



Final document (translation)

for the Digital Frankfurt Study Day
by Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice (CAPP) Germany
on February 13th, 2021

CHRISTIAN SOCIAL ETHICS
as a blueprint for coping with pandemics
Principles - Strategies - Implementation

by Dr. Christian Stenz

A. Preamble

In the midst of the still unresolved corona pandemic, people are increasingly longing for "normality". The question arises, however, whether there can be a return to an "old" form of life as it was before March 2020.

Many changes have made a lasting impact on our everyday lives. The so-called "elbow greeting" - earlier a sign of distance - has become a sign of the greatest possible closeness.

In the shadow of the pandemic, changes that can be observed worldwide are taking place, which are progressing almost imperceptibly due to the focus of public interest on Covid-19. The United States of America must reinvent itself after the change in power in the White House. New autocracies are emerging everywhere, in China and elsewhere states can appear far more authoritarian than before. In Germany path-breaking elections will take place in 2021.

In addition, from the point of view of some observers, Corona has shown that there has been a "great too much" in many areas, in some cases there is already talk of a gigantic "growth crisis".¹

Many times, the view is therefore that after the pandemic, things simply cannot go on as before, that there must therefore be a "new normal".

¹ Matthias Horx, 2021: *Das Jahr der Entscheidungen*, in: *Zukunftsreport 2021*, Hrsg: zukunftsInstitut, Frankfurt am Main 2020.



Catholic Social Teaching has developed principles that can and should be groundbreaking in coping with the corona pandemic:

- Personality (human dignity)
- Sociality / Common Good (*bonum commune*)
- Solidarity (also between generations, between genders and between countries)
- Subsidiarity
- Justice (cf. currently the encyclical "*Fratelli tutti*" by Pope Francis²)
- Mercy (as a proprium of Christian social teaching, in contrast to a pure ethics of reason).

These criteria can certainly be in conflict with each other: There are various options for action when solving problems such as vaccine distribution. It can be a matter of ensuring the fairest possible distribution at European level. On the other hand, this approach is in polarity with the principle of subsidiarity. According to which the higher level should only come into play if the lower levels (e.g. individual states or several individual states of the EU) are unable to solve the existing problem. The question is how to assess the situation and which principle is then given priority.

A classic tension exists, for example, between the principle of justice, which tries to find solutions based on legal or ethical norms, and the principle of mercy, which tries to avoid a purely formal legal treatment, in favor of treating people from the point of view of fraternal love.

The theses and options for action presented below (under D.) are intended to show that we as members of CAPP appeal in ourselves, in all Christians, but also in all people of good will responsibility in business, society and the church to implement the principles of Christian Social Teaching in dealing with the consequences of the corona pandemic.

We want to be inspired by the principles developed by Pope Francis in his encyclical *Fratelli tutti*. The Holy Father emphasizes the necessary service of religions - including and especially Christianity - in a fraternity that first and foremost enables a good order that is holistically imbued with the human person.³

According to *Fratelli tutti*, however, such brotherhood or fraternity cannot be achieved without transcendent truth, because, according to the Holy Father,

"If the transcendent truth is not recognized, then the violence of power triumphs and everyone tries to the utmost to make use of the means available to him in order to assert his interests and his opinion without regard to the rights of the other."⁴

² Enzyklika *Fratelli tutti* von Papst Franziskus über die Geschwisterlichkeit und die soziale Freundschaft vom 3. Oktober 2020, Verlautbarungen des Apostolischen Stuhls, Bonn 2020 (im Folgenden als FT abgekürzt).

³ *Fratelli tutti*, Achtes Kapitel: Die Religionen im Dienst an der Geschwisterlichkeit in der Welt, Nr. 271ff.

⁴ *Fratelli tutti*, Nr. 273.



And further:

"As long as we do not obscure the sincere search for God with our ideological or purposeful interests, it helps to see us all as companions, really as brothers and sisters."⁵

Taking this approach into account, in our opinion it can succeed to balance the already mentioned tensions or polarities between the individual principles of Christian Social Doctrine - such as between justice and mercy - and also in the balance of interests - for example between the individual and Common Good.

B. Possible future scenarios of a "post-corona"- society

In a current paper, the *zukunftsInstitut* is drafting four conceivable scenarios for a "corona effect", which are briefly summarized here:

Scenario 1: Total isolation - all against all

This scenario is characterized by the emphasis on "security", combined with a hyper-individualization of society and a strong virtualization, including also of art, culture and sport.

Scenario 2: System crash - permanent crisis mode

This would lead to frictions of the multipolar world order and a resurgence of overcome nationalisms, "big data" dominates, up to and including a real "health dictatorship" (not just claimed by so-called corona deniers).

Scenario 3: Neo-Tribes - The retreat into the private sphere

In this scenario, a strong re-regionalization would take place in the search for self-sufficiency and so-called "neo-tribes" would arise, (immediate) neighborhood help would be the focus.

Scenario 4: Adaptation: The resilient society

Here there would be a balance between global and local (trade, art, culture and sport), the understanding of health would not be in the sense of pure self-optimization but holistic, solidarity would be the focus, regional, national and international, the basis would be trust Conspiracy theories.

⁵ *Fratelli tutti*, Nr. 274



C. Critical statement on this approach

When considering the scenarios using the criteria of Christian Social Doctrine, it can be seen that the first three scenarios only partially meet the criteria of Christian Social Doctrine:

Scenario 1: The focus here is solely on the criterion of personality; But where is the overcoming of the collective and individual indifference?

Scenario 2: Here personality / human rights, sociality / common good (at national level) and subsidiarity are taken into account; the principle "my country first" does not correspond to the Christian demand for solidarity across borders.

Scenario 3: In this perspective, the criteria of personality, solidarity, subsidiarity and justice are applied. However, the "retreat into the private sphere" also here lacks solidarity with others and mercy.

On the other hand, in scenario 4 - ideally - all criteria of social doctrine would be fully taken into account: personality, sociality / common good, solidarity, subsidiarity, justice and mercy.

However, the term "resilience" in scenario 4 should not be elevated to an ideal. It is used by psychology in the scientific investigation of the previous economic and ecological crises of the 21st century in connection with the resilience of individual people, and has also been used in sociology since the 1960s when describing societies that are by definition able to cope with external disturbances without changing their essential system functions.⁶

It is precisely here that the approach advocated by psychologists and sociologists differs significantly from the approach of Christian Social Teaching, which does not focus primarily on maintaining structures and control processes, but on the six principles of personality, sociality, solidarity, subsidiarity, justice and mercy, which in turn have their origin in the Christian image of man as God's creature and His likeness.

The pure preservation of the system or the preservation of a "functioning apparatus" in the state and society - for its own sake - can therefore not be the primary goal of Christian Social Teaching and only make sense if it is not an end in itself, but would be helpful to achieve the stated goals and principles of Christian Social Teaching. For this reason, the Church never tires of emphasizing that the ideal of the good Samaritan represent a counter-position to technocratic bureaucracy.⁷

⁶ vgl. schon R.A. Rappaport: *Pigs for the Ancestors*, New Haven 1967.

⁷ So zuletzt auch Peter Card. Turkson / Peter Schallenberg, *Fratelli tutti – Eine theologische Sozialethik der politischen Liebe*, Grüne Reihe Nr. 475, Mönchengladbach 2020, 10ff.



Nonetheless, the contents of scenario 4, as already shown, are most in line with the goals and principles of Christian Social Teaching, so that this approach shall generally be kept in mind when developing options for action.

In all of this, what Pope Francis last postulated in his encyclical *Fratelli tutti* and thus confirmed as a firm conviction of the papal magisterium, it should serve as a guideline. Accordingly, every welfare state and every economic life need a kind of spirituality, an attitude of mind that underlies all action - "agere" of moral people as opposed to the merely manufacturing "facere" of craftspeople.⁸

D. Theses and options for action from the perspective of Christian Social Teaching on the levels of the individual, the family, the organizations and the state / community of states

1. Realization of personality

The individual is currently losing many rights in favor of social health protection. We are of the opinion that, taking into account the principle of personality, the individual, but also the community of the family should be strengthened in their personal responsibility again.

The Christian image of man should give us reason to deal carefully with terms such as "system relevance" of individuals, because from a Christian perspective every person is important and relevant.

For the same reason, it is the task of every Christian to engage in order to ensure that with all the changes that go hand in hand with the pandemic, even individuals who are not or only with difficulty able to adapt, do not fall by the wayside, e.g. the elderly with increasing digitization.

2. Realization of sociality / common good

In our opinion, observance of the principle of sociality or the common good can help to restore respect and tolerance in communication between individuals by promoting a culture of discussion based on constructive dialogue.

Many families are particularly suffering from the corona crisis. At the same time, the crisis shows how important family cohesion is. For Catholic Social Teaching, families are indispensable as the nucleus of society. The distribution of roles in the families has changed in some cases significantly as a result of the lockdown (home office, homeschooling), so that there is an opportunity to re-discuss a fair distribution of roles between the sexes, both within the family and at a political level. State support through grants or tax relief can help families to cope with the crisis.

⁸ Turkson/Schallenberg, 5.



In companies, it is the task of all Christian decision-makers to exercise leadership responsibility through exemplary behavior so that the power of Christian Social Ethics can unfold its effect as a resource and catalyst for good economic and social recovery after the pandemic. Since the economic effects of the pandemic will for the most part only be visible in their full scope with a delay, the Catholic leaders will have a special responsibility in the coming months and years.

In addition, on a national or international level cooperation can also serve as a solution option; women are underrepresented in politics. New beginnings at the political level should take this into account.

With regard to the development of the church, new forms of pastoral care have developed in parish life, which can and should be maintained and further developed: Live streaming of divine services for the elderly and the sick, good neighborhood campaigns, shopping aids, new hygiene standards. Isolation must be avoided at all costs. The common celebrations, communion and other things must be continued and partly revived. This applies, for example, to conversations after attending church services, especially for children and youth pastoral care. "Over-digitization" does not correspond to the Christian image of man, so it must be prevented. The possibility of keeping churches open while observing hygiene measures holds great potential to use this even better in order to be missionary. The crisis also offers the opportunity to rethink "being church post Corona". Hygiene measures should not be a pretext for avoiding arduous journeys to people and for not caring for others.

In companies, the Christian manager can also act as a pastor to the individual employee by recognizing loneliness and disorientation and expressing them, as well as developing suitable initiatives to strengthen the we-feeling in the workforce. This is especially important for the mental health of the employees, but can also have economic advantages for the company. Such behavior makes the church tangible and tangible on site.

3. Realization of solidarity

At the level of the individual, there is a risk of becoming dependent on marginalized groups. Signs of this can be observed all over the world. All Christians, especially the Church, have an option for those who have been left behind when it comes to inequalities, such as the distribution of vaccines. It is the task of Christians to counteract the brutalization of society through solidarity.

4. Realization of subsidiarity

The threat posed by the corona pandemic is a threat on all levels. Since always, the church has taken a look at the situation of people all over the world, but also especially of people at the local spot. This view of the



individual can help to determine the economic and social situation locally more quickly than it is possible for others - from a distance or from a different perspective - and can help that problems are recognized and solved more quickly.

5. Realization of justice

The measures to combat pandemics at the national and international political level, which are sometimes associated with considerable restrictions for the individual, require close parliamentary involvement and critical observation by the population and public opinion.

6. Realization of mercy

Compared to a pure ethics of responsibility, mercy is a unique feature of Catholic Social Teaching and should therefore be taken to heart by all Christians who are responsible in society and the economy, but also courageously represented to the outside world. This can and should help to regain a stronger presence in the social discourse as a church and a believing individual.

The new beginnings after the pandemic also offer the opportunity to strengthen the role of women as individuals, in the family, but also in business, politics and the church. The mercy of the Mother of God is both a model and a guideline. For the manager in the company, Saint Joseph can serve as a model ("father in the company") during and after the pandemic.

Compared to justice as the "penultimate" principle, mercy represents a "last" principle. An order of justice can always only be provisional, even in its form of a constitutional state. In this respect, justice in a democratic society must always remain "revisable". A prominent example of this is the German Federal President's right to pardon with regard to convicted criminals.

Major crises are often turning points between times. They dissolve traditional, firmly established thought patterns. This harbors risks, but also leads to new opportunities. The Corona crisis also harbors new opportunities: a new mindfulness for health and creation, a new appreciation of education and work, a new solidarity within and between countries. The Catholic Social Teaching shows a way how Christians and all people of good will not simply regain the old everyday life, but build a more humane, a fairer, a more merciful world.

The final document reflects the contributions to the discussion of the participants in the Digital Frankfurt Study Day of the Centesimus Annus pro Pontifice Foundation - German Section on February 13, 2021, which resulted from the keynote speech by Prof. Thomas W. Schwartz have developed "CHRISTIAN SOCIAL TEACHING as a stumbling block or blueprint for the post-corona society".

Dr. Christian Stenz is pastor of the St. Dionysius Parish, Kerken and a member of the Foundation Centesimus Annus pro Pontifice - German Section.