



Frankfurt Study Day  
of Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice (CAPP) Foundation – German Section

on July 16h, 2022

**SPIRITUAL POVERTY**  
**How to win today (young) people with Christian Social Ethics?**

by Prof. Dr. Dr. Elmar Nass and Dr. Ulrich Schürenkrämer

**A. Preamble**

Poverty exists and it exists in various forms. Germany is the fourth largest economy in the world, ranking # 6 in the Human Development Index among 189 nations and as No. 17 wealthiest among 193 nations: material and financial poverty - in the absolute definition eradicated – is defined in relative terms as less than 60% of the median income. A strong welfare system is in place for the precarious members and those who need help, like the homeless, get support from a wide range of public and private charity organizations, including church institutions.

Germany is caring about the poverty in other parts of the world and supports with development aid in the amount of several Billions Euro each year. The German churches collected taxes and further income of more than 12 bn Euro in 2020. The Catholic church alone contributes about 850 mn Euro each year through its various vehicles like Miserior, Adveniat, Renovabis or else to projects in need around the world to eradicate poverty and promote sustainable development and peace.

However the current handling of abuse cases and the confrontation around the synodal way discussing structural and organizational issues put the Catholic church in Germany into a crises mode which has been mirrored by more than 200.000 leavers per year since 2018. It resulted in an alarming and provoking statement of H.E. Cardinal Reinhard Marx that the Catholic church in Germany is at a dead point<sup>1</sup>.

The number of leavers hit a record with 359.205 in 2021. But by the way, the situation in the protestant church with a similar number of more than 200.000 leavers in the last

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/marx-ruecktritt> TV NEWS June, 4 2021



eight years, and 280.000 leavers in 2021, is not different. Thus the number of Christians is in decline in Germany and has fallen below 50% of the population in March 2022<sup>2</sup> and only 10% of these Christians attend the church services on Saturday or Sunday!!

Germany's poverty is the spiritual poverty. In deed what is missing is the evangelization. With regard to the provoking statement one might argue that the Catholic church is believing in resurrection and capable of reversal. Our German society is in desperate need of the richness that is Catholic social teaching (CST) and this treasure has to be communicated with more power of speech.

The CST of the Catholic Church is immensely rich with its basic values like human dignity, justice, freedom or common good, its social principles of personality, solidarity, subsidiarity and sustainability or our social virtues like mercy, social love and irenic living together (as a proprium of the Catholic social doctrine, in contrast to a purely rational or economic or constructivist ethics). It is a treasure that we do not seem to appreciate.

CST is firmly anchored and recognized in our society, namely in our German constitution with Art. 1 Clause 1 or with the social bonding of private property, without large parts of society being aware of where this is coming from. People appreciate the social values, principles and virtues without knowing that they are Christian based. Such a groundless awareness of a mere cultural Christianity, however, runs the risk that other values can quickly take their place. And precisely this process is already in full swing. The social values, principles and virtues of CST are perceived as naturally as the air we breathe. This analogy is particularly memorable in times of the corona pandemic, because today, with the spiritual poverty in Germany, we also need 'ventilators' to keep these treasures, which are formulated by CST, alive and to communicate them more eloquently.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the challenges and chances, strategies and tactics for an adequate dissemination of CST among the people in the current German environment, with the intention to develop further initiatives together with YIN and other young people in order to promote CST in the young generation.

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/4052/umfrage/kirchenaustritte-in-deutschland-nach-konfessionen/06.07.22>



## B. Analysis of the Challenges and Chances

### 1. Challenges

It is important to realize that the current Christian church crisis is a German phenomenon. The Catholic church in Germany is in a defense mode while worldwide the Catholic church is growing.

For example in Germany the number of priests, deacons and pastoral consultants is declining while in Nigeria the seminars to educate priests are full. Statistics of leavers give another example of the German phenomenon. Since only Germany has a mandatory church tax linked to income taxes, believers can make their choice respective their judgement of the current situation and leavers are exempt from church tax payments.

The negative development implies further downtrends. Priests want to do pastoral care, while the merging of parishes redirects their focus on administration. The media representation of the church is discouraging and making them sick, which is further amplified by the fact that priests are even discriminated and insulted in the street.

It is necessary to analyze systematically the challenges that lead to the wrong way and to avoid those in the future, to master the true challenges and to stay relevant in the current public discourse to get back on the right track.

It is misleading and wrong

- to communicate the abuse cases in a never-ending sequential mode over time from one diocese to another, because such a dragging ensures revolving negative communication in the media. The abuse scandal must be radically uncovered in one swoop for the whole of Germany and consistently prosecuted.

Lack of credibility is the biggest problem for the Catholic church in Germany. It does not lead to the catholic goal if the German catholic church circles exclusively around itself at conferences and operates a kind of insolvency administration. The relevance of Christian social positions in society has been marginalized; fewer and fewer politicians today still seek to close ranks with the church in Germany. Many have missed the German church in the sociological distress of the pandemic.

It is time to turn around:

- The church and theology talk about peace, but there is no good culture of dispute. Different opinions are ideologized and theologians and ministers discredit each other through the media. This repels people.



- In theological social ethics, a connectivity to secular positions is largely propagated. Reference is no longer made to sources in the Bible, the magisterium and tradition, but to secular social philosophers. In this way, the voice of theology in the social-ethical discourse becomes redundant in long term.
- Methodological atheism is in vogue in Christian social ethics: questions of social justice, integrity of creation etc. are discussed without God in order to be connectable. The silencing of God in the argumentation leads to secularization of social ethical theology and accelerates the redundancy of such "Christian" social ethics.
- The church in Germany is trying to gain applause from media and ideologies that are critical of the church. For example, the image of human in current gender identity discussion contrasts with the Christian image of man, as Pope Francis has said on several occasions.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, some positions seem to uncritically be adopted in German theology (especially social ethics) and even prescriptively demanded. We would prefer a good culture of dispute instead of simplification and ideologizing.

## 2. Chances

In confidence of the treasure and the power of the Catholic social doctrine it is helpful to concretize the winning themes and to focus on strength.

It is worthy and right

- to communicate the Christian conception of man as a great treasure in opposition to those ideologies which relativize human dignity, such as 1.) communism, in which dignity is awarded by the party; 2.) utilitarianism, which makes dignity dependent on considerations of utility and calculates it in monetary units (as in the rationing debates of the pandemic).
- to help the poor and disabled because of human dignity. This means for us: welfare state does not mean (utilitarian) that those in need are only helped because they would otherwise endanger social peace and use violence (so-called toleration premium to reduce the social threat potential). For this relativizes the human dignity of the weak and abandons those people from whom no such danger would emanate (such as the severely handicapped, the demented, the unborn).

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2016/aug/2/pope-francis-gender-ideology-annihilation-man-imag/>  
Washington Post: "Pope Francis: Gender ideology is the 'annihilation of man as image of God'" (August 2, 2016)



- to orientate society towards the inclusive, affective and irenic Christian idea of peaceful living together. This corresponds to the Christian idea of the universal human family, according to which every human being is regarded and valued as God's image. Therefore, liberal ideas of an anonymous coexistence or counter-existence, a fundamentalist exclusive togetherness that excludes others (according to class, race, or religion) and a society based solely on Kantian obedience to duty are rejected.
- to tackle the preservation of creation as a core task and to implement it on a Christian foundation. CST has contributed significantly to the concept of the social market economy, which reconciles the market and social humanity. Now we have the new challenge of integrating the integrity of creation into this idea of order, as Pope Francis proposes.<sup>4</sup> For this is an original Christian demand that we should not leave to political eco-activists.
- to take intergenerational justice into account, also in view of the ever-increasing mountains of fiscal debt that we are leaving to future generations.
- to ask the question honestly: what is family today and how should it be lived in the future? Young people are looking for identity - home, family, religion, nation, gender - everything flows, what remains as identity? Without it, we lose the humus of CST, and dangerous ideologies could spread (Chinese imperialism etc.).
- to ask about the future of good care, which affects us all. Young people ask: what do I owe to my parents? Do I have to give myself up? Christian social ethics can and must give young people answers to such questions. Young people also have a high idealism for the rights and protection of weak people. Associations for the disabled are running up a storm against the liberalization of so-called euthanasia.
- to ask for the just peace. Young people in particular are committed to peace ethics. At the same time, the question remains: when is violence permitted and by what means? CST can and must provide answers and orientation.

---

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html) Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* of the Holy Father Francis on Care for our Common Home (May, 24 2015)



### C. Initiate Solutions with Strategies and Tactics: Ventilation and Lighthouses

Credibility, exploring social life as culture of togetherness, talking about God, setting an example, being a beacon - these are central tasks to win (young) people today for faith and church again. We now want to make these more concrete:

- Are we Catholics stewards of the legacy or trailblazers? The biggest problem of our church is its lack of credibility. Those responsible must show their true colors and personnel consequences must be drawn. Church representatives and theologians must credibly live and exemplify social virtue individually and in the honest togetherness of the church as a community of faith. For the credibility of the church as an institution and organization, reforms must also take place which, in the sense of Aristotle or Wilhelm von Ketteler, for example, promote personalities of strong character and virtue.
- Theological social ethics in Germany have produced the theory of a discourse culture 2.0. This seems to mean: before we participate in social discussions, we have to sort out in our heads all arguments that are probably not capable of consensus. This censorship scissors in the head only produces polished arguments. A democratic culture of debate is lost as a result, as is the joy of difference and the struggle to find good arguments. We, on the other hand, believe: non-consensual positions should also be brought into the social discourse, for example on euthanasia, abortion rights etc. The church must show a profile that is controversial - otherwise the church will only become a copy of others. We must also practice this culture within theology and the church. This means that in Germany, for example, proponents and critics of the synodal way must discuss with each other in an appreciative manner, without ideological prejudices and mutual defamation. Anything else damages the reputation of the church and faith and contradicts the mission of Jesus.
- We should not only ask the disappointed why they leave the church. Rather, we should ask (young) people why they have stayed in the church despite many social inquiries and hostilities ("Customer" retention survey). Answers to this question could be: 1.) Experiencing people of faith in borderline situations, i.e. when young people are allowed to experience the death of close relatives. 2.) Young people experience something different in the church than in the profane world: a place of peace and quiet (I and God in silence) as well as a pastoral place of rebellion for ideals (trying things out). It is important to create a tangible sense of community, to use new means of communication skillfully, and to have time for young people and their concerns. In the spirit of subsidiarity, young people should take on a variety of responsibilities in pastoral projects.



- Research into the relationship between what (young) people need and what the church and faith could offer. Such a research project is already running in Cologne and should be finished at the beginning of 2023 with the hoped-for answer to the question: what topics and spiritual needs do people have as anonymous Christians that could be served by the church (supply-demand). Elmar Nass will give this research project result to CAPP at the end of the winter semester 2022/23.
- We must form core groups that radiate out to the margins. The core group creatively designs its own program and has an impact on society. The common basis is our confession: Jesus is the Christ. We believe in the love of a benevolent God. God is someone who listens to me. I am not alone. I can turn to God at any time, he listens to me. Faith makes me free; I never feel helpless. Through faith I am more in the here and now. As a believer, I actively deal with the end of life and believe in life after death. We Catholics have an existential joy and hope, thanks to the Good News. Pope Francis says that Christians should put the Good News back in the foreground.<sup>5</sup> This is a missionary mandate: I talk about Jesus Christ, who inspires me and spurs me on. It follows: this believing relationship is an integral part of my identity, how I think and act daily. I believe that the Holy Spirit is in me. Faith is my compass in looking at myself, each other, and the world. My faith is a regular mirror of my conscience.
- Like Pope Francis, we see virtues of faith as an essential way to change the world for the good. In worship, we should radiate more joy. We are carried through periods of sorrow. Our hearts should burn and radiate out to those around us. We find a contentment in our faith. We do not have to strive on immoderately. Through faith we have a measure of what "is enough": "Sólo Dios basta"<sup>6</sup> - God alone is enough -> sufficiency.
- Positive connectivity to nowadays means: we should be successful people catchers. The basis is the Eucharistic experience, as Christ encounter. But CST is addressed to all people of good will, even those without an understanding of Christ.
- We want to bring more people to CAPP and embrace them. Young people can be captured to the Catholic faith with community: the Catholic group experience is a dream. Scouts, altar servers, choirs,... Every believer should be a fisherman, go outside and talk about his faith; the bait must taste good to the fish, not to the fisherman. Our time is a searching one, the Catholic faith in the Triune God casts an

---

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/251103/christians-with-empty-nets-must-return-to-jesus-pope-francis-says> Christians with 'empty nets' must return to Jesus, Pope Francis says (CNA, May 1, 2022)

<sup>6</sup> Original Quote from a Prayer of Teresa von Ávila



anchor and gives answers. We can make transparent why we have which opinion on current social issues. Expressive talk of God, faith and transcendence (Pascal's wager, Charles Taylor, Pope Benedict). "We do not want to be the soup, but the salt".

- Our Catholic faith is a lighthouse for ethical orientation, because we have the Christian image of man as a source of light, the preservation of creation as a core task and life after death as hope. Moreover, as believers we can and should be lighthouses ourselves in a time of many great ethical challenges. This requires credibility in issues and in our personal lives. We can be lighthouses in a double sense, showing catholic profile, communicating it and with examples of application, practically and in simple terms, that can be understood easily by people of good will (for example by concrete examples with orientations in ethical dilemmas). This succeeds if we credibly live Christian values and courageously take a stand, provide orientation, and in the process also make our exemplary spirituality tangible. To do this, we must also communicate our Christian values in simple, understandable language, without watering them down. Nothing of our testimony remains unheard; it depends on everyone. And that is why we ask ourselves: How do we become a Catholic lighthouse for our fellow human beings? For us, this image expresses our mission very well. Because: everyone sees the lighthouse, everyone can decide for themselves whether they want to follow the lighthouse. Our Christian offer must be clearly formulated, the lighthouse must shine for everyone and in all directions. It offers orientation. It stands on a good foundation and must be maintained. (How) Do we really allow lighthouses in our Catholic community? i.e. also beyond self-referential networks honest discussions on eye level about important reforms of the church (synodal way or / and evangelization or other ways, topics and personalities).
- We must think in terms of implementation and involve networks, religious orders, schools, German professional congregations like Bund Katholischer Unternehmer (BKU), Catholic associations, where they share our goals.
- As credible Christians, we must therefore address socially relevant questions of people instead of revolving around ourselves: for example, human dignity, culture of coexistence, the option for the weak and disabled, digitalization. We have to give answers to challenges of technology, war and peace, future of care, duties of children towards parents, ecological preservation of creation, life at the beginning and at the end, family image, and so on.





- Implementation does not have to reinvent the wheel. We can and should value and explicitly encourage very concrete ideas for tactics and best-of from the wealth of experience of committed Catholics. For example: attend and donate marriage seminars, exemplify and pass on virtues as seasoned managers (i.e. etiquette seminars for employees, elevator pitch techniques for professionals, rhetoric course on how to counter objections). Internationally exciting workshops on the topicality of CST should be initiated. Here, for example, could be rehearsed and experienced together: living in and with creation, family responsibility also in dealing with children, peace building etc. Profile-building faith training for multipliers of church youth work (up-dates on theological profile, faith and being church) should be developed and implemented. This seems to be urgently necessary besides the learning of communicative skills, so that the Christian-social message distinguishes again the gospel instead of political ideology in the center.
- Testimonials are a huge treasure that we must make use of like the Members of our Foundation Prince Löwenstein, Renate Pilz, Claus Hipp and others. Prince Löwenstein's own experience in seminars with high school classes, corporations, unions and associations is positive: "The contents of CST amaze people. CST is no pious pretense, but a highly modern management theory." Indeed corporations like Allianz, Daimler, Hipp, Trigema and many others refer in their corporate mission statements to values and principles that relate to CST. The successful and highly awarded entrepreneur Renate Pilz, for example, in an impressive CAPP event, attributed the success of her life to the Holy Spirit, in full faith and with full conviction. This provokes the question to us who want to be a lighthouse: what in my life has the Holy Spirit guided? How can I sense and make plausible the divine mystery? Thus we should be inspired by such testimonials and bear witness ourselves. A quote from Renate Pilz on her interaction with her employees fits this: "Eye level has no hierarchy". Another lighthouse could be the German catholic male order Barmherzige Brüder Trier, with their corporate mission statement and employee human image, or our involvement in political or other socially relevant consulting (for example, currently Elmar Nass contributes as an external scientific expert on the CDU manifesto or Ulrich Schürenkrämer contributed in the last issue of Amos International about Ethics in Finance with an interview covering CST).



#### D. There is nothing good, unless you do it

We are planning a multi-project/program/initiative "**Lighthouse**" (in German: "**Leuchtturm**"), as a concrete format and as concrete events, possibly with bishops as participants, realizing that there are three levels which we have to differentiate if it comes to recommendations of action.

- Macro level of the church and the society: the Catholic church as a lighthouse. How can our beloved church be again the lighthouse for our society as well as in politics and economy?
- Meso level of the organization: CAPP as a lighthouse. How can we worldwide and in Germany as a papal foundation be a lighthouse to disseminate CST?
- Micro level of the individual: men as lighthouse. How can each of us as practicing Christian be a lighthouse in telling about our faith in everyday life, family, work and society?

While it is not ours or our intention to make recommendations of action for the macro level, we feel that we can contribute to the meso and micro level also by enlisting church shepherds as mouthpieces to be more inclusive of youth.

Our lighthouse for CST in Germany shall encompass:

1. The development of a certified training course on CST to promote leadership and management competences in private and public corporations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and church institutions in close cooperation with a German university and CAPP.
2. The organization of a Conference in 2023 on sustainable business management based on Christian leadership ethics (including virtue ethics, integrity of creation, peace etc.) in promotion of CST.
3. The hosting of a series of fireside chats with testimonials around megatrends and the principles of CST.
4. The gearing of our future meetings on the topics of and together with the young generation in dissemination of CST.



---

The document reflects the contributions to the discussion of the participants of the Frankfurt Study Day of the Centesimus Annus pro Pontifice Foundation - German Section on July 16th, 2022, which resulted from the keynote speech by Prof. Dr. Dr. Elmar Nass "How to win today (young) people with Christian Social Ethics?".

Prof. Dr. Dr. Elmar Nass is Prorector at the University for Catholic Theology in Cologne, teaching Christian social sciences and societal dialogue.

Dr. Ulrich Schürenkrämer is Managing Director of Machlaan GmbH, Munich, an impact-investment company, and Coordinator for Germany of the Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice Foundation, Vatican

Participants of the Study Day were further Volker Lauven, Ingo Ley, S.D. Alois K. Fürst zu Löwenstein, PD Dr. Dr. Thomas Rusche, Andrea M. Schürenkrämer, Reinhold Stücke, Sylvia Trimborn-Ley and Dr. Christoph Wagener.