, *The lost art of being happy spirituality for sceptics* (Finland: Findhorn Press, 2008), p. 14.

<sup>22</sup> Anthony Giddens, *Runaway world: how globalisation is reshaping our lives* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1999).

worth of 72.2 billion USD) have all achieved inner peace. If not, they are also capable of achieving it. Consequently, the Kingdom of God is equated with the search for wholeness and enlightenment of the self. Even the neo-Jungian spirituality, or the Buddhist eightfold path, could not offer resistance against all-encompassing logic of capitalist consumerism and reduction of everything to exchange values. It can only talk about wholeness, individuation which are easily assimilable to neoliberal entrepreneurial subjectivism just like outsourced Eastern spiritualities. Or, in the words of the famous Slovenian philosopher,

The recourse to Taoism or Buddhism offers a way out of this predicament which definitely works better than the desperate escape into old traditions: instead of trying to cope with the accelerating rhythm of technological progress and social changes, one should rather renounce the very endeavour to retain control over what goes on, rejecting it as the expression of the modern logic of domination – one should, instead, “let oneself go,” drift along, while retaining an inner distance and indifference towards the mad dance of this accelerated process, a distance based on the insight that all this social and technological upheaval is ultimately just a nonsubstantial proliferation of semblances which do not really concern the innermost kernel of our being.<sup>23</sup>

Even the “secular spirituality” espoused by Harold Walach (2015) that is “secular,” “fundamental,” and “non-dogmatic,” simply wants to infuse spiritual dimension to the secular spirit of Enlightenment or modern western tradition to make it palatable to post-modern spiritual sensibilities.<sup>24</sup> Meanwhile David Lawrence Preston’s (2007) advocacy of spirituality of simple living does not address the problem of access to resources: “Truly prosperous people do not need to burden themselves with unnecessary personal possessions.”<sup>25</sup> Out of his 365 steps to practical spirituality, there is no clear step on how to engage with the world on social sufferings and economic inequalities. He claims, “Spiritually inclined people are generally happier because they have a sense of meaning and a belief in something bigger than themselves that brings hope and optimism and faith, all of which are closely linked to happiness.” How about the starving mothers in Somalia? The poor in the favelas in Rio? The street children of Manila? Will they be much happier if only they develop and follow the 365 steps to practical spirituality? This is highly dubious. Even assuming the “spirituality of simple living” only appeals middle class of affluent societies, how one can persuade rich religious people to adopt the attitude of detachment to possessions of worldly goods is unclear. He approvingly quotes

<sup>23</sup> Zizek, Slavoj, *On belief* (London: Routledge, 2001) p.13.

<sup>24</sup> Harold Walach, *Secular spirituality the next step towards enlightenment* (Switzerland: Springer, 2015).

<sup>25</sup> David Lawrence Preston, *365 steps to practical spirituality: A day-to-day guide to finding health, contentment and inner peace* (Oxford: Spring Hill House, 2007), p. 365.

Bertrand Russell, “It’s the preoccupation with possessions more than any other thing that keeps us from living freely and nobly.” It sounds like the sermon of most priests, pastors, and spiritual writers. But in a world of great inequality, where 85 billionaires have the same wealth as the bottom half of the world’s population, where 1% of the world population owns 48% of the wealth in 2014, while the least well-off 80% currently own just 5.5%, such maxim seems absurd, if not, outright ridiculous.

### **Towards a Materialist Definition of Spirituality**

Having discussed very briefly “spirituality revolution,” let us now turn to re-tracing the original meaning of spirituality. Originally, spirituality has nothing to do with the binary opposition between body and soul, between the spiritual and materials. The origins of the word “spirituality” lie in the Latin *spiritualitas* associated with the adjective *spiritualis* (spiritual). It is equivalent to Greek *pneuma* as used in the writings of Saint Paul. As Sheldrake explains, “The intended contrast is not therefore between body and soul but between two attitudes to life. A “spiritual person” (see 1 Cor 2, 14–15) was simply “someone within whom the Spirit of God dwelt or who lived under the influence of the Spirit of God.”<sup>26</sup> Or, in the words of Casaldiga and Vigil (1994), “The spirit is not another life but the best of life, what makes life be what it is, giving it love and strength, looking after it, and moving it forward” (p. 2).<sup>27</sup>

But what does it mean to live according to the spirit of God? Sheldrake argues that the current vogue to dismiss the religious in favour of the spiritual, religious tradition for individualistic search for meaning, has to do with the culture of narcissism that wants to create a history-less memory, a culture of immediate gratification that junks all memories and traditions that get into the way of self-aggrandizement. Or as Harvey Cox observes, today, “[f]aith, rather than beliefs, is once again becoming its defining quality.”<sup>28</sup>

Hence, materialist analysis serves as a corrective to the “spiritualizing” and atomizing tendencies in post-modern spiritualities. By materialist analysis, I mean an approach that emphasizes the material, corporal, bodily, and worldly dimensions of spirituality.<sup>29</sup> I am not referring to Griffin’s definition of vulgar materialism that supports the mechanistic philosophy of Enlightenment.<sup>30</sup> Such mechanical and vulgar materialism has been the target of many ecofeminists, notably by Carolyn

<sup>26</sup> Philip Sheldrake, *A brief history of spirituality* (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2007) p. 24.

<sup>27</sup> Pedro Casaldiga and Jose Maria Vigil, *The spirituality of liberation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1994), p. 2.

<sup>28</sup> Harvey Cox, *The future of faith*. New York: Harper Collins, 2009), p. 17.

<sup>29</sup> Jeremy Carrette, *Foucault and religion: spiritual corporality and political spirituality* (London: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>30</sup> Griffin, David Ray, *Spirituality and society: postmodern visions* (New York: State University of New York, 1988).



Merchant.<sup>31</sup> But Griffin is referring more to Newtonian positivism than the more humanistic materialism.<sup>32</sup> Such approach is not foreign to Pope Francis who points out in his *Laudato Si*, “the life of the spirit is not dissociated from the body or from nature or from worldly realities, but lived in and with them, in communion with all that surrounds us” (No. 216).

From a materialist analysis, spiritual traditions are not free-floating spaceships that one can choose to ride or get off as soon as one finds it uncomfortable. “Spiritual traditions, as Sheldrake explains, “do not exist on some ideal plane above and beyond history. The origin and development of spiritual traditions reflect the circumstances of time and place as well as the psychological state of the people involved.”<sup>33</sup> Hence, the danger of rejecting any tradition and championing individualistic approach to spirituality is, “it offers no clear principles to judge whether the way we approach a mystical text or the way we adopt a spiritual practice is likely to be life-enhancing or spiritually dangerous.”<sup>34</sup> The do-it-yourself spirituality simply fuels the rapacious drive of postmodern individualism by cannibalizing different religious narratives and spirituality-traditions to concoct one’s own preferred spiritual recipe.

In short, “spirituality revolution” today, which forcibly tears apart spirituality from institutionalized religion and traditions, easily allows individuals to have their spiritual cakes, create it, and eat it, too. I therefore agree with Eric Ritskes that, “any definition of spirituality needs to acknowledge the value of connection, as conceived in indigenous spirituality, as vital and inherent to its being: a connection to all aspects of the self, connection to one’s community, connection to history, and connection to a higher power or larger framework. It is through this connectivity that spiritual power is constructed and spiritual resistance is empowered and without it, spirituality falls prey to individualism and relativism” (p. 15).<sup>35</sup>

Next, in its most basic or anthropological sense, spirituality, like personality, is a characteristic of the human being as such. It is the capacity of persons to transcend themselves through knowledge and love, that is, to reach beyond themselves in

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<sup>31</sup> Carolyn Merchant, *The death of nature: women, ecology, and the scientific revolution* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980).

<sup>32</sup> I agree with Andre Comte-Sponville’s definition of materialism: “To be materialistic, in the philosophical sense of the word, is to deny the ontological independence of the spirit. It is not to deny its existence (in which case, materialism itself would become unthinkable). Spirit is not the cause of nature.” Comte Sponville, *The book of atheist spirituality*, p. 22. In this sense, materialism does not preclude transcendence.

<sup>33</sup> Sheldrake, *A brief history of spirituality*, p. 5.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 206.

<sup>35</sup> Eric J. Ritskes, “Connected: indigenous spirituality as resistance in the classroom.” In *Spirituality, education & society an integrated approach* (pp. 15-36). Edited by Njoki N. Wane, Energy L. Manyimo, & Eric J. Ritskes (Boston: Sense Publishers, 2011).

relationship to others and thus become more than self-enclosed material monads.<sup>36</sup> The term does have religious connotations, according to Griffin, in that one's ultimate values and meanings reflect some presupposition as to what is *holy*, that is, of ultimate importance. "But the presupposed holy," Griffin rightly argues, "can be something very worldly, such as power, sexual energy, or success. Spirituality in this broad sense is not an optional quality which we might elect not to have. Everyone embodies a spirituality, even if it be a nihilistic or materialistic."<sup>37</sup> It may refer to the ultimate values and meanings in terms of which we live, whether they be otherworldly or very worldly ones, and whether or not we consciously try to increase our commitment to those values and meanings. The reality is much broader. Hence, "The spirit (spirituality) of a person, community or people is ... their life motivation, their disposition, what inspires their actions, their Utopia, their causes, regardless of whether these are better or worse, good."<sup>38</sup> Consequently, "those who do not have our spirit also have spirit; those who do not have Christian spirituality and even those who claim to reject spiritualities also have spirituality."<sup>39</sup>

Third, spirituality is a project of *life-integration* which means that it is holistic, involving body and spirit, emotions and thought, activity and passivity, social and individual aspects of life. It is an effort to bring all of life together in an integrated synthesis of on-going growth and development. Spirituality, then, involves one's whole life in relation to reality as a whole.<sup>40</sup>

Finally, spirituality need not necessarily be linked with religious belief in God. My understanding of spirituality in this paper is closer to the humanist definition that can be read in the works of Erich Fromm, Rollo May, Abraham Maslow, Gordon Allport, Viktor Frankl, and contemporary philosophers such as Guattari and Michel Foucault. In the humanist tradition, spirituality refers to the capacity of individuals to transcend their narrow self-interests for the sake of pursuing collective good of humanity. In this sense, spirituality "is a lived reality that is shaped into a way of life, for example, attitudes, practices, rituals, and behaviours become constant in an individual's life."<sup>41</sup> Or, more generally, "Spirituality as lived experience can be defined as conscious involvement in the project of life integration through self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives." This is very similar to Latin American understanding of liberation spirituality. In this context, "spirit means life, building, power, action, freedom. The spirit is not something that is outside matter, outside the

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<sup>36</sup> Sandra Marie Schneiders, *Religion vs. Spirituality: A Contemporary Conundrum. Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality*, 2003, 3: 2, pp. 163-185.

<sup>37</sup> David Ray Griffin, *Spirituality and society*, 87.

<sup>38</sup> Casaldiga and Vigil, *The spirituality of liberation*, p. 4.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>40</sup> Schneiders, *Religion versus spirituality*, p. 167.

<sup>41</sup> David B. Perrin, *Studying Christian spirituality* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 19.

body, and outside tangible reality, but something that is within, that inhabits matter, the body, actuality, and gives them life, makes them be what they are; it fills them with power, moves them, impels them; it propels them into growth and creativity in an impulse of freedom.”<sup>42</sup> Spirituality is expansive. Simon Robinson rightly points out that “Spirituality cannot be seen simply as individualistic, with the person choosing to take what they want from ‘religious experience.’ It is about making sense of and responding to the communities of which we are a part, from local to global, from family to environment.”<sup>43</sup> Spirituality is not only inward journey of the self but involves a movement outward.

### The Spirituality of Neoliberalism

After briefly sampling the current spiritualities that exist in the “market of religions,” in this section, I will briefly outline the contours of neoliberalism. At the end of the discussion, I hope I will be able to demonstrate the link between the rise of neoliberalism and the proliferation of various spiritualities today.

Neoliberalism was born out of the meeting of prominent intellectuals in the 1930s in Mount Pelerin, Switzerland. This group advanced the idea that planning and the role of the state should be checked, if not rolled back. They believe that it is the role of intellectuals to combat the pernicious influence of the Leftist intellectuals and allied elites who want to strengthen the role of the state in economic planning. The state and its collectivist power were seen as the greatest threat to human liberty and individual initiative. Michael C. Howard and John E. King provide a good definition of neoliberalism:

We define neo-liberalism as a doctrine and a related social practice. The *doctrine* is that all, or virtually all, economic and social problems have a market solution, with the corollary that state failure is typically worse than market failure. Unlike classical liberalism, however, neo-liberalism recognizes that political agencies must frequently act as financiers, supervisors and regulators of markets and marketization. Thus, neo-liberalism does not necessarily entail a massively reduced ‘weight’ for states or a reduction in their core powers, only that their activities must be significantly restructured and redirected.<sup>44</sup>

The real triumph of neoliberalism as a new “religion” came during its third wave in the eighties. Neoliberalism spread from North Atlantic and Western European confines of elite academia and domestic national politics and spread into many global

<sup>42</sup> Casaldiga and Vigil, *Spirituality of liberation*, p. 2.

<sup>43</sup> Robinson, Simon, *Spirituality, ethics, and care* (London: Kingsley Publishers, 2008).

<sup>44</sup> Michael Charles Howard and John Edward King, *The rise of neoliberalism in advanced capitalist economies: A materialist analysis* (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 38.

institutions, especially in the former communist countries and the developing world. Its principles were adopted by economists and policymakers of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the World Trade Organization (WTO), the EU, and as part of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

Many critics of neoliberalism agree that the 1990s was notable for the notorious “structural adjustment” policies pursued through these institutions and agreements. These were summarized in 1989 by the British economist John Williamson as the now renowned “Washington Consensus” and included tax reform, trade liberalization, privatization, deregulation, and strong property rights<sup>45</sup> (Jones, 2012, p. 19). Structural adjustment agreements call upon recipient governments to liberalize and privatize economies in the context of strict budget discipline. The role of the state has been reshaped to serve market liberalization, as governments have downsized, decentralized, and privatized (or “contracted out”) their functions. Neoliberalism was part of the modernization package that enticed developing countries that if they follow the policies and programs of lending institutions, they will join the rank and files of the developed nations. States followed the austere directives to decrease their protection of domestic industries from foreign competition (through tariffs, licenses,) to put fewer constraints on financial markets, fewer barriers on free movement of capital across their borders, and fewer regulations on labor markets. They are also operating with much tighter fiscal policy: They have strengthened private property rights and expanded these rights for foreign firms—for example, by removing restrictions on foreign ownership of land and productive assets. They have joined the World Trade Organization (WTO), which promotes safeguards for property, including controversial intellectual property safeguards, in conjunction with trade opening. The ostensible reason for implementing free-market reforms was that they would generate growth, development, and a convergence of the incomes of developed and developing countries. Structural adjustment puts developing countries in a particularly poor bargaining position. Heavily indebted, capital-poor countries with high levels of unemployment are desperate for foreign investment. Hence, less developed countries compete with equally poor countries for foreign investments. And this induces the notorious “race to the bottom,” in which less developed countries, rather than escaping the cycle of poverty and inequalities, plunge deeper into foreign debts, capital haemorrhage, poverty, brain drain, and unemployment.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Daniel Stedman Jones, *Masters of the universe: Hayek and Friedman and the birth of neoliberal politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 19.

<sup>46</sup> Nita Rudra, *Globalization and the race to the bottom in developing countries: who really gets hurt?* (Cambridge: CUP, 2008).

## The Birth of the Neoliberal Subject

The neoliberal vision of globalization was that a system based on individual freedom, free markets, and the opportunities provided by “flexible labor markets” would substitute for universal high-quality publicly funded education and health care systems, more efficient and cheaper privatized alternatives. The citizen was nothing more than a consumer. But neoliberals did not believe in the possibility of the failure of the market in providing safety-nets for the losers. The losers were labelled as welfare moms, dole-scroungers, or indigent free riders. At the same time, the language of profit, efficiency, and consumption replaced that of citizenship, solidarity, and service.

The subject that is nourished by neoliberalism is the “rational, autonomous, self-interested, and responsible liberal subject.”<sup>47</sup> He or she is “the possessive individual who owns and can sell him or herself to another for a time or can use other forms of capital (money, buildings, machines, land, etc.) as he or she wishes free from government interference. Rather addressing the problem of the market, collective civic actions are routinely reinterpreted as problems that can be solved if individuals buy knowledgeably and/or ethically.” Ian Parker writes,

Contemporary capitalist society is characterised by deregulation of education and welfare support, the privatisation of services so that each sector of the state operates as if it were a separate company. And each individual then becomes all the more separated from everyone else, with their success and wealth put down to their own ability or hard work and their failure and poverty down to their own stupidity or laziness. This new ‘neoliberal’ capitalism breeds competition and insecurity, and is the dominant form of globalisation.<sup>48</sup>

To cushion the social damage of “competition and insecurity,” neoliberalism dismantles the notion of democratic space and substitutes the “culture of enterprise.”<sup>49</sup> For the enterprise culture to succeed, people will have to be weaned from relying on government, and they have to begin accepting individual responsibility. This explains the rise of managerialism or the extension of management culture to public institutions, exemplified by the contemporary obsession with evaluating performance in terms of outcome rather than process, and the increasing concern on the part of government to shift from democratic management towards corporate

<sup>47</sup> Chris Arthur, *Financial literacy education: neoliberalism, the consumer and the citizen* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2012).

<sup>48</sup> Ian Parker, *Revolution in psychology: Alienation to emancipation* (Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Books, 2007).

<sup>49</sup> Daniel Bell, *Liberation theology after the end of history: the refusal to cease suffering* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 153.

management.<sup>50</sup> The consequence has been the ‘deprofessionalisation’ of public services and government decision-making as the old public sector élites, namely career civil servants and academics, have been replaced by management.<sup>51</sup>

Subject-formation under the behest of neoliberal regimes champions and promotes the entrepreneurial self. The entrepreneurial self has to follow the imperative of globalization to fully participate in the market. It fuels what Robert Wuthnow calls self-interest: “In economic terms this means looking out for ourselves: getting the most for our money, making wise investments, driving the hardest bargains we can.”<sup>52</sup> From the perspective of the neoliberal consumer-citizen, our interdependence with others is distorted and we appear as self-sufficient monads who owe nothing to others. For Chris Arthur,

The extension of the market into all spheres of life strengthens this myopia by supporting the extension of a practice and set of relations into spaces that were previously shielded from market forces. With few alternatives to neoliberalism, it becomes increasingly difficult to see our interdependence because the market and its social relations of production appear as part of human nature rather than as social constructs.”<sup>53</sup>

## Neoliberal Spirituality

Having discussed the origin and nature of neoliberalism, it is now appropriate to understand the “spiritual” orientation of neoliberalism. It is my contention that neoliberal capitalism that is now rapaciously spreading its Vulgate throughout the world spews its own spiritual values, a total way of life, that shapes how people deal with the world, and how they relate with other people. In fact, I am convinced that the spread of the ethos and values of neoliberalism through globalization has hijacked mainstream spirituality in the direction of privatization and extreme individualism. The privatization of spirituality has led to the quest for “the ‘authentic’ self.” In this privatized version of spirituality, “personal spirituality is seen as “independent of other people and their spiritualities; the histories, forces, and discourses at work around the individual; and independent of any realm outside of the core self. The primary concern is with moving inward.”<sup>54</sup> As I discussed earlier, institutions, such as the market, do not merely influence the relationship between things – that is goods and services – but the nature of individuals, including their

<sup>50</sup> Thomas Klikauer, *Managerialism a critique of an ideology*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

<sup>51</sup> Lynch Kathleen, Grummell, Bernie & Devine, Dympna, *New managerialism in education: commercialization, carelessness, and gender* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

<sup>52</sup> Robert Wuthnow, *Acts of compassion* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 13.

<sup>53</sup> Chris Arthur, Financial literacy education, p. 48.

<sup>54</sup> Eric Ritskes, Connected, p. 20.

preferences and their relationships with others.<sup>55</sup> The spiritual ethos of neoliberalism that converts everything to commodities with exchange values, as Michael Walzer argues, “would be like a totalitarian state’ with the market and money ‘invading every sphere, dominating every other distributive process.”<sup>56</sup> Similarly, Polanyi argues that, “To allow the market mechanism to be sole director of the fate of human beings and their natural environment, indeed, even of the amount and use of purchasing power, would result in the demolition of society.”<sup>57</sup> (in Harvey, 2005b, p. 167).

Neoliberal spirituality privatizes religion and spiritualities just as it privatizes the state and keeps at bay the power of the state and civil society. The neo-liberal state is hostile to (and in some instances overly repressive of) all forms of social solidarity (such as the trade unions or other social movements that acquired considerable power in the social democratic state) that put restraints on capital accumulation.<sup>58</sup>

The neo-liberal state emphasizes the importance of personal and individual freedom, liberty, and responsibility, particularly in the market, and failure is therefore entrepreneurial virtues failings rather than attributable to properties (Harvey, 20). This orgy of market liberty is condemned by Pope John Paul II in the encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, “The essence of freedom then becomes self-love carried to the point of contempt for God and neighbour, a self-love which leads to an unbridled affirmation of self-interest and which refuses to be limited by any demand of justice” (No. 17).<sup>59</sup> In the end, neoliberalism destroys compassion itself. Neoliberal globalization has also closed the gates to any possibility of justifying the State’s responsibility for ensuring equal education, since this prospect would apparently not be profit-yielding. Neoliberalism has stripped bare the promise to guarantee the physical and mental welfare of all citizens (never mind their happiness), equal opportunity, and the rectification of historical injustices to deprived populations.

Underlying neoliberal philosophical anthropology is a more general vision that every human being is an “entrepreneur” managing his or her own life and should act by maximizing gains and reducing, or eliminating risks. Entrepreneurial spirituality creates subjects who are supposed to act in a particular way according to the ideal of the business risk-taker. Individuals who carefully choose their friends, hobbies, sports, and partners to maximize their status are ethically neoliberal.

<sup>55</sup> Keri Day, *Religious resistance to neoliberalism: womanist and black feminist perspectives* (New York: Palgrave, 2016).

<sup>56</sup> Michael Walzer, *Spheres of justice* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), p. 127.

<sup>57</sup> David Harvey, *A brief history of neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>58</sup> Harvey, David. *Spaces of neoliberalization: towards a theory of uneven geographical development*. (Department of Geography University of Heidelberg, 2005), p. 19.

<sup>59</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus annus*, available at [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_01051991\\_centesimus-annus.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_01051991_centesimus-annus.html), retrieved October 27, 2017).

Such spirituality, which is corporatized, commercialized, and marketized, requires the autonomous chooser, a self, who is capable of acting both in a responsive and responsible way toward the ever-unruly environment under “disorganized capitalism.” In short, neoliberal spirituality creates “flexible” individuals with flexible spiritual lives.

It is therefore no surprise to find parallelism between neoliberal spirituality and postmodern selves. The postmodern neoliberal spirituality is premised on the belief that, “[e]veryone is free to choose his or her own spiritual path.”<sup>60</sup> Thus, the current boom of spirituality industry reflects a subjective turn in contemporary Western culture occasioned by neoliberal subject-making.<sup>61</sup> This kind of spirituality dovetails perfectly with “consumerist “lifestyle spirituality” that promotes fitness, healthy living, and holistic well-being” to better fit ever changing nature of capitalism.<sup>62</sup>

The way mainstream psychologies become complicit with neoliberal individualism and social narcissism is also applicable to spiritualities. Just as psychologies are used by neoliberalism to placate the social damages it brings, so spiritualities are also easily used to assuage people’s economic marginalization and spiritual sufferings that arise from the dissolution of social bonds:

The attempts by some psychologists to pretend that they can swim with the current and build a ‘postmodern’ psychology to suit a postmodern society miss the point of these changes. They conveniently sidestep questions of exploitation and oppression in a society that is still capitalist and which is still organised around patriarchal and colonialist power to alienate and divide the workforce against itself. Such a ‘postmodern’ psychology stays at the surface self-image of contemporary capitalism, and serves to cover over deeper structural problems.<sup>63</sup>

The problem with psychologized spirituality “is the way in which it reinforces the idea that the individual is solely responsible for his or her own suffering. It supports a world where meaning is a private reality and where individuals make sense of their lives in isolation – a self-styled and custom-built spirituality purchased in the marketplace – rather than one generated through the social and historical lines of transmission within communities.”<sup>64</sup> Wallach is right, therefore, to admit, that spirituality in the postmodern world, can easily be co-opted by capitalism:

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<sup>60</sup> Robinson, *Spirituality, ethics, and care*, p. 9.

<sup>61</sup> Sheldrake, *A brief history of spirituality*, p. 2.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>63</sup> Ian Parker, *Revolution in psychology: Alienation to emancipation*. Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto, 2007), p. 73.

<sup>64</sup> Carrette and King, *Selling spirituality*, p. 80.



Nevertheless there is a considerable danger of misusing spiritual experiences. This happens when they are used to exalt the importance of the individual ego. Perhaps the most subtle of these seductions and the most difficult discrimination to make is between a true source of experience and a helpless ego in search of plastic surgery for narcissistic wounds.<sup>65</sup>

In the same vein, Tacey warns that, “The spirituality revolution is rising from below, and not from above. As such, it is vulnerable to commercial manipulation and unscrupulous interest. There are many organisations and groups that seek to capitalise on the shifts taking place in society, and we have to be alert at every turn to possible abuse, violation, and distortion of the spiritual impulse”<sup>66</sup> Interestingly, Pope Francis himself shares similar observations:

The Catholic faith of many peoples is nowadays being challenged by the proliferation of new religious movements, some of which tend to fundamentalism while others seem to propose a spirituality without God. This is, on the one hand, a human reaction to a materialistic, consumerist and individualistic society, but it is also a means of exploiting the weaknesses of people living in poverty and on the fringes of society, people who make ends meet amid great human suffering and are looking for immediate solutions to their needs. These religious movements, not without a certain shrewdness, come to fill, within a predominantly individualistic culture, a vacuum left by secularist rationalism<sup>67</sup> (*Evangelii Gaudium*, No. 63).

### **Selling Spirituality for Neoliberal Consumers**

According to Carrette and King, “From feng shui to holistic medicine, from aromatherapy candles to yoga weekends, from Christian mystics to New Age gurus, spirituality is big business.” True indeed! For many people, spirituality has replaced religion as old allegiances and social identities are transformed by modernity. However, in a context of individualism and erosion of traditional community allegiances, ‘spirituality’ has become a new cultural addiction and a claimed panacea for the angst of modern living. Spirituality is celebrated by those who are disillusioned by traditional institutional religions and seen as a force for wholeness, healing, and inner transformation.<sup>68</sup>

According to the gospel of postmodern spirituality, “To find an ‘authentic’ spirituality one must be able to discover the ‘authentic’ self – the approach and

<sup>65</sup> Harold Walach, *Secular spirituality the next step towards enlightenment* (Switzerland: Springer, 2015), p. 182.

<sup>66</sup> David Stacey, *The spirituality revolution*, p. 3.

<sup>67</sup> Pope Francis, *Joy of the Gospel*, 2013, No. 63. Available at [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html), retrieved October 23, 2017.

<sup>68</sup> Carrette and King, *Selling spirituality*, p. 1.

direction is inward. Personal spirituality is independent of other people and their spiritualities; the histories, forces, and discourses at work around the individual; and independent of any realm outside of the core self. The primary concern is with moving inward.”<sup>69</sup> Ironically, “[i]t was this culture of consumerism and individualism that has led writers to explore spirituality as a cure or alternative in the first place, but instead of escaping the Western hegemonic discourse they are merely reproducing it within this new discourse of spirituality.”<sup>70</sup>

We have to reject the definition of spirituality as search for wholeness and move towards relationships and connectedness to break the impasses of neoliberal subjectification. As Harvey Cox points out, “The danger is that religion [spirituality] could become no more than a service sector to the global civilization, no longer shaping its values but merely repairing the spiritual damage it inflicts.”<sup>71</sup> In short, neoliberal spirituality is “*individualist/consumerist* and *corporatist/capitalist* spiritualities” that “devalue embodied communities by increasing the self-importance of individuality (or the corporation) and placing the pursuit of individual (and/or corporate) wealth above social justice.”<sup>72</sup>

Today, with the demise and bankruptcy of neoliberal ideology or the so-called “Washington consensus,” the values and ethos of neoliberal doctrine remain deeply embedded in the institutions around the world. It continues to inform the practices and life styles of subjects who populate and recreate those institutions from families to government bureaucracies. Amidst this lingering menace of neoliberal doctrine, with the ways it sells spiritualities, Christianity can offer a counter-cultural antidote to neoliberal ethos that can unclog the neoliberalized capillaries of global capitalist subjects. Such counter-culture that is informed by anti-neoliberal spirituality can serve as starting point for an updated version of Marcuse’s “Great Refusal” – the contemporary refusal to the slogan there is no alternative to capitalism. Spirituality must snap people away from “lack of deep spirituality which turns into pessimism, fatalism, and mistrust.”<sup>73</sup> If as Chris Arthur argues, “Citizens should therefore not be conceived as self-interested individuals in competition with others but rather as individuals who have a duty to promote a social environment within which individuals can pursue their own private conceptions of the good within some overarching collective conception of the good that is understood and can be altered by citizens (a situation we do not have in (neo)liberal capitalist societies),”<sup>74</sup> then, spirituality must enable individuals to justify the goods it promotes, and the

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<sup>69</sup> Ritskies, *Connected*, p. 20.

<sup>70</sup> Carrette and King, *Selling spirituality*, p. 21.

<sup>71</sup> Harvey Cox, *Christianity*, p. 124.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>73</sup> Pope Francis, *Joy of the Gospel*, No. 275.

<sup>74</sup> Chris Arthur, *Financial literacy education*, p. 234.

directions it points to. Spirituality must not be left to irrational forces of the market of religions. And this direction points to the alternative spiritual vision of Pope Francis.

### **The anti-Neoliberal Spirituality of “Pop” Francis**

*The spirituality of the poor.* The first thing that stands out from the vision of Pope Francis is Franciscan spirituality or spirituality of the poor.<sup>75</sup> When Pope Francis was elected after two rounds of voting, he chose the papal name “Francis,” the first in the history of papal names. “Pope Francis chose his name in honor of St. Francis of Assisi because he is a lover of the poor,” said Vatican deputy spokesman Thomas Rosica. He adds, “Cardinal Bergoglio had a special place in his heart and his ministry for the poor, for the disenfranchised, for those living on the fringes and facing injustice.”<sup>76</sup>

What does it mean to live the spirituality of Saint Francis today? It means to be part of the Church of the poor. But what does it mean for the Church to be “a poor church of the poor”? In his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (*Joy of the Gospel*), Pope Francis explains what opting for the poor means:

This entails appreciating the poor in their goodness, in their experience of life, in their culture, and in their ways of living the faith. True love is always contemplative, and permits us to serve the other not out of necessity or vanity, but rather because he or she is beautiful above and beyond mere appearances.

The document adds,

The love by which we find the other pleasing leads us to offer him something freely. The poor person, when loved, “is esteemed as of great value,” and this is what makes the authentic option for the poor differ from any other ideology, from any attempt to exploit the poor for one’s own personal or political interest (No. 199).

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<sup>75</sup> One cannot appreciate Pope Francis’ compassion for the poor if one does not know the *villas miserias*, where the poorest of the poor in Buenos Aires are found, where Jorge Mario Bergoglio worked for many years. Cardinal Sean O’Malley of Boston, one of the cardinals who took part in the conclave that elected Bergoglio, said in an interview, “I knew that the Church’s social gospel would be front and center with this man, realizing the experience of the Church in Latin America” (quoted in Allen, *The Francis miracle*, p. 128).

<sup>76</sup> The name itself already signals the direction of Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio: “Wearing simple white robes and plain black shoes, he explained how he decided to name himself after St. Francis of Assisi: When he reached two-thirds of the vote in the conclave, a fellow cardinal embraced him and said, “Don’t forget the poor.” “That’s when I thought of Francis of Assisi,” he said. “And that is how the name came to me: Francis of Assisi, the man of poverty, of peace.” He added: “This is what I want, a poor church for the poor.” (from [http://worldnews.nbcnews.com/\\_news/2013/03/16/17336851-pope-francis-describes-wish-for-poor-church-for-the-poor?lite](http://worldnews.nbcnews.com/_news/2013/03/16/17336851-pope-francis-describes-wish-for-poor-church-for-the-poor?lite), accessed February 2, 2015).

Here, the Pope already distances the love that animates the “option for the poor” from pure sentimentalism and instrumentalist charity of capitalist culture. Charity, of course, is part of Christian and Franciscan spirituality. Even Pope Benedict in *Deus Caritas Est* emphasized that charity is one of the “three-fold responsibility” of the Church. Pope Benedict adds that the Church “cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice. She has to play her part through rational argument and she has to reawaken the spiritual energy without which justice, which always demands sacrifice, cannot prevail and prosper” (No. 28). The same exhortation is pursued and reiterated by Pope Francis, by emphasizing that charity must go beyond mere “alms giving:”

It is not enough to offer someone a sandwich unless it is accompanied by the possibility of learning how to stand on one’s own two feet. Charity that leaves the poor person as he or she is, is not sufficient. True mercy, the mercy God gives to us and teaches us, demands justice; it demands that the poor find the way to be poor no longer.<sup>77</sup>

The spirituality of the poor also entails the “need to let ourselves be evangelized by them” [poor]. Pope Francis declares,

This is why I want a Church that is poor and for the poor. They have much to teach us. Not only do they share in the *sensus fidei*, but in their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them. He challenges his audience: “Do you think of the poor? Do you feel with the poor? Do you do something for the poor? Do you ask the poor to give you the wisdom they have?”

In his message to the young people at University of Santo Tomas, Manila, the Pope said:

This is what you lack, to learn how to beg, and to those to whom we give. This isn’t easy to understand: To learn how to beg. To learn how to receive with humility. To learn to be evangelized by the poor, those that we help, those infirm, orphans, they have so much to offer us.

Have I learned to beg also for that? Or do I feel self sufficient and I’m only going to offer something and think that you have no need of anything?

Do you know that you, too, are poor? Do you know your poverty and the need that you receive? Do you let yourselves be evangelized by those you serve? Let them give to you?

And this is what helps you mature in your commitment to give to others, to learn how to offer out your hand, from your very own poverty.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Pope Francis, *The church of mercy* (London: Loyola Press, 2014), p. 99.

<sup>78</sup> <http://www.rappler.com/specials/pope-francis-ph/81203-full-text-pope-francis-message-youth-ust> (accessed January 27, 2015).

In another occasion, Pope Francis (2014) makes the same exhortation:

The poor are also the privileged teachers of our knowledge of God; their frailty and simplicity unmask our selfishness, our false security, and our claim to be self-sufficient. The poor guide us to experience God's closeness and tenderness, to receive his love in our life, his mercy as the Father who cares for us, for all of us, with discretion and patient trust.<sup>79</sup>

This spirituality entails that we “find Christ in them [the poor], to lend our voice to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them, and to embrace the mysterious wisdom that God wishes to share with us through them.” The spirituality of the poor breaks the neoliberal spirituality that either declares poor people as dole-out addicts or as entrepreneurial subjects who have no one to blame for their economic predicaments other than their in-flexibility and inability to adapt to the vagaries of the global market. The anti-neoliberal spirituality of Pope Francis encourages kenosis or self-emptying. It demands emptying ourselves of preconceived prejudices against the poor. Pope Francis points out that, “The Church, guided by the Gospel of mercy and by love for humankind, *hears the cry for justice* and intends to respond to it with all her might.” In this context we can understand Jesus’ command to his disciples: “You yourselves give them something to eat!” (Mark 6:37). This means 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 we encounter.<sup>80</sup>

*Anti-consumerist spirituality.* Another component of Pope Francis’ anti-neoliberal spirituality is anti-consumerism. To evangelize is to make the kingdom of God present in our world. Spirituality in a world, which is saturated with “selfie,” means destroying the privatizing tendencies in religious orientation. It is an anti-consumerist spirituality:

Since the market tends to promote extreme consumerism in an effort to sell its products, people can easily get caught up in a whirlwind of needless buying and spending (Laudato Si, No. 203).

Pope Francis dispels the postmodern obsession with attaining inner freedom which equates freedom with the unrestrained sovereignty to consume. For Pope Francis, such spiritual freedom is bogus because, “those really free are the minority who wield economic and financial power.” Counter to this imperative is a spirituality

<sup>79</sup> Pope Francis, *The church of mercy*, 98.

<sup>80</sup> Francis continues that welfare projects alone are not enough, though they are necessary. “As long as the problems of the poor are not radically resolved by rejecting the absolute autonomy of markets and financial speculation and by attacking the structural cause of inequality, no solution will be found ... Inequality is the root of social ills” (*Joy of the Gospel*, No. 202).

that directs people “to desire, seek, and protect the good of others.” It entails “rejection of every form of self-centeredness and self-absorption” (*Laudato Si*, No. 208). An anti-consumerist spirituality demands simplicity:

Christian spirituality proposes a growth marked by moderation and the capacity to be happy with little. It is a return to that simplicity which allows us to stop and appreciate the small things, to be grateful for the opportunities which life affords us, to be spiritually detached from what we possess, and not to succumb to sadness for what we lack (No. 222).

“Consequently, no one can demand,” the Pope emphasizes, “that religion should be relegated to the inner sanctum of personal life, without influence on societal and national life, without concern for the soundness of civil institutions, without a right to offer an opinion on events affecting society.”<sup>81</sup> Contrary to postmodern and new age spiritualities, religious or secular, anti-neoliberal spirituality has political, cultural, and social dimensions. As David Tacey (2004) nicely puts it, “God cannot be neatly separated from the world, or marshalled into a corner of reality marked ‘formal religion.’ Nor is God’s work kept alive by organisations acting in God’s name. God is much larger than our organisations, and the divine work and mission far exceeds the boundaries of any institutional aspiration or religious assumption.”<sup>82</sup>

*Spirituality of solidarity.*<sup>83</sup> As I have shown, neoliberal form of spiritualities that promote entrepreneurial self, market competition, and rugged individualism in the context of generalized risk encourages absorption of the self into inward quest for freedom and authenticity.<sup>84</sup> This search for inner peace “seems to have no room for mercy,” as people are obsessed with promoting their own self-interests. Pope Francis counters this postmodern narcissism by proclaiming: “We must regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and the world, and that being good and decent are worth it” (*Laudato Si*, 229). In his *Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy*, the Pope offers corporal works of mercy as expressions of solidarity:

Let us rediscover these corporal works of mercy: to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, heal the sick, visit the imprisoned, and bury the dead. And let us not forget the spiritual

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<sup>81</sup> Pope Francis, *Joy of the Gospel*, No. 183.

<sup>82</sup> Tacey, *The spirituality revolution*, p. 189.

<sup>83</sup> In *Octogesima adveniens*, the importance of solidarity is expressed, thus: “Without a renewed education in solidarity, an overemphasis of equality can give rise to an individualism in which each one claims his own rights without wishing to be answerable for the common good” (No. 23).

<sup>84</sup> Carrette and King argue, Psychological individualism is a new form of mass control within late capitalist society, creating a form of subjectivity built on ideals of consumer freedom. It provides part of the philosophical infrastructure and rationale through which economic and political systems operate” (*Selling spirituality*, p. 57).

works of mercy: to counsel the doubtful, instruct the ignorant, admonish sinners, comfort the afflicted, forgive offences, bear patiently those who do us ill, and pray for the living and the dead (No. 15).

Guided by Christian practice of mercy and solidarity, Pope Francis has delivered some blistering rhetoric on the inequities of “deified market, which become the only rule” (*Laudato Si*, No. 56), including the way in which prosperity deadens us to the suffering of others.<sup>85</sup> “We have to say ‘thou shalt not’ to an economy of exclusion and inequality (*Joy of the Gospel*, No. 53). Such an economy kills.” Francis argues, “This imbalance is the result of ideologies which defend the absolute autonomy of the marketplace and financial speculation” (No. 56). The Pope envisions an alternative system where: “Growth in justice requires more than economic growth, while presupposing such growth: it requires decisions, programs, 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” (No. 204).

Pope Francis uses the concept of solidarity as a foil to challenge “unbridled capitalism [that] fragments economic and social life, while the challenge of a society is the opposite: establishing ties of solidarity” (p. 64). Elsewhere, he proclaims:

Rampant capitalism has taught the logic of profit at all costs, of giving to get, of exploitation without looking at the person . . . and we see the results in the crisis we are experiencing! This home is a place that teaches charity; it is a “school” of charity, which instructs me to go and encounter every person, not for profit, but for love.<sup>86</sup>

The Pope strongly argues that, “The word *solidarity* is a little worn and at times poorly understood, but it refers to something more than a few sporadic acts of generosity. It presumes the creation of a new mind-set that thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few.” Moreover solidarity teaches us, “Social problems must be addressed by community networks and not simply by the sum of individual good deeds” (*Laudato Si*, No. 219).

Pope John Paul II in *The Dignity of Labor* (1981) emphasized the solidarity among workers, “This solidarity must be present whenever it is called for by the social degrading of the subject of work, by exploitation of the workers, and by the growing areas of poverty and even hunger” (No. 8). In *Centesimus Annus* (1991), the

<sup>85</sup> Whereas Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI made critical remarks against market capitalism, for Francis it was personal. According to Paul Vallely, “He had seen half his flock plunged below the poverty line when the International Monetary Fund had flown in from Washington during Argentina’s massive debt default crisis in 2001 (Paul Vallely, *Pope Francis: Untying the knots*. New York: Bloomsbeery, 2015), p. 12.

<sup>86</sup> Pope Francis, *The church of mercy*, p. 108.

same Pope proclaimed that, “In order to overcome today’s widespread individualistic mentality, what is required is a concrete commitment to solidarity and charity.”<sup>87</sup> For Pope Francis (2014), solidarity is connected with the option for the poor, of building a church of the poor:

A lack of solidarity toward his or her needs will directly affect our relationship with God: “For if in bitterness of soul he calls down a curse upon you, his Creator will hear his prayer” (Sir. 4:6). The old question always returns: “How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods, and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?” (1 John 3:17). Let us recall also how bluntly the apostle James speaks of the cry of the oppressed: “The wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts” (James 5:4).

To exercise solidarity is to become “revolutionaries” who swim against the tide of wasteful economy:

Have the courage to go against the tide of this culture of efficiency, this culture of waste. Encountering and welcoming everyone, [building] solidarity—a word that is being hidden by this culture, as if it were a bad word—solidarity and fraternity: these are what make our society truly human.<sup>88</sup>

The Christian virtue of solidarity breaks our apathy and indifference towards those who suffer and are products of a wasteful economy: “This “culture of waste” tends to become a common mentality that infects everyone. Human life, the person, is no longer seen as a primary value to be respected and safeguarded, especially if that person is poor or disabled or not yet useful, like the unborn child, or is no longer of any use, like the elderly person.” Pope Francis (2014) issues the challenge: “I ask everyone to reflect on the problem of the loss and waste of food, to identify ways and approaches that, by seriously dealing with this problem, convey solidarity and sharing with the underprivileged” (p. 30).

The “option for the poor” and the need for solidarity should come together. In his encyclical on the environment, *Laudato Si*, the Pope said: “In the present

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<sup>87</sup> In *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (*The Social Concerns of the Church*), Pope John Paul II even makes solidarity an obligation for all Christians in the face of inequalities both between nations and among individuals (No. 9). In No. 26, the encyclical defines solidarity as interdependence among people: “Today perhaps more than in the past, people are realizing that they are linked together by a common destiny, which is to be constructed together, if catastrophe for all is to be avoided.” For an overview of the concept of solidarity as used in Catholic social teachings, see Uzochukwu Jude Njoku, *Re-thinking solidarity as a principle of Catholic social teaching: going Beyond Gaudium et spes* and the Social encyclicals of John Paul II, *Political Theology*, 2008, 9:4, pp. 525-544. .

<sup>88</sup> Pope Francis, *The church of mercy*, p. 122.



condition of global society, where injustices abound and growing numbers of people are deprived of basic human rights and considered expendable, the principle of the common good immediately becomes, logically and inevitably, a summons to *solidarity and a preferential option for the poorest* of our brothers and sisters” (No. 153) [emphasis mine].

According to Allen, the kernel of Pope Francis’ spirituality is when Francis asserted that solidarity with the poor, as well as the promotion of peace, are constituent elements of what it means to be a missionary Church.<sup>89</sup> This means that the struggle for justice and evangelization cannot be separated as distinct missions of the Church. They are one. Thus, he imagines a church that “moves from ‘spiritual worldliness camouflaged by religious practices, unproductive meetings, and empty talk’ (No. 207) to become one that draws near to the world’s multiple expressions of poverty and vulnerability (Nos. 210-12), is committed to care for the earth (articles 215-16), and work for peace (Nos. 218-21), especially through multiple forms of ‘social dialogue’ with other religions (No. 238-58).<sup>90</sup>

*Spirituality of encountering God in the neighbor.* Finally, the anti-neoliberal spirituality of Pope Francis leads Christians to God. In the Joy of the Gospel, he states that, “Loving others is a spiritual force drawing us to union with God.” He adds,

When we live out a spirituality of drawing nearer to others and seeking their welfare, our hearts are opened wide to the Lord’s greatest and most beautiful gifts. Whenever we encounter another person in love, we learn something new about God. Whenever our eyes are opened to acknowledge the other, we grow in the light of faith and knowledge of God. If we want to advance in the spiritual life, then, we must constantly be missionaries (No. 272).

By connecting our struggle for the poor with the union with God, we do not “end up worshipping earthly powers, or ourselves usurping the place of God, even to the point of claiming an unlimited right to trample His creation underfoot.” If God is the absolute and the only Creator, then we lose our hubris to dominate. It destroys the pretention of the market to rule everything!

This spirituality also encourages contemplation that “incorporates the value of relaxation and festivity.” In our zeal to change the world and combat the evils of neoliberal capitalism there is always a danger of “empty activism” (*Laudato Si*, No. 237). Thus, we need also to rest. Contemplation in this form of spirituality is not just

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<sup>89</sup> John Allen, Jr., *The Francis miracle* (New York: Times Book), p. 130.

<sup>90</sup> Richard Lennan, *Evangelii gaudium: The good news from Pope Francis*, *Compass* 48 (2014): 3-8.

inactivity that neoliberal capitalism deems as value-less and unproductive. Rather it is another way of working, of resting to draw strength from the experience of God's gratuity and graciousness.

## Conclusion

What I have offered in this paper is a working outline of an anti-neoliberal spirituality derived from the teachings of Pope Francis, "a lifestyle and a spirituality which together generate resistance to the assault of the technocratic paradigm" (*Laudato Si*, No. 111) generated by global capitalism. I have shown that this anti-neoliberal spirituality is not something foreign to the Judaeo-Christian tradition and Catholic social teachings. It is the only kind of spirituality that we need today in a world where "money, money, cash commands." It is a countercultural spirituality that opposes "worldliness" –

Today she must strip herself of a very grave danger, which threatens every person in the Church, everyone: the danger of *worldliness*. The Christian cannot coexist with the spirit of the world, with the worldliness that leads us to vanity, to arrogance, to pride. And this is an idol; it is not God. It is an idol! And idolatry is the gravest of sins! [emphasis mine]<sup>91</sup>

And these idols include the pantheon of money, wealth, career, and power that lead many Christians to turn indifferent towards the plight of poor, the marginalized, and wasted lives. Indeed, Pope Francis and his reforms are shaking the very foundations of the Church. As Bruce Duncan suggests apropos Pope Francis' encyclical *Joy of the Gospel*, "This is a critical moment in history for the church to make a substantial contribution to rebuilding the moral foundations of economics and of the whole process of globalisation."<sup>92</sup> The challenge is for the church to mobilize all her resources to demystify the idolatry of the market and dictatorship of money that propel the spirit of "winner" ethic. And the anti-neoliberal spirituality of Pope Francis can play a decisive role in countering this neoliberal-engulfed "throwaway civilization."

Based on this anti-neoliberal spirituality, is the future capitalist or otherwise? Nobody can tell. But based on the teachings of Pope Francis, the future society cannot be one where jungle-like competition, rugged individualism, profit accumulation, consumerism, and crass materialism are enshrined in market Cathedrals that demand endless blood sacrifice from the poor.**PS**

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<sup>91</sup> Pope Francis, *The church of mercy*, p. 108.

<sup>92</sup> Bruce Duncan, Pope Francis's call for social justice in the global economy, *The Australasian Catholic Record*, (2015), 91: 2, 178-193.

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