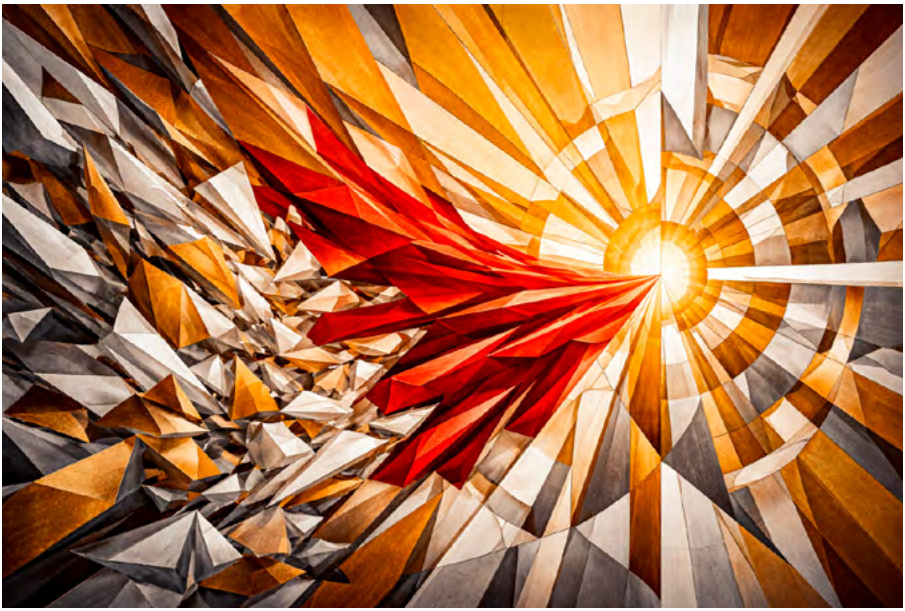
OPUS CARITATIS

CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN SOCIAL PRINCIPLES



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FONS Press

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Contemporary Christian Social Principles

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edited by: Sauli Tari and Szabolcs J. Illyés

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ROVANIEMI

Contents

Editor's Introduction – God's Legacy: the Human Dignity

Sauli Tari

If the Church does not shine like a city built on a hill, then it is as though it has forgotten the "heritage" and spiritual "lineage" inherent in its calling. The authors of this volume seek precisely to bring to light those elements — often consigned to oblivion — that belong to the Church's teaching and mission. Approaching from various aspects of contemporary life, they aim to show how the Church can once again become a sign and source of hope today. The Church's presence in the world — "as salt and light" — leads us back to the very heart of Jesus' teaching. The Christian community is not merely a reality that exists for itself, but a force capable of transforming everything and a living source that renews life. The root of this extraordinary power is supernatural, yet it is called precisely to be present in this world and to exert a responsible influence on society. The Church is the mediator of divine love: it represents the inexhaustible Giver who sets the service of one's neighbor before every believer as an example to follow.

The Son of God became flesh in order to save humanity; as one of us He began to gather together the

scattered "remnant," God's old yet renewed people. The task of this new people is to participate in the work of humanity's salvation: to feel responsibility for a suffering world and to stand beside others in active solidarity. Throughout the centuries, the Church's teaching has reflected this responsibility and commitment — even in times when the challenges of history demanded new expressions and fresh courage. They do this in a period that many describe as marked by growing alienation, the excessive dominance of virtual reality, pervasive exploitation, the rejection of repentance and conversion, and the false promise of "self-deification." In the midst of these dark tendencies, the Church's vocation is to bear the light of Christ and to remind us that human dignity finds its true fulfillment in our relationship with God and in the service of love.

In the question of how political charity can be put into practice, we gain rich insight from papal statements as well as from the Church's social teaching and fundamental values. These guidelines provide not only a theoretical framework but also concrete direction on how justice, solidarity, and the service of the common good may be responsibly represented in public life.

The biblical analysis of movements of conversion helps uncover the tendencies that shaped commu-

nity life at the dawn of Christianity. One of the outstanding figures in this process was John the Baptist, who in his preaching proclaimed the gathering and preparation of God's people. His call to repentance and contrition signified not only personal renewal, but also a communal readiness for the divine mission within society as a whole.

The study examining advanced technology sheds light on the particular challenges of the digital age, especially the problems arising in a communication space dominated by social media. In contrast, it sets the Church's permanent and enduring values, encouraging us to cultivate a responsible, human-centered outlook even in our use of modern tools.

The essay on the fair-trade movement presents the significance of just commerce in the light of the Church's mission. It challenges us to contribute, in our economic relationships as well, to fairness, sustainability, and solidarity — thereby helping to alleviate poverty and protect human dignity.

Finally, the author illustrates the value-centered nature of Christian social teaching through one of its distinctive perspectives. Freedom is interpreted from a broad horizon: the dignity of the human person receives its true meaning in mutual relationship with the social community. Thus, freedom is not isolated, self-seeking independence, but responsible

participation in the life of the community — a freedom that unfolds in the service of truth and love.

The unique principle of Political Love

Alternative Theories the Battlefield of Public World

Szabolcs J. Illyés

The concept of „political love" is necessarily provocative, insofar as it radically runs counter to those theoretical and practical traditions that interpret politics primarily according to the logic of power, interest, and instrumental rationality. The dominant currents of modern political thought—from realist conceptions of power to technocratic theories of governance—describe public life as a sphere in which the collision of interests, control over resources, and the maximization of efficiency determine action. Within this framework, love, as a normative guiding principle, appears as a foreign body: emotional, irrational, or, at best, relegated to the moral dimension of the private sphere (Tollefsen, 230-232.).

The concept of political love, however, does not entail the negation of rationality, but rather its critical transcendence. It draws attention to the fact that political rationality is never value-neutral and cannot be reduced to purely calculative decision-making. The public world is not a neutral space, but a

field of struggle: a stage on which values, power relations, and competing conceptions of communal justice confront one another. Political decisions are always underpinned by anthropological presuppositions concerning what is regarded as worthy of the human person, what kind of relationship is assumed between the individual and the community, and who is recognized as a legitimate subject of the common good. In this context, political love is not an emotional substitute or a moralizing rhetoric, but a normative compass. Love, in political terms, does not signify the abolition of interests, but their ordering according to the primacy of human dignity. It is an orienting principle capable of reconfiguring political priorities: transforming the exercise of power into service, institutions into spaces of communal responsibility, and law not merely into formal justice, but into the ethical framework of social coexistence (Protevi, 2025, 29–30).

The agonistic character of the public sphere thus does not disappear, but acquires a new interpretation. Conflicts are not eliminable; yet political love offers a horizon within which struggle is directed not toward the annihilation of the opposing party, but toward the good of the community as a whole. In this sense, the elevation of love to a political category does not weaken politics, but deepens it:

reconnecting it to its original purpose, namely, to serve the just, humane, and sustainable ordering of people's shared life (see: WOLLERSTORFF, 2018. 198-199).

1. The contemporary construction of political love – a chain of ideas originating from the pen of Pope Benedict XIV

By expanding the horizon of the concept of love, Pope Benedict XIV elevated a category that had previously been interpreted as abstract and, in many respects, excessively "personal," into an effective socio-political factor. Nevertheless—allowing for the application of a narrow theological-hermeneutical framework—through the exceptionally fruitful teaching activity shared with his saintly predecessor, this concept could become generalized in a distinctive direction, while at the same time continuing to constitute a fundamental element of Christian theology. The conscious articulation of this fact already encounters linguistic difficulties, as papal teaching itself explicitly indicates: „love" has become one of the most frequently used and, at the same time, most misunderstood concepts of our age, to which radically divergent meanings are attached. Although the encyclical focuses on the interpretation and practice of love as deriving from

Sacred Scripture and ecclesial tradition, it cannot ignore the layers of meaning that this term has acquired in contemporary language use and in diverse cultural contexts shows us the „Fribourg document" (Gabriel, 2019. 8-12).

The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church does not shy away from clearly stating that love alone is capable of transforming the human person in so profound a manner that his or her activity is placed at the service of social peace. Love cannot be confined to the level of individual morality, but must also assert itself in social and political dimensions: it must permeate the functioning of communities, the legal order, and the entirety of social structures. Responsibility for those in need thus does not constitute merely a personal gesture of assistance, but one of the essential forms of promoting the common good, aimed at the benefit of society as a whole (OGAS, 7).

The construction elaborated by Pope Leo XIII in *Rerum novarum* did not lose its validity four decades later in the reflection of Pope Pius XI. In a key chapter of Quadragesimo anno—while addressing the fundamental questions of public justice and equality—the Pope made it clear that the socially formative power of love constitutes one of the most important strategic resources of papal teaching. Ac-

cordingly, he emphasizes that in social realization the law of love must always enjoy primacy, since it is the bond of perfection. Those reformers live under a grave illusion who focus exclusively on the observance of mutual justice while arrogantly rejecting the assisting role of love. Although love cannot replace obligatory justice where the legitimate demands of justice are violated, even in a perfectly functioning order of justice there nevertheless remains ample space for love. Mere legality—even when applied with the greatest precision—is incapable of creating the unity of hearts and souls, even though it may eliminate the structural causes of social conflicts (RN 13).

Pope Benedict XVI devoted the entirety of Deus caritas est to the theology of love. In his interpretation, Christian charitable service must operate independently of parties and ideological constraints. It is not a political instrument, nor a program subordinated to secular strategies, but the active manifestation of concrete love lived in the present, which the human person needs in every historical epoch. The philosophies of progress that unfolded from the nineteenth century onward—above all Marxism—often reject charitable activity, since according to their position assistance to the poor preserves unjust systems, alleviates their tensions, and there-

by obstructs revolutionary transformation. Along this line of reasoning, love is stigmatized as a system-stabilizing factor. In Benedict's reading, this view is inhuman, because it sacrifices the individual for the sake of an uncertain future. The world does not become more humane by depriving human beings of their humanity in the present; authentic progress can only be realized if, here and now, within the possibilities available, and independently of political programs, we consistently do what is good (CIV, 15).

Deus caritas est emphasizes that when the Church, as a community, practices charity, alongside personal initiative thoughtful organization, forward-looking planning, and cooperation with other assisting institutions are indispensable. At the same time, it is a fundamental requirement that love must not become an instrument of proselytism. Christian love is an end in itself; it is not an action subordinated to the achievement of other objectives. The ultimate root of suffering often lies in estrangement from Truth; yet whoever assists in the name of the Church never imposes his or her faith on others. Such a person is aware that pure, selfless love is in itself a witness to God, who moves the human person to act through His love. The Christian recognizes that there is a time to speak about God,

and a time when love lived in silence speaks in His place (see: DCE).

The teaching of Caritas in veritate renders intelligible for political reality the relationship between the willing of the common good and love. In Benedict XVI's vision, the promotion of the common good is not merely a moral obligation, but an essential expression of justice and love. Striving for the common good means the cultivation and formation of an institutional order that structures communal life in legal, social, political, and cultural terms, and shapes society into a polis in the original sense—that is, into the political community of human beings. Love for the other person becomes all the deeper and more effective the more it contributes to a common good that responds to genuine needs. Every Christian is called to this active, society-serving love, in accordance with his or her vocation and the degree of influence exercisable within a given historical and social space. Such institutionally inspired action—motivated by love and even interpretable as political activity—is not of a lower order than direct, personal assistance. Provided that genuine love stands behind it, its value far surpasses that of political practice driven merely by secular interests. Every such act—just like the struggle for justice itself—is part of the witness borne to divine

love: an action that unfolds in time, yet opens toward eternity (CV, 5).

Pope Francis explicitly articulates the principle of „political love." Laudato si' points out that love is not exclusively personal, but also possesses civil and political dimensions, and is manifested in every action directed toward the construction of a more just and more humane world. Responsible love for society and commitment to the common good constitute one of the highest forms of love, which is realized not only in interpersonal relationships, but throughout social, economic, and political systems as a whole. In this spirit, the Church proposes to the world the ideal of a "civilization of love," emphasizing that social love is a fundamental prerequisite of genuine development. In order for society to become more humane and to reflect human dignity more authentically, the role of love must be rediscovered at every level of social life—political, economic, and cultural alike—and must be made the supreme guiding principle of action. Ecological thinking also fits into this framework, since social love calls us to develop solutions capable of curbing environmental destruction and of promoting a culture of care throughout the entire community. Those who recognize God's call to participate, together with others, in this social transformation

become aware that this is not mere activism, but an integral part of their spirituality: the practical living of love, through which their human life is fulfilled and sanctified. Although not everyone is called to direct political engagement, numerous civic initiatives emerge that serve the protection of the natural and urban environment in the interest of the common good (Cotta, 1991. 15-27).

Pope Francis proceeds further and, within the framework of Fratelli tutti, elevates the concept of political love to a social and then explicitly „civilizational" level, thereby completing the narrative of love-concepts applicable within the political sphere. From social love there opens the path toward the civilization of love. This dimension makes it clear that love is not a mere emotion or mood, but a dynamism of universal scope, capable of building a new world. It is not sterile sentimentalism, but one of the most suitable instruments of development that is accessible to all and sustainable. Through its creative power, it offers new responses to the challenges of the present age, while being capable of renewing social structures, the legal order, and communal forms of organization in a profound manner—not merely at a surface level, but by transforming their inner logic and mode of operation (FT, 21).

2. Foundations of an intellectual-historical outlook: what the Church has always professed

In the thought of early Christian authors of late antiquity and of the Church Fathers, the political significance of love does not appear in a programmatic form, but functions as a normative criterion. It is not an ideology that can be linked to specific political systems or institutional constructions, but rather an anthropological and moral-theological principle that determines the human relationship to community, power, and the common good. The political relevance of love lies in the fact that it simultaneously limits and orients politics: it constrains the exercise of power within human boundaries, while opening its interpretive horizon toward a higher order of justice. This legacy is not merely a historical antecedent, but a deep structural foundation of all modern attempts that seek—again and again—to reconceptualize love as a political category (Plantinga, 2018. 129-130).

As a political principle, love in early Christian thought is not articulated in the language of political theory in the modern sense. We do not encounter systematized theories of the state or models of governance; nevertheless, in the form of anthropological, ecclesiological, and moral-theo-

logical reflections, a normative structure unfolds that consistently subordinates questions of political community, power, and the common good to the primacy of love—agape and caritas. Consequently, love functions not merely as a moral virtue, but as an implicit political principle that determines the legitimate order of communal coexistence.

For early Christian authors, love is first and foremost not an emotional category, but a force that creates and sustains order. This is particularly evident in thinkers such as Origen and Gregory the Great, who located the foundation of communal life not in external mechanisms of coercion, but in the inner transformation of the human person. In contrast to Hellenistic – Roman political thought — which interpreted order primarily in legal, military, and hierarchical categories—Christian thought proceeded from the conviction that a just political community can come into being only if the inner order of individuals is also restored. In this sense, love is not an instrument of political order, but its anthropological precondition: only the person who is transformed by love is capable of a just communal life (Ibid).

This perspective is already discernible in the earliest Christian sources, in martyr literature and among the apologists as well. Tertullian's famous formulation — „see how they love one another" —

can be interpreted not merely as a moral commendation, but as an implicit political challenge to the Roman order. Here the Christian community presents an alternative social model: a community organized not according to the logic of violence, coercion, or interest, but on the basis of the norm of mutual love.

In the thought of the fourth-century Church Fathers, the political meaning of love is further deepened and becomes explicitly a principle of social organization. Especially in the case of the Cappadocian Fathers, one can observe that love does not remain at the level of individual morality, but is transformed into a structural demand of justice. In the sermons of Basil the Great, the critique of private property, the emphasis on responsibility toward the poor, and the assertion of the communal destination of goods acquire a clear political dimension. Love here no longer follows the logic of occasional almsgiving, but becomes a normative principle affecting the entire social order: one who possesses superfluously commits not merely a moral fault, but disrupts the order of the community. Similarly, in the Constantinopolitan homilies of John Chrysostom, love emerges as the central concept in the critique of social injustice. He presents the Church as an alternative „polis," in which the relationship

between rich and poor is regulated not by legal minimalism, but by the maximalism of love. In this sense, love functions as a political yardstick: it reveals the extent to which a given social arrangement can be regarded as legitimate (Chartier, 2022. 42.).

The political reflection of the patristic tradition reaches its most developed form in the thought of Augustine. In The City of God, the basis for evaluating political communities is not institutional or constitutional in character, but the order of love (*ordo amoris*). It is not forms of government, but rather what a community loves — and in what order — that determines its moral quality. A community distorted by self-love follows the logic of the earthly city, whereas a community built upon love of God and neighbor is open toward the divine order. Augustine's political realism consists in the fact that he does not idealize earthly power. He acknowledges certain functional roles for law, coercion, and even violence, while at the same time making it clear that these can never be legitimized in themselves. The ultimate justification of political order is not the fact of stability or the maintenance of order, but the extent to which it serves a form of justice defined by love. In this context, love clearly functions as a political principle: it establishes a normative limit to the exercise of power (see: Chandler, 1962).

In early Christian thought, the political significance of love often takes on a counter-political character. It is not directed toward the perfection of existing power structures, but toward their relativization. The Christian community is not an alternative to the state, but its constant critical counterpoint, reminding it that no political order is absolute, and none is free from injustice. In this sense, love as a political principle carries an eschatological tension: it does not abolish the existing order, but neither does it allow it to be regarded as final. Love always points beyond given institutions, and thereby prevents the self-idolatry of politics.

3. The hermeneutics of Western philosophy: interpretations from modernity onward

The interpretation of love as a political principle appears, at first glance, alien and even provocative to modern political thought. The reason for this is not merely conceptual, but historical and hermeneutical in nature. In the course of modernity, politics gradually detached itself from its moral–anthropological horizon and developed an autonomous rationality grounded in the logic of interest, techniques of power, and system stability. Within this context, love became a depoliticized category: it was relegated to the domains of the private sphere,

morality, or religion. Contemporary social crises—democratic erosion, mass migration, ecological collapse, armed conflicts, post-pandemic social fragmentation—however, once again render visible the consequences of this exclusion. The question thus is not whether love can be „introduced" into politics, but rather what kind of politics has been produced by the enduring absence of love (ARENDT, 1958. 12-17).

The birth of modern political thought is closely intertwined with the political marginalization of love. In the case of Niccolò Machiavelli, this does not signify cynical amorality, but a conscious methodological separation. Machiavelli's hermeneutical gesture consists in „purifying" politics of moral normativity in order to describe the actual functioning of power. Love disappears here not because it lacks value, but because it is unpredictable. The rationality of the modern state is built upon calculability, whereas love exceeds the boundaries of instrumental rationality. In the thought of Thomas Hobbes, this rupture becomes radicalized. The foundation of political community is not orientation toward the common good, but mutual fear. Hermeneutically, Hobbes reads human nature as inherently conflictual and destructive, a force that can be restrained only by sovereign violence. In this construction, love is not merely irrelevant, but dangerous: it

weakens the fear that sustains order. Contemporary security discourses—terror threats, migration panic, „law-and-order" populism—clearly actualize this Hobbesian hermeneutic, in which politics becomes exclusively a defensive mechanism while losing its community-forming function (Craig, 2013.).

In twentieth-century philosophy, the thought of Emmanuel Levinas represents a radical hermeneutical turn. Levinas interprets ethics not from the standpoint of norms, but from that of encounter: the face of the Other addresses me even before any political or legal category comes into being. Love here is not an emotion, but a radical responsibility that precedes politics, while at the same time continually unsettling it. Hermeneutically, Levinas rereads the foundation of political community not in terms of mutual recognition, but of asymmetrical responsibility. This is particularly relevant in light of contemporary humanitarian crises. The face of the refugee, the vulnerable, the victim of war cannot be fully integrated into the categories of political rationality. Love, as a political principle here, does not offer a solution, but articulates an accusation: against every system that reduces the Other to a statistic or a risk (Levinas, 2005).

Hannah Arendt's conception of politics seemingly excludes love from the political sphere. For her, pol-

itics is the space of public action and speech, where human beings appear before one another as equals. Love—especially in its intimate forms—is, according to Arendt, antipolitical, because it dissolves the distance that constitutes the condition of political plurality. Hermeneutically, however, Arendt's thought does not reject love, but displaces it. The concept of natality—the possibility of a new beginning—can be implicitly connected to love as an initiating force. The question thus is not whether love "fits" into politics, but which actions are capable of creating a new political beginning. In light of current democratic crises—institutional hollowing-out, apathy, cynicism—love can be interpreted as a political act that does not produce consensus, but generates new initiative. Arendt places particular emphasis on the political significance of forgiveness. Hermeneutically, forgiveness responds to the problem of the temporality of action: it makes it possible for the past not to determine the future definitively. Like love, forgiveness is not an institutional instrument, yet it is a community-forming force (Arendt, 1958. 27-29.).

This insight is particularly relevant in the context of post-conflict societies, historical traumas, and cultural divisions. The logic of law and punishment alone is incapable of restoring community. Love and forgiveness here function as political principles, be-

cause they presuppose the recognition of the other once again as a human being. In the thought of Paul Ricoeur, the tension between love and justice is not a contradiction to be resolved, but a productive ethical dynamic. Hermeneutically, Ricoeur interprets politics as a narrative space in which the language of institutions (justice) and the language of ethical surplus (love) are in constant interaction. In contemporary societies, this dynamic is particularly fragile. Legal formalism, technocratic governance, and algorithmic decision-making all reinforce the "cold" forms of justice. Love here is not an alternative to law, but its humanizing hermeneutical horizon, without which politics loses its moral legitimacy (Ricoeur. 2006).

In the deconstructive political philosophy of Jacques Derrida, love appears as a limit-concept. Unconditional forgiveness and radical hospitality are acts that are in principle impossible within the framework of political rationality, yet indispensable for political renewal. Hermeneutically, Derrida shows that politics always presupposes a "surplus" that it cannot institutionalize. Contemporary migration crises, relations to the stranger, and questions of global responsibility all move along this boundary. Love here is not a solution, but a risk-taking that interrupts sovereign logic (Derrida, 1967).

Love as a political principle is not the overcoming of modern politics, but its critical complement. Hermeneutically, it constitutes a normative horizon that continuously questions the self-satisfaction of political rationality. It does not offer a program, but a standard; it does not promise stability, but demands responsibility. In light of current social crises, the political rethinking of love is not idealism, but a realist necessity: the recognition that politics cannot function sustainably without human content. Love does not resolve conflicts, but it is capable of giving new meaning to why and how we live together in the political world.

4. The role of politics in society – Thomas Kuhn's philosophy-of-science paradigm and its critique

Thomas Kuhn's legacy in the philosophy of science fundamentally rewrote the frameworks of thinking about modern science and, through it, about social and political rationality. In The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (1962), he described scientific development not as linear, cumulative progress, but as a discontinuous historical process structured by successive paradigms. For Kuhn, a paradigm is not merely a theoretical construction, but a complex social order that encompasses commonly accepted

norms, methodological rules, interpretive frameworks, the range of problems and solutions considered legitimate, and the institutionalized consensus surrounding all of these. Consequently, science appears not merely as an epistemic enterprise, but as a deeply embedded social practice endowed with its own internal rationality and demand for stability (Kuhn, 1996).

This conception necessarily collided with the tradition of twentieth-century critical rationalism, above all with the position of Karl Popper. For Popper, the essence of science lies in continuous criticism and the principle of falsifiability, which ensure the openness of rationality and the possibility of intellectual self-correction. Popper therefore regarded Kuhn's concept of „normal science" as dogmatic and uncritical, and believed that it elevates loyalty to a paradigm into a virtue of intellectual conformism. Popper's political sensitivity becomes particularly intelligible at this point: he feared that the Kuhnian model could legitimize ideological closure, and even an authoritarian conception of science and politics, insofar as consensus is granted priority over critical rationality. Kuhn, however, did not defend normal science in a normative sense, but presented its actual functioning in a descriptive manner; the dispute thus partly arises from the fact that Popper read as

a normative expectation what Kuhn described as a historical-sociological fact (see: Popper, 1957).

The radicalization of Kuhn's logic was carried out by Paul Feyerabend, who paradoxically arrived at methodological anarchism precisely by starting from Kuhn's historical sensitivity. According to Feyerabend, Kuhn still paints an overly orderly, overly disciplined picture of science, whereas in reality scientific practice is far more chaotic, contingent, and pluralistic. The principle of "anything goes" is not merely a methodological provocation, but the assertion that there exists no universal standard of rationality that could elevate science above other forms of knowledge. Feyerabend's critique, however, makes the specificity of Kuhn's position visible precisely by demonstrating its limits: Kuhn did not aim at the dismantling of rationality, but sought to reveal its historical and communal embeddedness, while still taking into account the stabilizing force of consensus (Kuhn, 1996).

From the perspective of social theory, one of the most influential critiques was articulated by Jürgen Habermas. For Habermas, Kuhn's relativism is problematic because it weakens argument-based rationality and the normative foundations of critical discourse. In Habermas's view, Kuhnian consensus appears merely as a sociological fact, rather than as

a normative ideal capable of grounding the functioning of the democratic public sphere. The political stakes of this are far-reaching: if democracy is merely the dominant paradigm of a given epoch, it loses its universal claim, and there remains no rational basis for critique. At the same time, Kuhn's analysis precisely illuminates the fact that normativity is not a transhistorical given, but is always realized through institutionalized practices and interpretive orders (Habermas, 2001).

The internal tensions of Kuhn's theory were further intensified by Margaret Masterman's conceptual critique, according to which Kuhn uses the concept of „paradigm" inconsistently and with excessive multiplicity of meanings. Paradigm appears simultaneously as method, worldview, model, institutional order, and communal consensus, which leads to conceptual indeterminacy and complicates empirical application, especially when the concept is transferred into political or social-theoretical contexts. This critique, however, does not necessarily indicate Kuhn's failure, but rather suggests that the concept of paradigm is intentionally multidimensional, precisely because it seeks to capture the social complexity of science (Masterman, 2009. 107-115).

From the direction of scientific realism, Hilary Putnam and Larry Laudan reproached Kuhn for

failing to provide a satisfactory explanation of why science works and why it approaches truth. According to Laudan, scientific progress is not to be grasped in the revolutionary alternation of paradigms, but in the gradual increase of problem-solving effectiveness. This critique once again points to the fact that the focus of Kuhn's interest was not the metaphysical status of truth, but the social constitution of knowledge accepted as truth. Approaches in the sociology of knowledge, above all David Bloor and the Edinburgh School, emphasized that Kuhn did not go far enough in analyzing power relations, institutional interests, and economic-political embeddedness. Kuhn, however, deliberately refrained from transforming his theory into an all-encompassing social critique; his aim was not demystification, but the understanding of how interpretive orders function (Putnam, 2022. 25-29).

In light of all these critiques, Kuhn's political and social-theoretical significance can be grasped precisely in the fact that he conceives politics not merely as the sum of decisions and measures, but as an interpretive order. The analogy between „normal science" and "normal politics" illuminates how, in stable periods, reforms are incremental, and positive social processes are strengthened within the framework of the existing paradigm. The accumu-

lation of anomalies, however, over time leads to a structural crisis in which the old language and normative system lose their explanatory power, and a worldview conflict emerges. Paradigm shifts in such cases occur not through rational consensus, but through decision, and they generate new concepts of what is considered good, just, or normal (IBID.).

Kuhn projects a meta-theoretical perspective according to which there is no objectively given „good" social model, because every positive process is paradigm-dependent and historically fragile. Social progress, in this sense, is not technocratic optimization, but the result of a collective interpretive victory. For this very reason, Kuhn is not the dismantler of rationality, but a thinker who reveals its historical conditionality, and whose theory becomes truly productive for contemporary political and social-theoretical discourse precisely through the critiques formulated against it.

5. Synthesis

The reciprocal reading of the two chapters becomes truly productive when the concept of „political love" is understood not merely as a theological virtue or a moral exhortation, but as a historically constituted and institutionally mediated order of meaning that, within modern publicity, is just

as much the object of conceptual struggles as any political foundational principle. Papal teachings—from Rerum novarum through Quadragesimo anno, then along the arc of Deus caritas est and Caritas in veritate, all the way to the explicitly formulated principle of „political love" in Laudato si' and Fratelli tutti—seem to delineate precisely a hermeneutical movement in which the meaning of love gradually crosses from an „primarily personal" horizon into the organizing dimension of social and political reality. This movement, however, is not a linear "progress" toward the applicability of the concept, but rather the continuous reconfiguration of interpretive frameworks: love simultaneously preserves its character as a theological foundation and becomes public, indeed civilizational language. This dual status also explains the modern ambivalence of the term: "love" is at once the most frequently used and the most misunderstood word, to which radically different semantic contents adhere, and whose "commonization" carries, just as much, the risk of linguistic inflation as the possibility of a society-forming rediscovery (see: QA, DCE, CIV).

If we read this theological-political history with Kuhnian logic, then "political love" is not simply a new theme in social teaching, but an interpretive framework that rearranges the concepts of the com-

mon good, justice, development, and dignity into a new configuration. Kuhn's paradigm is not merely a theory, but an ensemble of norms, methods, legitimate problems and solutions, as well as institutionalized consensuses; and papal social ethics—however much it belongs to a different genre—operates in a similar manner when it places love, not as a sentiment, but as an order-forming principle, at the center of social structures. The key intuition of Quadragesimo anno, according to which in social realization the „law of love" must enjoy primacy, becomes a strategic claim precisely because it declares: mere legality, however precisely it may function, is incapable of creating „the unity of hearts and souls." Love here is not a substitute for justice, but that surplus without which society can at most produce conflict management, but not communal integration. The outcome of political love in this framework is not a "nice" side effect, but the condition of social peace and cohesion: an integrative energy that goes beyond law, capable of transforming the mechanical enforcement of justice into a living communal reality (see: QA).

This Kuhnian reading becomes particularly sharp when we relate it to objections arriving from critiques of modernity. In Popper's eyes, the paradigm-bound loyalty of "normal science" is dogmat-

ic, uncritical, and even potentially authoritarian; according to his political concern, the primacy of consensus can legitimize ideological closure. If we project this critique onto the program of "political love," then the first question immediately becomes: does love in public life not become a kind of cover-language for "paradigm conservatism" that conceals the radical structural causes of conflicts and reduces reforms to moralizing gestures? One of the stakes of papal teachings is precisely the dispelling of this suspicion. The objection reminiscent of Marxism—according to which charity stabilizes the existing unjust order—is, in Deus caritas est, not merely a practical point of dispute, but the object of anthropological and normative deliberation: the human person cannot be sacrificed for the sake of an uncertain future, because "true development" does not begin with the suspension of present humanity, but with the consistently enacted good here and now. This response also carries, in a Popperian sense, a critical moment: love is not an alternative to critique, but a form of critique that does not deny systemic justice, yet does not allow the present-time dignity of the human person to become an instrument of historical projects (Kuhn, 1996).

Feyerabend's more radical challenge—the methodological anarchism of "anything goes"—tests the

concept of political love at another point. If there is no universal standard, and all meaning-formation in political language is plural and contingent, then the "civilization of love" can easily appear as mere rhetoric that, in a competing ideological language-game, is nothing more than sentimentalism. Pope Francis's claim formulated within the framework of Fratelli tutti—that love is not a mood, but a universal dynamism capable of building a new world—responds precisely to this relativizing risk: love here is not an aesthetic feeling, but a creative social force capable of transforming even the inner logic of institutions, the legal order, and communal forms of organization. The Kuhnian conceptual background helps us understand that "political love" is not a single methodological rule, but an interpretive center that also modifies the range of legitimate problems: social ills are not exclusively redistributive or policing questions, but also questions of relation, community, and responsibility. With this, love expands the definition of „political problems," and it is precisely this expansion that makes it possible for contemporary crises—ecological destruction, social atomization, identity conflicts—to become readable not only in a technical, but also in an anthropological and moral horizon (see: Feyerabend, 1993.).

Habermas's critique considers Kuhnian relativism dangerous with regard to the normative foundations of the democratic public sphere: if consensus is merely a sociological fact, then the rational bases of critique dissolve. The program of political love finds itself in a particularly sensitive position here, because it seeks to be "more" than legal justice and yet does not want to operate against rationality. Caritas in veritate resolves precisely this tension by understanding love within the relational system of justice and truth: striving for the common good is not merely a moral obligation, but the cultivation of an institutional order that structures communal life in legal, social, political, and cultural terms. Love here is not a substitute for discourse, but its inner direction: the willing of the common good as an ordering principle legitimates rational institution-building, legal form-creation, and political responsibility. Against Habermas's concern, papal teaching maintains normativity by articulating love not as a private emotion, but as communal rationality, whose outcome is a more humane, more dignity-faithful form of the polis—the political community of human beings (see: Habermas, 2001).

Masterman's conceptual critique—according to which „paradigm" appears in at least twenty-one meanings in Kuhn—here gains, in a peculiar man-

ner, a fertilizing role. The discourse of political love is similarly polysemic: it refers at once to personal virtue, institutional responsibility, cultural ethos, and indeed a civilizational project. Conceptual plurality here is not an error, but a sign: it indicates that love cannot be reduced to a single level. If we understand it only as personal charity, then we lose its society-forming power; if we grasp it only as an institutional principle, then it empties out and becomes technocratic; and if we elevate it exclusively to a civilizational slogan, then rhetorical inflation threatens it. The hermeneutical task is precisely to hold these layers of meaning together not at one another's expense, but as mutually presupposing one another. The outcome of political love in this perspective is not a single political program, but a multidimensional social praxis ranging from personal action through organized charity to institutional common-good-building, whose internal criterion is the responsible turning-toward the other human person (MASTERMAN, 2009. 145).

Putnam's and Laudan's realist critique—the question of „why science works, why it approaches truth"—can analogously be rewritten into the language of political love: why does love work in society, and why does it approach the common good? According to Laudan, progress is not to be grasped

in revolutionary shifts, but in problem-solving effectiveness; political love can avoid mere idealism if it can be shown that it increases society's problem-solving capacity where law and market are insufficient in themselves. The theses of Deus caritas est concerning organization, planning, and cooperation, in this light, are not incidental practical remarks, but precisely answers to the realist question of "functioning": the social effectiveness of love becomes durable not in spontaneity, but in institutional forms capable of recognizing needs, allocating resources justly, and respecting dignity. The outcome of political love thus becomes measurable as well: not emotional intensity, but the emergence of structures of care, the density of solidarity networks, the reduction of social exclusion, and the institutionalization of ecological responsibility indicate that love truly forms communal life into a „polis." (see: DCE)

Finally, Bloor's and the Edinburgh School's power-critique constitutes the most difficult test of political love. If knowledge and consensus are formed within power relations, then the political language of love cannot be naively "innocent": there is the risk that it becomes a resource of legitimation that institutions place in the service of their own survival (Bloor, 2017). One of the most important self-corrective mechanisms of papal teaching is therefore

precisely the prohibition of proselytism and the rejection of instrumentality: love must not become a program subordinated to political strategies; it cannot be a party-political instrument, and it cannot be the handmaiden of other goals. Here the "purity" of love is not sentimentalism, but a structural criterion: it means that action is undertaken not for power-gain, not for narrative dominance, but for the recognition of the dignity of the person in need. The witness of love lived in silence—that there is a time when one must speak about God, and there is a time when love speaks in His place—is, in a hermeneutical sense, the antidote to power-critique: it is the moment in which love does not strive to dominate publicity, but responds to the reality of the suffering human being.

The closing insight of the synthesis of the two chapters, therefore, is that political love is not a simply introducible "policy principle," but an interpretive order that comes into being in response to the legitimation and integration crises of modern society, and whose effect can be grasped only if we hold together the logic of Kuhnian paradigm-movement and its critiques. Political love becomes more than rhetoric if it is capable at once of preserving Popperian critical sensitivity (not permitting ideological closure), handling the reality of Feyerabendian plu-

rality (functioning not as a universal method, but as a creative dynamism), meeting the Habermasian demand for normativity (legitimating rational institution-building ordered toward the common good), learning from Masterman's conceptual multilayeredness (not reducing love to a single meaning), answering the Putnam–Laudan question of "functioning" (demonstrating the institutional effectiveness of care), and finally reckoning with Bloorian power-critique (protecting love from instrumentality). In this hermeneutical framework, the outcome of political love is nothing other than the emergence of a civil and political ethos that does not replace legal justice, but fulfills it: it does not merely manage conflicts, but creates community; it does not merely stabilize systems, but protects dignity; it does not merely operate with the promise of the future, but makes the world more humane in the present (See: Chartier, 2022.). The "civilization of love" thus is not a utopian escape from politics, but the deepest interpretive turn of politics: the insight that the durability of the institutions of the common good ultimately depends on whether a community is able to read the reality of the other human being not as an instrument, but as an end, not as a problem, but as responsibility (see: Putnam, 2022).

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Repentance and Movements: A Biblical Analysis

Sauli Tari

In the study of the historical Jesus, various movements active before and after Jesus' birth play a significant role. A parallel phenomenon to Jesus' public ministry is a nameless movement led by John the Baptist—Zachariah's son from Jerusalem. Was he a new wilderness prophet, the forerunner of Jesus, a prophet Elijah in disguise, a messenger of the Essenes, or, as the Gospel writers called him, "the voice crying out in the wilderness"? John's phenomenon would not have surprised readers familiar with the Old Testament. Appearing after a long prophetic hiatus, this camel-hair–clad, traditional-style Nazirite preached impending judgment (Boda, 2015, 24).

Yet, as one administering baptism, John was unprecedented in the Jewish context (Webb, 1991, 179–180.) His activity in the Judean wilderness and along the Jordan River stirred widespread interest—even among the nation's leaders. His entire being—his dress, diet, and message—strongly recalled the ancient Jewish prophets of old.

1. The Message of Repentance

The biblical message of repentance is timeless and deeply human. Repentance is not just a single action or religious sentiment, but a comprehensive life transformation—turning the heart away from sin and toward God. It involves contrition but also trust that God forgives and renews. In Christian faith, repentance is not a human achievement, but a work of the Holy Spirit: an awakening and a new life.

In modern society, repentance carries particular significance. We live in an age that emphasizes individuality, freedom of choice, and personal truth. At the same time, people increasingly experience rootlessness, meaninglessness, and inner fragmentation. The message of repentance offers answers to these experiences by calling individuals to return to God—the source from which life gains purpose and foundation. Repentance does not narrow human values, but opens the heart to God's truth and love.

Repentance also has societal implications. When a person turns to God, their relationships with others are transformed: a desire arises for reconciliation, justice, and love for one's neighbor. Thus, repentance is not merely a private experience but bears fruit for the whole community. The biblical message calls us all to ongoing renewal—not be-

cause we are insufficient, but because God loves us and desires to give us new hearts and direction. For this reason, repentance is as relevant today as ever.

From the intertestamental period, apocryphal books and the library of a Jewish sect near Qumran have been preserved. Beginning in the 1940s, researchers discovered scrolls and fragments in the caves of the Judaean Desert that reveal Judaism's development before Jesus. Among these texts are biblical writings, apocrypha, sectarian rules and commentaries, and ritual texts. This historical discovery has broadened our knowledge of intertestamental Judaism and the activity of communities during that period. Although analysis has been slow and remains ongoing, the work has radically changed biblical scholarship. The writings provide insight into intertestamental Judaism, essential for New Testament research. The anonymous Qumran community's characteristics closely resemble those of John the Baptist. In this section, we will examine the community's defining traits, their expressions of repentance, their connections to the Old Testament legacy, and finally compare these features with John's activity (Charlesworth, 2006, 2.)

2. Repentance in Qumran Texts – Ritual Purification and Community Membership

Although this unknown desert community was only one branch of Judaism, studying their concept of repentance is interesting and important because they functioned as a rival religious group to the official temple service. Chronologically, they were active alongside movements contemporary with Jesus, and geographically near John the Baptist. Central to their thought were ritual purity, sacred priesthood, covenantal thinking, and repentance. They offered an alternative to the Jerusalem temple service, which they believed had been defiled by priestly leadership.

Instead of sacrifices, they rigorously observed ritual services, prayer, purification and repentance practices, and communal life in isolation. This desert group is the first in Jewish history known from surviving literature to practice daily ritual prayers of repentance and festival purification ceremonies (Vermes, 2011, 126.) Their rulebooks contain detailed instructions for indoctrinating new members and ordination rites. According to these, candidates underwent repentance exercises, prayers, and an initial immersion to join the covenant (Falk, 2007, 127.) The baptism was effective only for those who repented, entered the covenant community, and were baptized by that community.

New members underwent a probationary period and ritual activity that marked their separation from the outside world. The process is well documented in the Community Rule scrolls (1QS/4QS). Upon joining, a novice had to withdraw from the external world and, through repentance rites, return to the Mosaic Law and become a community member—a full Israelite—through baptism. During the ritual, community representatives recited texts recounting God's deeds, the people's sins during Belial's rule, expressions of repentance, blessings for the priests' allies, and curses on Belial's followers, to which the assembly replied "Amen." The novice also prayed and swore an oath to return to Israel's pure community. The Community Rule indicates that prayers and baptism replaced sacrifices in repentance practice. The community's spirit and novices' virtuous behavior ensured the baptism's efficacy (Lambert, 2016, 135.) Their primary goal was inward-oriented: members lived in separation and belonged to a pure group. Their opponents were outsiders—impure people living without covenant, repentance, or purification. The first purification baptism served as initiation and fulfillment of repentance; later, daily baptisms served as ongoing rituals of cleansing.

The community's repentance and purification rites trace their roots to Old Testament priestly traditions. The Torah mandates ritual purity for priests who serve with offerings in the tabernacle. Priests had to be ritually clean; they washed with water in a basin in the sanctuary courtyard and changed clothes before service. Priests performed sin offerings for their own and their family's transgressions and interceded for the people. On Yom Kippur, the High Priest performed elaborate rituals, including laying hands on the scapegoat and declaring the people's sins—sending the goat into the wilderness. During sacrifice for atonement, the priest laid hands on the animal's head and confessed its sins. Qumran's priestly community held prayer services instead of sacrifices, but their purification ceremonies and repentance practices were similar to those in the Torah.

John the Baptist's movement operated on similar principles to the Qumran community, except that the community's baptism targeted novices to bring them into a holy Israelite group. John's call to repentance, however, was aimed at all Israelites ready for repentance, confession, life transformation, and ultimately baptism. His warning to Israel created a key connection with the Qumran movement: "Whoever has the father Abraham does not automatically

succeed before God, for God could raise up children of Abraham even from stones." (Allison, 2010, 35.) This phrase implies that merely being Abraham's descendants did not guarantee readiness to meet God.

Qumran's withdrawal from temple service was based on their criticism of Jewish leaders who they believed had defiled or corrupted the sacrificial service. John's call for radical life change and the bearing of repentance's fruits resemble the Community Rule texts.

3. Repentance in Qumran Texts – Eschatological Purification

During the intertestamental period, tension grew over God's expected intervention in history. Israel had been ruled by various powers for a long time; power was both secular and religious. Priests were often criticized for their ethnicity, misuse of power, or ritual impurity (Sollamo-Pajunen, 2015, 18.) Influence from Egypt and Syria, enforced Hellenization, Roman occupation, Herod the Great, and his dynastic rule created internal conflict.

Eschatological groups emerged, awaiting the Messiah, practising repentance, purification, religious renewal, or even revolution. Among such repentance movements were the Maccabees, Essenes,

Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots, the disciples of Jesus of Nazareth, and John's group. According to Charlesworth, many Jewish groups in John's era pursued eschatological purification in preparation for impending judgment (Charlesworth, 2006, 15.) These groups are termed "baptism movements," and Lambert labels them "repentance movements" for the same reason (Lambert, 2016, 121.)

Eschatological expectation involved God's direct intervention: He would restore Israel, send the Messiah, establish peace, kingdom, and salvation. Expectation of judgment was also central: the people would be judged, separating God's allies from the devil's, and each would be rewarded according to deeds. In Qumran's Community Rule scrolls, a clear distinction is drawn between future members and outsiders:"Everyone who joins the council of the community shall enter into God's covenant before all who have freely joined. He shall bind himself by a compelling oath to turn with all his heart and soul to the Law of Moses… to separate from all the sons of delusion who walk in the path of injustice."

The candidate returns wholeheartedly to the Mosaic Law and enters into a covenant with God before the community. He abandons his former life of sin and returns to God's law. This return entails both negation and affirmation (Lambert, 2016, 141;

Falk, 2007, 188; Webb, 1991, 160.) By doing so, he is separated from non-members. These two groups have different destinies: the community priests pronounce blessings over the covenant-makers and curses upon the unjust crowd.

The most important Old Testament teaching tradition is the Deuteronomistic historiography, rooted in Deuteronomy and continuing through the historical books (Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1–2 Samuel, 1–2 Kings). Deuteronomistic writers often use long speeches for important figures and evaluate Israel's people and leaders based on adherence to God's law (Boda, 2006b, 27–28.) Based on this tradition, the people and their leaders are often divided into two groups, offered two choices: blessing or curse, service to God or sinful life and death. One key passage is Deuteronomy 30: "When all these blessings and curses I have set before you come upon you and you implore the name of the Lord your God ... and you return to the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and obey his commands ... the Lord will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you" (Deut 30). Blessings and curses are laid before the exiled Israelites, who are given a great opportunity to return to the Lord— where the Hebrew verb "šub" denotes turning away from disobedience and covenant-breaking to listening to God again. The Lord

responds to obedience by turning the people from exile back to their homeland.

4. John the Baptist in an Eschatological Context

John the Baptist is portrayed as a powerful actor in an eschatological context. The kingdom of God is near, and people must make urgent decisions. They have to choose: turn and live with God, or face the fires of judgment. In Qumran's manner, a clear distinction is drawn: the wheat will be gathered into the barn and the chaff burned with unquenchable fire. The Messiah at the end of days will purify his threshing floor, separating the good from the bad. John's preaching echoes the harsh message of the Community Rule: judgment is near, and purification is the means of preparing the people for God's revelation (Allison, 2010, 35.)

According to Vermes, Qumran and John's movement share clear similarities: "The Essenes did not consider themselves merely the remnant of their age, but the remnant of all ages, the last remnant. In the time of wrath, when God is preparing to destroy the godless, their founder had repented. They had become Israel's penitent." (Vermes, 2011, 68.) John similarly called all Israel to repentance and preparation for the final judgment.

The location in the wilderness is the most striking feature both in the narratives about John the Baptist and in the life of the Qumran community. The Baptist's activity took place near the ascetic movement's settlement by the Dead Sea. For both parties, the location in the wilderness was spiritually and physically significant. The idea behind the Qumran group was that they lived far away and isolated from the Temple service in Jerusalem and from people in general. According to the Community Rule, the desert also carried deliberate theological meaning. Too little information remains about the life of the Baptist for us to know for certain why he chose the wilderness as his dwelling place. For this reason, many scholars have suggested that he may have been a member of the Qumran group before beginning his public ministry.[1] According to Luke, John grew up in the wilderness, but Meier disputes this in his book. In his argument, he notes that the evangelists often face the narrative problem of how to bridge the gap between John's childhood in Jerusalem and his later appearance in the wilderness of the Jordan Valley. According to Meier, the reference to the wilderness may be a narrative bridge created by the author. Nonetheless, due to his preaching and baptizing activity, John's choice of the wilderness is

1 (ALLISON, 2010, 27-83)

theologically purposeful in a manner similar to that of the Essenes (CHARLESWORTH, 2006, 19.)

The members of the Qumran community had a daily duty to serve God through prayer, which was intended to replace the sacrificial offerings. Sacrificial service made atonement for the land where sinful people dwell. A second task was to prepare the way for the Lord: "When they exist as a community in Israel, they shall separate themselves according to these statutes from the habitation of unjust men and go into the wilderness to prepare the way of Him there. As it is written: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.' This way is the study of the Law, which He gave through Moses, so that they may do all that has been revealed from age to age and what the prophets have announced by His Holy Spirit."

Preparing the way thus involves studying the Law of Moses, and this takes place precisely in the desert, as the prophet Isaiah foretold. The wilderness is the proper place for ascetic life, where people, separated from society, devote themselves to the matters of God. According to Gnilka, service carried out in the desert is part of the work of preparation for the coming of God. Originally, Isaiah 40:3 was not linked to the coming of the Messiah, and in

the Qumran scrolls it was interpreted as referring to God (Gnilka, 1994, 13.)

The significance of the desert for the Israelites is clear from the Exodus narrative and the wilderness wanderings. The desert is the place where God desires to meet humankind, where He gave the Law, and where the sacrificial service in the tabernacle began. It was in the desert that the miracles occurred through which Israel entered the Promised Land. The wilderness is also a place of testing and temptation. In the desert, prophets waited for either the coming of God or their own death.

Isaiah 40:1–5 is the most important Old Testament justification for the Qumran community and for John the Baptist: Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.A voice of one calling: "In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

This passage from Isaiah is the opening address of the second part of the book, through which Deutero-Isaiah received the name "Book of Consolation." It begins with a double call to comfort, because Jerusalem and its inhabitants had suffered double punishment from the Lord's hand (Kim, 2016, 188.) God is ready to forgive and rebuild the city. The forgiveness of sins is part of a great eschatological act. Behind the prophetic and solemn speech stands YHWH Himself, proclaiming a new age for the people in exile. God commands His servant to announce the new time to Jerusalem.

Kim assumes that the mysterious voices in the text are members of God's divine council. A similar kind of speech appears in Isaiah 6: "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" In Isaiah 40, there is likewise the first person plural: "Prepare the way for the Lord in the wilderness, make straight in the desert a highway for our God."

The greatest element of the new age is the arrival of God into the city. The desert was a vast region between Israel and Babylon, difficult to traverse. Therefore, a herald is needed to prepare the way and to call others to help make the path ready in the wilderness. From the east, through the desert, the King returns to the ruins of Jerusalem. According to Goldingay, the ceremonial arrival refers to a royal

general and his army marching toward the center of power. The voice crying out in the wilderness is the herald of the victorious general who is coming (Goldingay, 2005, 18.) Kim emphasizes that the command to build a highway for God comes from the divine council. Through the highway and the wilderness, God returns to Zion (Kim, 2016, 189.)

The revelation of God's glory is connected to the memory of the historical Exodus. God revealed Himself to the Israelites, and His miraculous deeds were also made known to the nations. Coggins, in his commentary, emphasizes the connection between this chapter and Isaiah 6: "The whole earth is full of His glory" and "all flesh will see His glory" are variations of the same expression. The new revelation of God in this text promises a new Exodus, during which the glory of God will be visible to all. This new Exodus will take place from Babylon to Zion.

There is mysterious information in the Gospel of Luke about John the Baptist's childhood:

"And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day he appeared publicly to Israel."

Based on this statement, Charlesworth argues that John may have been a member of the Essene group in his youth. He was prepared for spiritual

proclamation and an ascetic life through the Qumran movement. While there is no direct reference to him having been there, the location he chose, the scriptural passage he used, his lifestyle, baptizing practice, and his attitude toward judgment do not rule out the possibility that he could have been an Essene.

The desert as a place enabled, for the Jews, the age of the new Exodus. Keener states: "Jews in John's time recognized this place as suitable for revival movements, as well as for prophets and the Messiah." In the wilderness, John gathered large crowds for baptism. According to Keener, the location is of great importance:

"John's place signifies the site and cost of the coming new Exodus and final salvation—the cost to be paid by God's true prophet for his calling: a total absence of all societal values—of comfort, of status symbols, and even of basic needs" (Keener, 2009, 165.)

Allison comments on John's activity in the wilderness as a preparation for a new Exodus. In the Gospel, the Isaiah quotation creates the wilderness as a setting for Jesus, the new Moses, who, after passing through the baptism of the Red Sea, goes into the wilderness for testing and leads Israel's history into a new chapter (Allison 2010, 35.)

5. Summary

The proximity of John the Baptist's movement to the Qumran community is evident in many ways. Both operated in the same desert region, used the same biblical passage in shaping their identity, shared a similar ascetic lifestyle, anticipated judgment, and practiced ritual cleansing. Both sharply criticized the secular and religious leaders of the Jews as well as the general populace. What most profoundly united them was the theme of repentance, which formed a connection among their other similarities.

The wilderness was the place of the people's preparation for the coming of God, for a new Exodus, and for judgment. These great events in salvation history required a people who were pure and ready for a new age. Although John's youthful membership in the Qumran sect cannot be proven, he represented the same time and regional form of Judaism with similar activity and message. The requirements of repentance included a withdrawal from former ways of life. Life in the desert, ascetic practices, confession of sins, baptism, and preparation for judgment were essential elements of purification movements.

The heritage of repentance in intertestamental literature developed in Jewish history through the

work of the prophets. Warning the people and calling them to repentance gave Israel's history a strong moral trajectory. The representatives of this path were prophets sent by God, the last of whom was John the Baptist.

The similarity between the anonymous Qumran community and the life and practice of John the Baptist becomes clear through analysis of the Gospel narratives and comparisons with the Qumran texts. The ancient Old Testament heritage, the characteristics of Second Temple Judaism, and the New Testament accounts of John the Baptist offer us broad insight into the continuity of the theme of repentance.

Similarities include geographic proximity, the wilderness as both actual and theological setting, an ascetic lifestyle with its associated purification, eschatological expectations and nearness of judgment, opposition to Jewish leaders, and the use of Isaiah 40 for shaping identity. Beyond all this, the most important connection is the teaching and practice of repentance. Both John the Baptist and the Essenes lived in eschatological tension and anticipated the arrival of God. In their anticipation, they separated themselves from society and practiced daily study of God's law, purification rituals, repentance, fasting, and ascetic living. John's entire being reflected his deep devotion to God.

John's characteristics—his clothing, diet, place of dwelling, speech, and lifestyle—all testify to his dedication and make him a living model of repentance for the people, reminding them of God's law. In gospels accounts, the reason for repentance is the coming wrath and the judgment of God. He referred to people as "brood of vipers," a strong warning about the nearness of judgment. The axe laid to the root of the tree is a powerful image, indicating the urgency of repentance, for God is ready to punish the wicked. Baptism holds both salvific and judgmental meaning. The coming Messiah will separate the people like wheat from chaff, which he will burn. The Messiah figure to come will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

The Influence of Qumran's Teaching on Repentance on Society

The Qumran community's teaching on repentance primarily influenced Jewish society through a prophetic and eschatological call. Although the community lived in isolation, its message was a sharp critique of the temple system in Jerusalem, the priesthood, and the spiritual condition of the people. Repentance—returning to God's law, con-

fessing sins, and moral purification—was seen as essential to avoid the coming judgment of God.

The Qumran sect withdrew to the desert to form a pure ”covenant community” that lived according to the Torah, in contrast to the ”corrupt generation” in Jerusalem. Their lifestyle—marked by repentance, study of the law, prayer, and ritual purification—represented a radical protest against societal and religious corruption. This made them a countercultural movement with prophetic significance.

Although secluded, the community's teachings and writings radiated outward. Their emphasis on repentance, judgment, and future salvation became part of the broader religious landscape of Second Temple Judaism, prompting responses from other groups such as the Pharisees and prophetic figures like John the Baptist.

The community's way of life and eschatological expectations provided a model for later movements of renewal and revival. The similarities between John the Baptist's ministry in the wilderness and Qumran's message are notable. While John was likely not a member of the sect, his call to repentance and preparation for the Lord closely mirrored Qumran's core values and message.

Qumran's teaching on repentance emphasized God's sovereignty, the separation of the elect, and

the study of the law as a means of sanctification. This shaped the understanding of sin, repentance, and salvation in Jewish thought on the threshold of the New Testament era. The community asserted that true societal renewal must begin with the individual and communal spiritual purification.

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Dark Age of High Technology

Neo-Platonic Anthropology Today

Szabolcs J. Illyés

Phenomena that can be interpreted as civilizationally significant anthropological and political-theological turning points indicate that a changing world-epoch has arrived. Digital platforms—particularly social media and messaging applications—have become the primary mediating environments of social reality: they do not merely transmit information, but also reconfigure the criteria of relevance, credibility, and visibility. In parallel with this transformation, communication is increasingly permeated by negative phenomena that simultaneously render democratic processes, social cohesion, and the validity of historical memory risk-laden domains: algorithmically organized and rapidly spreading disinformation, hate speech, coordinated manipulation campaigns, and the logic of the „attention economy" built upon emotional polarization.

These phenomena can no longer be regarded as isolated pathologies; rather, they are structurally embedded in the defining characteristics of the platform ecosystem itself. The business and tech-

nological rationality of the major platforms—especially engagement-based ranking mechanisms—generates an informational environment in which provocative, identity-forming, enemy-designating, and morally outrage-inducing content systematically gains a competitive advantage over slower, contextualized, evidence-based modes of discourse. Multiple empirical studies corroborate this tendency: systems optimized for engagement disproportionately amplify content characterized by „outrage" and „out-group" animosity within political communication, thereby structurally intensifying the emotional temperature of the public sphere and its dynamics of enemy construction. This transformation does not amount merely to a „fact versus opinion" type of crisis. Rather, the essence of the post-truth condition lies in a reconfiguration of the social conditions of validity: truth claims and regimes of legitimation detach themselves from the norms of shared verifiability and historical-critical methodology, while communication becomes attuned to metrics of speed, visibility, and affective mobilization. In this sense, the dark side of social media does not constitute a mere "content deviation," but rather a mode of operation of informational infrastructure that treats social reality—and with it, history—as a continuously re-frameable, immediately

instrumentalizable, and emotionally manageable resource (Harsin, 2024).

The most dramatic indicators of these negative communicative phenomena are those cases in which platform dynamics have functioned as catalysts for physical violence, ethno-religious persecution, or mass human rights violations. In international discourse, Myanmar represents an emblematic example, where investigative findings associated with the United Nations and several human rights analyses suggest that Facebook played a role in the dissemination of anti-Rohingya hate speech and violent mobilization. A Reuters report on the UN investigators' assessment explicitly indicates that the platform was widely used to incite hatred and violence while simultaneously becoming the dominant channel of social communication. A subsequent evaluation by Amnesty International, focusing specifically on platform operations, likewise concludes that the system—particularly its recommendation and distribution mechanisms—may have reinforced an environment conducive to violence against the Rohingya and raises the question of reparative responsibility (see: http://amnesty.org). (Similarly, in relation to the anti-Muslim riots in Sri Lanka in 2018, a Human Rights Impact Assessment (HRIA) published by Facebook itself documents in detail

that hatred and incitement circulating on social media constituted a systemic risk within the context of communal violence.)

In the African context, Ethiopia has emerged as one of the most acute terrains of platform responsibility: multiple reports and legal proceedings claim that the algorithmic amplification and inadequate moderation practices of Facebook/Meta may have contributed to dynamics of ethnic violence. According to a 2025 Reuters report, a Kenyan court opened the jurisdictional path for a lawsuit against Meta, explicitly centering on the amplification of hate speech and incitement to violence, as well as the insufficiency of risk management during conflict. In conflict zones, so-called "linguistic blind spots" (moderation deficiencies affecting underrepresented languages) further exacerbate risk: research indicates that due to linguistic limitations in content moderation, platforms are less capable of addressing dangerous content, particularly in contexts of the Global South.[2]

These dark effects are not confined to public social media platforms. Mass social harm has also emerged within the "closed" communicative spaces of messaging services. In the Indian context, mul-

2 (see: https://www.reuters.com/technology/meta-can-be-sued-kenya-over-posts-related-ethiopia-violence-court-rules-2025-04-04/?utm_source=chatgpt.com, downloaded: December 2025)

tiple analyses and reports discuss how rumors and manipulated content circulating on WhatsApp have been linked to lynchings and large-scale violent acts, thereby sharpening the platform regulation dilemma of „traceability versus privacy." What unites these examples is that platforms do not merely „reflect" social reality; rather, embedded within the dynamics of conflict, they operate as infrastructures of organization, mobilization, and legitimation. The "digital antechamber" of history-shaping atrocities is often no longer the classical propaganda state, but a public sphere structured by platform logic: competition for visibility, identity-political algorithmization, and emotional contagion. While a current political manipulation may in principle be correctable (through elections, institutional checks, or later fact-finding), the fixation of historical constructions as shared knowledge can produce damage that remains enduring—potentially across generations—within the fabric of collective memory. The short formats of social media (video fragments, image memes, highlighted quotations) generate a form of „memetic history": past events and actors are compressed into immediate moral judgments, identity markers, and enemy-designating symbols. Within this process, the foundational norms of the historian's craft—source criticism, contextualization, mul-

tiperspectivity, and chronological discipline—are placed at a competitive disadvantage relative to the speed of viral dissemination.

A particularly grave danger lies in the fact that the „alternative pasts" produced within communicative space are not merely errors, but narratives capable of political action: they organize communities, generate emotional belonging and hatred, and replace the „claim to reality" with a „claim to loyalty" (loyalty to the group's truth). In this manner, historical memory ceases to be a neutral background and becomes a political resource continuously reconfigured by platform logic. The contemporary relevance of this phenomenon is further intensified by the recent shift of manipulation techniques toward AI-generated content. From the perspective of historical memory, this development is critical because artificially produced „evidence" (images, videos, testimonial-like narratives) can radically undermine the stability of shared reference points: the „visualization" of the past is no longer a guarantee of the verifiability of the past.

The political weight of these phenomena is indicated by the fact that regulatory discourse in Europe has begun to conceptualize the societal impact of platforms through the vocabulary of „systemic risks." The EU's Digital Services Act

(DSA) explicitly assigns obligations to Very Large Online Platforms (VLOPs), such as risk assessment and risk mitigation, including risks arising from coordinated disinformation campaigns. In doing so, the DSA treats platforms not merely as "content carriers," but as social-infrastructural actors whose systemic effects can be measured in the dimensions of democratic public life and social peace (see: http://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu).

The post-truth phenomenon and the „dark atrocities" of social media are therefore evidently not manageable solely as issues of media ethics or political communication. Platforms that seek to dominate the entire communicative landscape have become the new medium of historical action: the mobilization of hatred, the production of legitimating narratives, and even the struggle over the "ownership of the past" are increasingly bound to digital infrastructures. The negative phenomena of communication thus do not merely generate „factual errors," but erode those conditions of human integrity that are necessary for sustaining a shared world: reflexive distance, the personal traceability of responsibility, and the possibility of transcendental orientation (as a normative horizon). The injury of historical memory here constitutes not merely a cultural loss, but an erosion of the foundations of

communal identity, political judgment, and moral responsibility (Brettschneider, 2021. 160-165.).

1. The historical aspect of the „post-truth" agenda

If we regard the „post-truth" doctrine as a universally realized model of communication, the loss of validity simultaneously entails the image of the erosion of human spiritual integrity. For as long as political, or otherwise themed, marketing communication realized in the spirit of „post-truth" attacks the integrity of the human spirit in relation to a future, potential decision — something that, in principle, may still contain the possibility of correction in light of decisions realized in the future — so, with regard to historical constructions, methods that step beyond truth, that is, methods that surpass the "craft of the historian," call into question the dimension of the validity of civilization's shared memory, which, once named and fixed as common knowledge, can cause irreversible damage in the fabric of communal, national memory.

Although the Oxford English Dictionary declared the expression „post-truth" the word of the year in 2016, the phenomenon itself is by no means new; it has long been present in certain dimensions of public discourse alike, and in a much deeper way

than those perceive it who interpret it as mere deviance or decline. Fuller traces the origin of the concept back to the 2004 ironic coinage "reality-based community," a description criticizing George W. Bush's foreign policy; accordingly—placed in historical perspective—it is an expression referring to, or designating, circumstances in which objective facts have less influence on shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal conviction (Fuller, 2018, 12–14).

According to the Oxford English Dictionary definition of „post-truth," the communication strategy of "bottom-up" fact distorting actors in public discourse is the minimization of moral and epistemic distance, and the forced placement into focus of the unfulfilled promises and hypocrisy of the communicative front line. Post-truth politics appeared vividly in the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign. Hillary Clinton deplored half of Donald Trump's supporters for questioning the dominant progressive program of the post–Cold War neoliberal welfare state. In response, Trump, speaking on behalf of those whom this same agenda increasingly left behind, called the political elite "corrupt" and „cheaters." Yet Trump aimed deeper than this, at the essence of the post-truth condition. His campaign slogan—„drain the swamp"— suggested that the entire Washington

political establishment, not only the Democrats but also the Republicans, operates a manipulated game in which, regardless of the outcome of elections, the political class always wins. Previously this was called "bipartisanship" and was celebrated as an effective instrument of governance, accompanied by the narrative of the "end of ideologies." Trump, however, successfully exposed that this too is merely one game among many. This is the essence of the post-truth condition (IBID, 15–18).

The relationship of the scientific mainstream to the post-truth agenda is based on tradition, that is, on expertise, which draws its authority from the accumulated experience of generations. This corresponds to Thomas Kuhn's concept of "paradigm": a system of conventions within which knowledge is built in an orderly manner around a founding worldview. Kuhn's paradigm theory interprets the official narrative of the history of science as the continual rewriting of the past, which conceals dead ends, errors, and changes of direction, maintaining confidence in the status quo (KUHN, 1996, 43–51).

Post-truth is therefore not some transient political episode, but the deep structure of Western intellectual life, which reveals, by intertwining them with one another, the questions of politics, science, and judgment: it interprets the social epistemology

of the logically often hard-to-interpret historical situations of post-truth from the truth concepts of philosophy through the „tailor-made" forms of science, from Max Weber's concept of vocation to the epistemology of the future. The central stake is everywhere the same: who exercises „modal power," that is, who decides what can be considered possible.

Although many among the authors of the scholarly literature dealing with communication theory strive to refer to the general character of the „post-truth" phenomenon and to treat it as a scientific fact, that is, as a valid communication phenomenon bearing value-content, from an intellectual-historical perspective—especially in relation to „European" spiritual cultures that have entered an extremely sensitive and fragile phase—it may be permissible to draw attention to the destructive, counter-cultural nature of the communicative phenomenon by emphasizing that the phenomenon itself exists, is characteristic of, indeed a determining form of, the value-level unfiltered communicative trends of virtual „social media platforms" running on the platforms of global tech giants; thus, it is an existing phenomenon. Precisely not in one of its worst-natured manifestations, which, while emphasizing the efficiency of forwarding the message, is capable of even completely disregarding the idea of truth that

provides form to the message. Thus, even if the mode of communication can be considered successful with regard to the effectiveness of the primarily intended message reaching its destination—since it communicates an essentially destroyed, invalidated truth (a lie)—it remains, even within the playing field of political communication, a destructive, value-destroying phenomenon: it is nothing more than the "virtual book burning" of our present world-epoch (see: Harsin, 2024, 17–22).

If we speak of a destructive phenomenon, we cannot disregard the intellectual-historical changes and the postmodern social transformations that preceded and grounded them. We attempt to outline the intellectual framework not merely as a history of technology or media history developmental arc, but embedded in a philosophy-of-history frame of anthropological–theological depth, which, with a view to the future as well, can provide a framework of orientation for a methodological abstract capable of neutralizing the intellectual-historical effect of „post-truth" deconstruction. The structural, philosophy-of-history foundation of this can be provided by an implicit, yet consistently applied Neoplatonic anthropological triad, which grasps human existence in three mutually building, yet mutually presupposing dimensions: corpus (body), intellec-

tus (intellect), and spiritus, that is, the integrated, transcendentally oriented unity of the intellect. This threefold division—which was classically already present in late antique Christian thought, especially in the reception of Neoplatonism—makes it possible to interpret the crises of modernity not as isolated social phenomena, but as the gradual disintegration of human integrity. In this sense, the structure represents not a linear theory of progress, but a disintegrative philosophy of history (IBID).

At the center of the model, which intends to go beyond technological determinism and cultural relativism, stands the historical aspect of human dynamism: technical development, the transformation of communicative media, and the algorithmization of intellect are not groups of phenomena interpretable in themselves, but appear as symptoms of the reconfiguration of the human mode of existence. Here the basic thesis of the critique of the modern narrative emerges, which treats "change" as in itself a positive, value-neutral, or necessary category of development. „Change," in this framework, can much rather be regarded as a process of loss of equilibrium. For in each historical phase a kind of double dynamic can be recognized: in the short term an increase in functionality, efficiency, and adaptability can be observed, while, as an as-

pective consequence of this, in the long term human integrity—bodily, intellectual, or spiritual in sense—gradually erodes. This logic is deeply akin to the mode of thought of classical conservative and Christian civilizational critique.

This approach connects directly to Oswald Spengler's philosophy of culture, who in *The Decline of the West* describes civilization as the technically advanced, yet spiritually exhausted condition following vital culture. In Spengler, the advance of technical rationality does not mean development, but the rule of form over life (Spengler, 2003, 17–23).

A similarly critical perspective appears in Romano Guardini's interpretation of modernity, who in *Das Ende der Neuzeit* warns that the extension of technical power may go together with the loss of dominion over the human being. For Guardini, the tragedy of the modern human being is not the existence of technology, but that he loses the inner measure over technology that was previously ensured by a transcendent order (see: Guardini, 1951).

As a significant point of reference, Jacques Ellul may be mentioned, who, by virtue of his critique of technology, was capable of paradigm formation: in his work *La Technique ou l'enjeu du siècle* he elevates technique to a totalizing system possessing its own logic, which gradually subordinates to itself

ethical, political, and spiritual spheres as well (Ellul, 2014, 6–21). Accordingly, in contrast to the creative power of human integrity, every new „inertia system" — whether machine-based, media-based, or algorithmic — creates its own self-sustaining logic, from which individual intellect is increasingly less able to exit.

The threefold anthropological structure is therefore not merely a descriptive model, but also a normative critical instrument. It enables the examination of which dimension of the human being becomes dominant in a given historical era, and which suffers distortion or is pushed into the background. From this perspective, modernity and postmodernity appear not primarily as a sequence of political systems or economic formations, but as the gradual falling apart of human wholeness. The theoretical construction of integrity-loss of anthropological depth, realized through the active expansion of constructed phenomena intended to ease the conditions of human existence, by narrowing the proportional scope of the principled sovereignty of human existence, fits into the classical European intellectual-historical tradition, while laying claim to interpreting the technological and cultural crises of the present age in an integrated manner. This framework is not only analytical, but potentially re-

constructive as well: implicitly, it raises the question of the restoration of human integrity, which, in later chapters, can be projected into normative, ethical, and theological directions, encouraging a form of intellectual construction.

2. The intellectual-historical level of instrumentalization

The first major rupture of modern Western civilization in the history of human integrity is bound to the radical transformation of the bodily dimension. The period identifies itself as the "stage of machines," and implicitly links the technical processes of mechanization, the abstraction of labor, and the political–economic dimension of secularization. This triadic interrelation does not merely provide a historical description, but reveals the logic of a deeper anthropological transformation: mechanization appears not simply as an innovation in production technology, but as a radical reconfiguration of the relation between the human being and labor. Labor, which in premodern societies was still closely bound to the body, to the community, and to the transcendent order, gradually becomes an abstract function in the course of modernity. The body is no longer the organic expression of the human person, but an optimizable, measurable, and substitutable

resource that is fitted into the technical system. This process is closely connected to secularization, which signifies not merely a religious, but also an ontological and political transformation of significance. With the disappearance of the transcendent reference, the human body loses its symbolic and sacral meaning and is subordinated to the logic of economic rationality. Modern political economy thus redefines not only production, but also the bodily conditions of human existence.

This civilizational-critical reading is directly connected to the thought of Oswald Spengler, who described modern civilization as the mechanical closure of organic culture. For Spengler, the rule of technology is not merely a question of efficiency, but a sign that the spiritual forces that shape life have been replaced by functional rationality. The body, in this context, loses its organic meaning and becomes part of the machinery of civilization (Spengler, 1922).

It would, however, be an error to remain at the level of conservative cultural critique, since contemporary theories of technology indicate a direction with regard to moving further: Donna Haraway's essay *A Cyborg Manifesto* opens a radically new perspective on the relation between body and technology. In Haraway's interpretation, the mod-

ern human being is no longer a purely biological entity, but a hybrid entity in which the boundaries of the natural and the artificial are blurred. Although Haraway also attributes emancipatory potential to this paradigm of hybridization, her analysis implicitly confirms the diagnosis that the body is transformed into a functional interface that bears an increasingly less stable anthropological meaning (see: Haraway, 2016).

Hayles's work on posthumanism, especially her book *How We Became Posthuman*, further nuances the increasingly plastic perceptibility of the disintegration of human integrity experienced in our present world-epoch. According to Hayles, modern technical thought gradually reduces the body to an informational pattern that can, in principle, be detached from its material carrier. In this paradigm, the body is no longer the foundation of human identity, but merely a temporary „platform" for information (Hayles, 1999). This reduction points to a deeper philosophical erosion of bodily integrity that goes beyond mere technical changes. Nevertheless, „progress" in this phase is not yet totally destructive. Mechanization and modern technology unquestionably create new possibilities: increasing productivity, rising standards of living, and social mobility. The disintegration of bodily integrity

therefore initially appears as an ambivalent process that simultaneously carries emancipatory and dehumanizing elements.

In this context, the response of the Christian Church is particularly significant, which can be interpreted, not as an apologetic defense, but as a structural reflection in light of the present process. The major documents of Catholic social teaching—*Rerum Novarum* (1891), *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), and then *Centesimus Annus* (1991)—do not represent the rejection of technical development, but rather strive to provide it with an anthropological and moral framing. The phenomenon of labor in this case remains not merely an economic factor, but the sphere of the unfolding of the human person, which cannot become a mere instrument. The transformation of the body into an instrument is not in itself a tragedy, but the first, decisive step of the instrumentalization of the human person, which prepares the later disintegration of intellectual and spiritual integrity. Without the recognition of the ambivalence of this phase, the critique of modernity would necessarily become reductive.

3. Disintegration and the deconstruction

The second major period of modern Western civilization determined by a crisis of integrity affects

the dimension of human intellect. While in the first phase bodily existence became the object of technical rationality, in the era of mediated communication intellect, thinking, and judgment increasingly come under the dominion of mediating systems. The intellectual-historical framework examined rightly regards this phase as the epicenter of the process, since it is here that the turn occurs without which the later spiritual–intellectual collapse would not be interpretable. In this phase three processes tightly intertwined with one another take place: the mediatedness of intellect, the technical organization of the public sphere, and the mediatization of democracy. Intellect no longer operates as a direct reflexive act, but as the result of information flows structured, filtered, and ranked by communicative infrastructures. Thinking thus gradually loses its autonomy and begins to adapt to the logic proper to the media.

The classic diagnosis of this process is provided by McLuhan's famous thesis, according to which "the medium is the message" (the medium itself is the message). In McLuhan's interpretation, communicative tools are not neutral carriers of messages, but actively shape the structures of perception, thinking, and social relations. The printed press, electronic media, and then the internet do not mere-

ly make faster information flows possible, but create new cognitive patterns. Intellect adapts to the medium, not the other way around (McLuhan, 1994, 7–21).

This insight gains particular significance in the context of modern democracy, which is built upon the institutional functioning of the public sphere. Habermas's normative theory of the public sphere originally assumes that the foundation of democratic decision-making is rational discourse in which arguments clash and the possibility of consensus oriented toward truth exists. In the era of mediated communication, however, this ideal increasingly diverges from practice. The technical organization of the public sphere—especially with the emergence of mass media and digital platforms—binds discourse to formats and algorithms. Democratic participation seemingly expands, while intellect fragments: the place of debate is taken by reactions, impulses, and identity-based opinions. In this sense democracy does not cease, but becomes mediatized, losing its original epistemic foundation (Habermas, 2001, 122–147).

A contemporary critique of this process is strengthened by Bruns's analysis of participatory media systems. Bruns points out that in the digital public sphere „user participation" often does not

mean genuine deliberation, but rather continuous content production and sharing, which is directed by platform logic. The quantitative increase of participation thus does not coincide with the qualitative strengthening of intellect. The conceptual framework of the „communicational inertia system" becomes a system-central element here. This expression simultaneously refers to the self-sustaining dynamics of media systems and to the fact that individual intellect is structurally incapable of exiting these systems. The speed, volume, and technical mediatedness of information flows reach such a degree that the individual becomes not the interpreter of contents, but their drifting consumer. Intellect thus loses its reflexive distance, which is the basic condition of critical thinking (see: Bruns, 2018).

In this context, the separation of opinion and truth becomes particularly emphatic. In the mediated public sphere every opinion appears formally as equal, while those epistemic criteria disappear on the basis of which the claim of truth could be distinguished from mere standpoints. The democratic form remains, and even seemingly strengthens, yet it becomes hollow in content. This tension is one of the fundamental paradoxes of modern democracy: while communication has never been so widely accessible, the collective functioning of intellect

is increasingly less capable of truth-claim-oriented orientation. Mediated communication thus is not merely a technical question, but an anthropological crisis that prepares the next phase: the disintegration of the unity of intellect and spirit in the age of machine rationality. Through all these processes it becomes visible how the human being gradually loses anthropological integrity not only as a laboring, but also as a thinking and political being. In the era of mediated communication, the loss of intellectual integrity is not a spectacular collapse, but a gradual slippage, the consequences of which become apparent only with delay.

4. Spiritual integrity in the age of machine intellect

The integrity crisis of the Western civilization that lives with us arrives, in the third phase, at a qualitative turning point. While the first two stages—the disintegration of bodily and intellectual integrity—could still be interpreted as a critique of the internal contradictions of modernity, the age of machine intellect can no longer be fitted into the frameworks of classical critiques of modernity. Here we are confronted with a „post-anthropological" state-description, in which not merely human capacities become distorted, but the very unity of

human intellect becomes questionable. Technical rationality is now no longer an instrument, but an interpretive power that takes over the functions of judgment, decision, and responsibility. The concept of „machine intellect" therefore cannot be identified simply with artificial intelligence as a technology, but denotes a structural transformation: the delegation of interpretation, the algorithmization of responsibility, and the gradual disappearance of personal judgment. Yet it is not that it is present in the life of our emerging civilizations as a completely abstracted „background phenomenon," but rather its very tangible destructive presentness: for some years now, the operating principle of those virtual platforms referred to as „social" media—countercultural platforms that occupy, in ever greater volume, the network-like groupings of human communities and strive to appropriate them—has been determined by this process. Behind the „free surfaces" that ensure boundlessly wide space for dehumanization and faceless hatred, there is hidden not a value-terror masterfully constructed, weighted, and controlled to the utmost from one aspect (Tollefsen, 2018. 235.).

The intellectual-historical grounding of the post-anthropological diagnosis is closely connected to Lyotard's classical thesis on the „end of grand

narratives." According to Lyotard, the essence of the postmodern condition is not merely that narratives bearing universal truth claims lose their credibility, but that the legitimating structures of reason disintegrate. The fragmentation of knowledge in itself would not yet mean collapse; however, in the age of machine intellect this fragmentation becomes embedded in technical systems that reduce the question of truth to criteria of efficiency and prediction (Lyotard, 1979, 17–20).

The social consequences in parallel with this become increasingly evident. Bauman's concept of „liquid modernity" captures precisely that condition in which identities, norms, and institutions lose their durability. In a society driven by machine intellect, this liquidity is further radicalized: decisions are not the results of moral weighing, but of probabilistic calculations. The individual, similarly to the Spenglerian dystopia-vision, becomes not an acting subject, but a data point within a predictive system: he refers to this in the chapter devoted to the rethinking of *The Decline of the West* (Bauman, 2013, 168–175).

The psychic and cognitive dimensions of this process are analyzed consistently by Han, who speaks of the exhaustion of attention, concentration, and deep meaning. According to Han, digital

capitalism and the constant compulsion to perform create a mental environment in which intellect is not oppressed, but overburdened. The continuous flow of information produces not knowledge, but intellectual fatigue, in which judgment dissolves into a series of stimulus-reactions. „Machine intellect," in this context, is not merely a technological innovation, but an anthropological turn. The delegation of interpretation means that the human being renounces the capacity to understand reality within his own normative horizon. The algorithmization of responsibility, in turn, means that the consequences of decisions can no longer be bound to personal moral subjects. The disappearance of personal judgment ultimately leads to the hollowing out of human freedom. This is the point at which the crisis gains a theological dimension. The disintegration of the unity of intellect and responsibility is not merely a social dysfunction, but the annihilation of the concept of the human person. The loss of spiritual integrity at the same time means that the human being is no longer capable of responding even to the transcendent address, since that inner unity is lacking which would be the condition of the response (Han, 2015, 35–38).

In this context, the reinterpretation of the role of the Church bears particular significance. One of

the greatest merits of the outline examined is that the Church appears not as a belatedly reacting, defensive institution, but as an anthropological counter-horizon. The teaching and practice of the Church in this phase are not simply a moral position-taking, but a counter-narrative against the totalizing logic of machine intellect. A characteristic feature of the final phase of disintegration is that the postmodern forms of persecution of the Church are not primarily legal or physical in nature. Rather, what is at stake is ontological and cultural annihilation: the hollowing out of the concept of the human person, the rendering ridiculous of the transcendent truth claim, and the dismantling of the communal and interpretive structures of faith. In this sense, the Church is not merely persecuted, but a structurally marginalized reality.

Nevertheless, precisely this situation makes it possible for the Church to appear not as a reaction, but as a creative counter-position. The emphasis on the unity of the human person, on the traceability of responsibility, and on the transcendent openness of intellect offers a normative alternative that preserves its relevance even in the post-anthropological condition. The possibility of restoring spiritual integrity thus is not a technological solution, but a question of anthropological and theological recon-

struction. The age of machine intellect, therefore, is not simply a new historical stage, but bears the danger of the self-abolition of human intellect. In this situation, the Church's counter-narrative is not a turning toward the past, but one of the last coherent interpretive frameworks of the human future.

5. Summary

In the summarizing evaluation of the intellectual-historical outline examined, first and foremost it can be established that we are confronted with an internally coherent, theoretically grounded, and high-level civilizational-critical construction. The three-phase model—the description of the gradual disintegration of bodily, intellectual, and spiritual integrity—does not display an incidental thematic succession, but follows a systematic anthropological logic. This logic draws a philosophy-of-history arc that leads from the beginning of modernity to the post-anthropological condition, while throughout preserving its normative sensitivity. The dissolution of integrity realized in this manner does not reduce modern social changes to technical, economic, or communication-theoretical factors. Instead, it places the integrity of the human person at the center, and in each phase change appears as a process of loss of equilibrium. This approach consciously

breaks with the progressive development narrative dominant since the Enlightenment, which treats change as in itself a positive and necessary category.

From an intellectual-historical standpoint, the recognition that technical and social development can, in the long term, lead to the erosion of human integrity can be brought to a common denominator with Oswald Spengler's philosophy-of-culture diagnosis, which describes civilization as the exhaustion of spiritual forms (Spengler, 1922). The same thought appears in Guardini's critique of modernity, who warns of the loss of the human being's inner measure in the age of technical power (Guardini, 1950).

The sorrowful process can be brought into accord with Jean-François Lyotard's postmodern diagnosis of the end of grand narratives (Lyotard, 1979), as well as with Bauman's theory of liquid modernity, which captures the disintegration of institutional and identity stability (Bauman, 2000). The condition described in Phase III can no longer be interpreted with purely social-critical concepts. The diagnosis of the age of „machine intellect" is a post-anthropological state-description, in which the delegation of interpretation, judgment, and responsibility calls into question at its foundations the concept of the human person.

In this context, the interpretation of the role of the Church is of key importance. The Church appears not as a reactive, defensive institution, but as an anthropological counter-horizon. This approach sharply separates the model both from the one-sided institution-loss narratives of secularization theories and from purely apologetic theological reactions. The Church here is not a kind of loser of modernity, but the bearer of an interpretive framework capable of offering an alternative anthropological narrative against the totalizing logic of machine intellect.

Particularly significant is the recognition that postmodern persecution of the Church is not primarily legal or physical in nature, but can be interpreted as ontological and cultural annihilation. This diagnosis is consonant with those contemporary analyses according to which the marginalization of religion today occurs primarily through the delegitimation of truth claims, transcendence, and the concept of the person, rather than through open repression (Taylor, 2007).

The three phases of disintegration build upon one another: they simultaneously bear philosophy-of-history, social-theoretical, and political-theological relevancies. With regard to these, a reconstructive demand can at the same time be formulated: the question of the restoration of human

integrity beyond technical efficiency, on the horizon of the reunification of intellect, responsibility, and transcendence—which, presumably, will be one of the principal methodological questions for those intending to rebuild the society of the future.

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Opportunities for Involvement in the Fair Trade Movement

Gábor Czagány

Since the 1970s, the global economy has fundamentally changed in many respects. The idea of a strong state capable of correcting market failures has been replaced by the concept of a free market. According to this way of thinking, the market is seen as the cure for all kinds of global economic problems and economic growth is considered limitless. As a result of these ideas, privatization and economic liberalization have reached unprecedented levels, which in turn have generated further problems - such as widening disparities within countries and between nations, often to the point of becoming nearly insurmountable.

As the economy, society and culture have globalized, humanity is now facing challenges never experienced before. Due to globalization, we live in a world where our actions affect the lives of people in faraway corners of the world. Contrary to common misconceptions, globalization is the result of human decisions - not a power above humanity. Therefore, if it was created by people, it can also be changed by people.

Colonialism led to an unjust division of labor, where countries in the geopolitical South became sources of raw materials for the colonizing nations and remained so even after gaining independence. For many years, the IMF (*International Monetary Fund*) and the World Bank have provided significant financial aid to these countries. However, these subsidies continue to encourage them to focus on raw material exports, as the income generated is not sufficient to drive economic growth. As a result, these countries continue to produce the same agricultural products and raw materials as they did during the colonial period. This leads to two consequences:

1. The processing takes place in developed, industrial countries or in their overseas factories, meaning the countries formerly referred to as the "Third World" must buy back the finished products at higher prices.
2. Since countries in the Southern Hemisphere are all increasing their raw material production, overproduction occurs, which drives prices down - thereby reducing revenue.

Farmers are forced to take out loans, but the terms are increasingly unfavorable, making it hard-

er for them to access credit. They try to use pesticides to improve quality, but this not only consumes their wealth and fails to deliver better quality, it also damages the environment. The loss of wealth has many other consequences, such as being unable to send their children to school because they cannot afford the tuition fees. For many the only solution is to sell their crops before harvest to various market speculators - at a minimal price - because they cannot afford to wait until the crops are worth more.

Insolvent farmers have their land auctioned off by the authorities, which then ends up in the hands of large landowners, while the farmers themselves migrate to big cities - where they often cannot find work. The growing number of unemployed people increases the burden on the state, which is then forced to take out more and more foreign loans. However, this money is used to solve daily problems instead of being invested in education, public health, or industry.

Our actions also influence this process. If we buy shoes or footballs made using child labor, or drink coffee produced with environmentally harmful techniques, we become personally responsible. Nevertheless, there is an alternative approach that runs counter to the logic of global free trade. This alternative is **Fair Trade**, which is based on co-

operation, social oversight, and environmentally friendly production methods. (Czagány, 2008. 28.

1. General Characteristics of the Fair Trade Movement

Various international Fair Trade organizations have attempted to define the concept of Fair Trade in different ways. One of the most widely accepted definitions is: "*Fair Trade is a trading partnership, based on dialogue, transparency, and respect, that seeks greater equity in international trade. It contributes to sustainable development by offering better trading conditions and securing the rights of marginalized producers and workers - especially in the Global South.*" (Geoff, 2004. 73.)

In our view, the most important concepts in this definition are *dialogue* and *sustainable development*, as they clearly outline the framework of a new kind of partnership between the so-called geopolitical North and South. The foundation, therefore, is dialogue between two equal partners, and the shared goal is sustainable development.

It is essential to note that Fair Trade and cooperative economics are not merely the result of theoretical debates, but rather stem from real, thriving social movements. These ideas are rooted in everyday life - they are not just abstract theories but are

grounded in reality. From the producers' perspective, Fair Trade means genuinely higher income, improved working conditions, support for local traditions and generally greater social security (Develtere, 2005. 3.)

Fair Trade has a dual purpose. On the one hand, it can benefit farmers in developing countries; on the other, this way of thinking offers a response to the contradictions of Western consumer culture. According to the document outlining the general goals of Fair Trade, adopted at the General Assembly of IFAT (*International Federation for Alternative Trade*) in May 1999, the interests of the Global South are central.

"*These goals are:*

To improve the livelihoods and well-being of producers by improving market access, strengthening producer organizations, paying a better price and providing continuity in the trading relationship.

To promote development opportunities for disadvantaged producers, especially women and indigenous people, and to protect children from exploitation in the production process.

To raise awareness among consumers of the negative effects on producers of international trade so that they exercise their purchasing power positively.

To set an example of partnership in trade through dialogue, transparency and respect.

To campaign for changes in the rules and practice of conventional international trade.

To protect human rights by promoting social justice, sound environmental practices and economic security." (Redfern, 2002. 19.)

At the same time, when we consider the developed world's deep faith in consumption, we can also identify the needs of the West. Two critical points of consumer culture must be emphasized here. First, the scale of consumption is a serious issue, as it is directly responsible for global environmental degradation – such as global warming, water pollution, deforestation, and the loss of biodiversity. Second, the consumer mindset is excessively materialistic, which significantly narrows the diversity of life's meaning. As a result, this culture undermines collective interests by overemphasizing individualism (Gould, 2003. 342.) Viewed from this angle, the inhabitants of the Western world may find a realistic alternative in Fair Trade – one that can help overcome many contradictions of contemporary economics and society.

2. Main Criteria for Fair Trade Products

The key element of the Fair Trade system is the **Fair Trade certification label**. This label can be found on nearly all Fair Trade products, clearly identifying goods traded within the system. The most important criteria that must be met to receive the Fair Trade label include:

- Payment of fair wages to workers, decent housing conditions, higher health and safety standards, and the right to join trade unions;
- A complete ban on child labor and forced labor;
- Implementation of programs that promote environmental sustainability;
- Democratic structures in small farmer cooperatives, allowing members to participate in decision-making processes (Develtere, 4.)

This is the foundation – but it is not the all. Strict monitoring also takes place during transport and trade. Additionally, within the Fair Trade system, each product is subject to specific standards. These define characteristics such as minimum quality, pricing, and production conditions that must be met. These criteria are developed and monitored by the cooperating organizations **Fairtrade In-**

ternational and **FLOCERT**, which operate independently of Fair Trade companies.

3. The Christian Roots and Examples of Fair Trade

Although the Fair Trade movement itself emerged in the 1960s, its spirit and foundational principles can be traced back to 1860. In that year, the book *Max Havelaar* by Dutch author *Multatuli* was published, exposing the injustices of the Dutch coffee trade in Indonesia. This was the first work that opened many eyes to the exploitation embedded in Western-controlled food trade. While this did not yet lead to a movement in the modern sense, it clearly revealed – even at the time – that the prevailing and still-developing monopolistic capitalism was taking a misguided path.

Although *Multatuli*'s book argued from a secular, humanist perspective, the author himself came from a devout Christian, Mennonite family. Following in his footsteps – but also independently of him – Christian-rooted critiques of increasingly ruthless colonization and its distorted social consequences gained strength in the decades that followed.

Therefore, it is not surprising that one of the concrete responses to these issues also emerged from a Christian background – a method that sought ef-

fective solutions to support producers living under colonial or semi-colonial dependency.

In this section of our article, we aim to shed light on some theoretical aspects of the relationship between Christianity and Fair Trade, thereby emphasizing the reasons why Fair Trade can count on Christians as natural allies in the future. The most important emphases can be summarized in the following points:

In Christian thought, work is not merely an economic necessity but a means of personal fulfillment and communal responsibility. The right to a fair wage – which is a cornerstone of the Fair Trade model – aligns with the moral imperative that workers should not be treated as tools but as co-workers in the act of Creation, deserving dignity and respect.

The Fair Trade model supports numerous community-based development initiatives – with the Fair Trade premium being used to build schools, wells, and healthcare facilities. This closely reflects Christianity's ethical emphasis on community, particularly the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity, which are strongly emphasized in the Catechism of the Catholic Church and various papal encyclicals (Dawson, 2017. 124-125.)

Christian theology defends the integrity of the created world, which resonates with Fair Trade's em-

phasis on environmentally responsible production and sustainable agricultural practices. Pope Francis's 2015 encyclical *Laudato si*' explicitly highlights the "structures of power" that govern global trade and calls for a unified Christian ecological vision. (LS, 5)

4. Three Fair Trade initiatives from different denominational backgrounds

This paper does not aim to provide a comprehensive history of Fair Trade. Instead, we will highlight three examples that demonstrate how Christians have contributed to the development of Fair Trade or the emergence of new Fair Trade initiatives in different decades and contexts.

As an introduction, we begin with the first representative of the modern Fair Trade movement, **Ten Thousand Villages**, followed by a Dutch example from the 1960s, **SOS Wereldhandel**, and conclude with a contemporary initiative: the **Fair Trade Church Network**. Each of the initiatives fulfills the three aspects outlined in the previous section, but also adds unique messages and forms of implementation.These three examples represent three different Christian traditions (Mennonite, Roman Catholic and Anglican). Their example raises the possibility that the Reformed tradition could also be the backdrop for new Fair Trade initiatives.

Ten Thousand Villages is one of the first and most well-known non-profit organizations to become a pioneer of the global Fair Trade model. Its story is closely intertwined with Christian social responsibility and the support of artisans in developing countries. The origins of Ten Thousand Villages date back to the 1940s, when *Edna Ruth Byler*, a member of the Mennonite community in Pennsylvania, visited Haiti in 1946. There, she encountered handmade artisan goods created by local women. *Byler* realized that selling these products in the United States could offer women an opportunity to earn their own income and improve their quality of life. This was the core idea behind what we now call Fair Trade (Osman, 2020. 155.)

Byler initially sold the products from her home, then later through churches and local fairs. This initiative led to the creation of the *Self Help Crafts* program in 1958, supported by the *Mennonite Central Committee* (MCC). The goal of Self Help Crafts was to build direct and fair relationships between artisan producers and North American consumers. The organization not only focused on selling products but also supported community development, education, healthcare and infrastructure improvements (Keahey, 2011, 268-269.)

By the 1980s, the organization experienced rapid growth, forming trade relationships with an increasing number of partners in developing countries. In 1996, the organization officially adopted the name *Ten Thousand Villages*. The name is based on a quote by *Mahatma Gandhi*, who said, "*India lives in its villages*." Symbolically, the name reflects the organization's mission to provide artisans from remote and often forgotten villages around the world the opportunity to sell their goods at fair prices (Wolfer, 2008. 452.)

Ten Thousand Villages was one of the founding members of the **World Fair Trade Organization (WFTO)**, which represents Fair Trade organizations globally. It also played a pioneering role in the American Fair Trade movement and operated for many years as one of the largest Fair Trade retail chains in the United States. Today, products from thousands of artisans across more than 30 countries are available in Ten Thousand Villages stores. These locations serve not only as retail outlets but also as educational and awareness-raising centers that inform consumers about the principles of Fair Trade.

Ten Thousand Villages remains one of the world's most recognized and longest-standing Fair Trade organizations. Its story serves as inspiration for other civil, religious, and ethical enterprises. It proves that

Christian social principles, community responsibility, and global economic justice are not only compatible but can also reinforce one another (KEAHEY, 2011. 267.)

S.O.S. Wereldhandel was one of the earliest and most important alternative trade organizations in the Netherlands, directly contributing to the birth of global Fair Trade. Its activities were pioneering in the development of the international network of Alternative Trade Organizations (ATOs) and can be considered the direct predecessor of what is known today as Fair Trade Original.

S.O.S. Wereldhandel was founded in 1959 in the Netherlands with the goal of offering a sustainable trade model for developing countries instead of aid. The name itself reflected this vision: "S.O.S." stood for "*Steun Onderontwikkelde Streken*" (Support for Underdeveloped Regions), while "*Wereldhandel*" means world trade – symbolizing the realization of global solidarity through trade. The movement was closely connected to the Dutch Catholic Church and other Christian civil organizations that supported the creation of new, just economic relations with countries of the Global South (FICHT, 2007. 6-7.)

In 1967, S.O.S. Wereldhandel opened the first Dutch world shop (*Wereldwinkel*) in Breukelen,

laying the foundation for Fair Trade retail in Europe. The "Third World shop" movement, which later spread across Western Europe, was in part inspired by this example. These volunteer-run shops aimed not only to sell products but also to educate consumers and raise awareness. During the 1970s, S.O.S. Wereldhandel actively participated in building the European ATO network. In 1987, it became a founding member of IFAT (*International Federation for Alternative Trade* – now known as the *World Fair Trade Organization*, WFTO) (IBID. 7.)

By the mid-1960s, S.O.S. Wereldhandel was no longer the only Fair Trade organization in the Netherlands. Activist groups formed with both church affiliations and other political ideologies. This gave rise to a notable parallel between Christian activists working in a spirit of charity and radical secular groups. Paradoxically, although one might expect the opposite, the secular humanist initiatives were far more moderate than the Christian groups, such as Sjaloom, Solidaridad, or S.O.S. Wereldhandel, which organized anti-capitalist campaigns. While studies from the period often suggest tension between the two currents, in reality, quite the opposite occurred – denominational and ideological activists often worked together in successful collaboration (VAN DAM, 2015. 71.)

In 1994, S.O.S. Wereldhandel changed its name to *Fair Trade Organisatie* and later adopted the more widely recognized name Fair Trade Original (in 2006). This transformation was part of a broader shift, as the organization aligned itself with modern consumer expectations, market mechanisms, and branding strategies. Fair Trade Original continues to operate today, primarily focusing on the distribution of food products such as coffee, tea, spices, and rice.[3]

The pioneering role of S.O.S. Wereldhandel lies not only in being one of the first Fair Trade organizations but also in laying the foundation for a trade ethic based on communal and Christian values. The networks and mindset it fostered remain essential components of the global Fair Trade structure today.

Although the Fair Trade Church initiative is not among the earliest examples of the connection between Fair Trade and Christian communities, it is one of the clearest realizations of how the two concepts - church and ethical trade - can closely intertwine. The essence of this initiative is that congregations, parishes, or churches officially commit to the values and practices of Fair Trade - not just in theory but also in everyday practice. This program

3 History (Stichting) Fair Trade Original Foundation: https://ftofoundation.nl/about-us/ (Download: 16/07/2025)

serves educational, symbolic, and practical goals and is mobilizing more and more church communities around the world. The movement began in the United Kingdom from an Anglican background, where it also has the strongest presence (Dawson, 2024. 123.)

According to the guidelines developed by the Fairtrade Foundation, a church or congregation can be recognized as a Fair Trade Church if it meets the following three basic criteria:

- **Use of Fair Trade products** The church regularly uses (and where possible, sells) Fair Trade certified coffee, tea, and other products at services, meetings, and events.
- **Commitment to Fair Trade principles** The community accepts and formally pledges to support Fair Trade, for example through a church council resolution or a written statement.
- **Raising awareness and education** The congregation organizes at least one event per year (e.g. a Fair Trade Sunday, presentation, or market) to promote Fair Trade principles among its members.

The Fair Trade Church program not only impacts the consumption habits of local communities but also contributes to broader societal change:

- **Education and awareness-raising:** Through the program, children, youth, and adults gain insight into global injustices and the potential of conscious consumerism.
- **Fairtrade Fortnight:** Many churches participate in this annual two-week campaign through special events (e.g., services, coffee gatherings, exhibitions).
- **Global responsibility:** Churches commitment to Fair Trade contributes to building a more ethical global economic system (FICHTL, 2007. 60.)

5. Current Economic Problems from the Viewpoint of the Reformed Tradition

In this chapter, I would like to present the Reformed perspective on the current eco-political situation. This can help in assessing the extent to which the Reformed tradition is suitable for embracing the Fair Trade message.

The assessment of social and economic injustices within the Reformed (Protestant) tradition is somewhat complex and, at times, *controversial*. Protestant countries such as England and the Netherlands were heavily involved in colonization. Some white Protestant churches bore serious responsibility for supporting various racist policies (e.g.,

in the Southern Confederacy before, during, and after the Civil War, or in South Africa during the apartheid regime). Moreover, Protestantism is, in a certain sense, one of the ideological roots of the modern capitalist system. Of course, capitalism and socio-economic injustice are not synonymous, but the former can give rise to the latter.

Despite the original social teachings of Calvin and the views of Puritan divines and merchants—many of whom opposed the oppression of the poor (Cohen, 2002. 249.) the Reformed tradition is, at least *indirectly, implicated in the current global situation*. Philanthropy and hard work, which were fundamental to Puritan thought, were used to justify capitalist profit-making, and hard work was also seen as legitimating inequality. In this way, Puritanism contributed to legitimizing capitalism; though this legitimization was more cultural than behavioral, it was nonetheless significant. While not the sole origin of capitalism, it was undoubtedly one of its key ideological sources (Ibid. 258.) In some cases, this connection is more evident - such as in the economic and political structures of the United States today. Many leaders within this system are members of devout Protestant (often fundamentalist) congregations whose spiritual roots lie in Puritanism.

Globalization has many faces, but the most heavily criticized is its economic dimension – namely, neo-liberal economic globalization. In recent years, the Church has issued numerous documents against this ever-expanding phenomenon. One of the most significant among these is the radical and unequivocally worded declaration by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. The document, *Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth* – more commonly known as the **Accra Confession –** offers a detailed critique of neo-liberal economic globalization.

According to the Accra Confession, neo-liberal globalization is based on:

«*(1) unrestrained competition, consumerism, and unlimited economic growth and accumulation of wealth;*

(2) ownership of private property with no social obligations;

(3) capital speculation, liberalization and deregulation of the market, privatization of public utilities and natural resources, unrestricted access for foreign investment and imports, lower taxes, and the unrestricted movement of capital; and

(4) the subordination of social obligations—such as protection of the poor and the weak, trade un-

ions, and human relationships—to the processes of economic growth and capital accumulation.» (VAN WIEREN, 2005. 3.)

The declaration states clearly that the Church must not remain silent:

"*Therefore, we reject the current world economic order imposed by global neo-liberal capitalism and any other economic system, including absolute planned economies, which defy God's covenant by excluding the poor, the vulnerable, and the whole of creation from the fullness of life. We reject any claim of economic, political, and military empire which subverts God's sovereignty over life and acts contrary to God's just rule.*"

As a response, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches declares:

"*Now we proclaim with passion that we will commit ourselves, our time, and our energy to changing, renewing, and restoring the economy and the earth, choosing life, so that we and our descendants might live.*"[4]

4 Covenanting for Justice: the Accra Confession, *Reformed World* Vol. 55, 2005/3, 188 & 190.

What could this prophetic action look like in practice? We must seek alternatives to neo-liberal economic globalization. Fair Trade is one such alternative, and therefore, the Church must actively participate in this movement.

Ulrich Duchrow, a well-known Reformed professor of social ethics, speaks of a dual strategy for promoting alternatives. The first approach involves participation in the development of local and regional alternatives; the second focuses on building alliances for collective action toward macroeconomic and political change. Both approaches are biblically grounded. Jesus and his movement helped people heal their communities – including their economies – by re-establishing cooperative models grounded in solidarity.

The Church must take part in the work of building a visible covenant between the People of God and those affected by injustice, along with their organizations, such as trade unions and social movements. It is a real sign of hope that such movements are emerging across the globe – most notably within the framework of the **World Social Forum**.

Conclusion

The Reformed tradition's relationship with economic injustice is complex and historically bur-

dened, as Protestant countries and churches have, to some extent, contributed to the development of capitalism, colonialism, and systemic inequality. However, recent theological developments – particularly the formulation of the *Accra Confession* – indicate a clear shift toward the critique of neoliberal economic globalization and a search for more just social alternatives. In this context, the Fair Trade movement offers a practical and ethically grounded alternative that aligns closely with biblical principles of justice, and it provides a tangible opportunity for Reformed churches to take on a prophetic role in transforming global economic systems.

The core values of Fair Trade – human dignity, social justice, community solidarity, and care for creation – resonate deeply with Reformed social ethics. As *Ulrich Duchrow* emphasizes, both the support of local alternatives and the building of global alliances are biblically mandated tasks. Fair Trade is not merely a trading model; it is also a form of spiritual and moral action – for the sake of the created world, oppressed communities, and future generations. In this regard, Reformed communities, while critically engaging with their own historical legacy, can become authentic and active participants in shaping a more just, people-centered global economic order.

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Control of the Communist Party – Persecution of Christians

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The history of Christian communities in the People's Republic of China is characterized by a cyclical fluctuation between periods of relative acceptance and severe persecution. While the Chinese Constitution theoretically guarantees freedom of religion under Paragraph 36, a significant dichotomy exists between this legal promise and the socio-political reality faced by believers. This study investigates the current status of Christians in China, focusing specifically on developments and trends over the past five years. The primary objective is to analyze the gap between the theoretical protections afforded to religious groups and the practical implementation of state-led restrictions and atrocities.

To provide a rigorous analysis, this research relies on a comprehensive review of reports from international human rights and advocacy organizations, including the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) and Open Doors, which document the systematic atrocities affecting these communities. Furthermore, this examination is grounded in the theoretical framework

of genocide studies. Moving beyond the colloquial understanding of genocide as solely mass extermination, this study applies Raphael Lemkin's original 1944 definition, which posits that genocide involves a coordinated plan aiming at the destruction of the essential foundations of national groups, including their social, cultural, and religious aspects.

By projecting Lemkin's conceptual system and Michael Mann's models of state persecution onto contemporary events, this study argues that the treatment of Christians in China—ranging from the demolition of churches to the forced "Sinicization" of theology—constitutes a structural attempt to neutralize Christian identity as an independent social force. The following chapters will explore the historical background, the tightening legal framework under the current Communist Party leadership, and the specific mechanisms of persecution that align with the early stages of genocidal processes.

1. Theoretical Background within the Framework of Genocide Studies

Religious persecution, the aspiration to abolish religious groups in whole or in part—which includes killing members of the group, causing physical or mental harm, making their living conditions impossible with the intent of physical destruction, pre-

venting births within the group, and transferring children belonging to the group to another group—qualifies as the crime of genocide under the 1948 Genocide Convention if the intent is proven (Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide).

Although we can date the establishment of genocide as a distinct crime from this point, the name and the concept were born a few years earlier. In his book published in 1944, Raphael Lemkin defines the meaning of genocide as follows: "Generally speaking, genocide does not necessarily mean the immediate destruction of a nation, except when accomplished by the mass killings of all members of a nation. It is intended rather to signify a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves." (LEMKIN, 79). Furthermore, Lemkin defines numerous methods by which national identity is attacked in various social areas.

These areas are the political, social, cultural, economic, biological, physical, religious, and moral aspects of the given group. Mass destruction appears under the physical aspect of genocide, which clearly shows that in its original interpretation, genocide did not feature as mass murder—the im-

mediate mass extermination of a group—but as a complex phenomenon extending to every area of life (LEMKIN, 82-90). However, scientific writings dealing with genocides in many cases identify genocide with mass murder instead of the Lemkinian interpretation. This does not exhaust the original concept (MOSES, 21-22).

Projecting Lemkin's interpretation and conceptual system onto the Christian persecutions taking place today, a clear picture emerges before us. In numerous cases, precise parallels can be drawn between contemporary events and what was described in the mid-20th century. It is observable how much the persecution of Christians matches Lemkin's original description of genocide. While it is possible that not every form of Christian persecution necessarily exhausts the legal definition of genocide, it is undoubted that within the framework shaped by Lemkin, they fall into the category of the genocide process and genocidal acts.

2. State-led persecution

The persecution of any group requires organization, adequate resources, and coordinated execution on the part of the perpetrators. In certain areas, these capabilities are possessed only by the state and state leadership; thus, it is unsurprising

that if state policy so dictates, the state is best positioned to successfully carry out persecution. In many cases, however, the role of the state is not necessarily unambiguous. The groups carrying out the actual persecution are often not directly employed by the state, nor do they receive their direct orders from the state leadership—at least not explicitly. However, the persecution-related activities of these organizations can be traced back to state decision-making; they occur with its approval, or the state, acting merely as a passive observer, allows the atrocities to be committed. The model established by Michael Mann, originally developed regarding ethnic cleansing, can be effectively applied to cases of religious persecution. In his theory, rather than positing a single perpetrator group, Mann outlined levels of perpetrators, encompassing supreme state leadership, various coercive organizations, and the radicalized masses (MANN, 8.).

This model aids not only in a higher-level, comprehensive understanding of ethnic cleansing but also in gaining a deeper insight into the practice of state persecution cited here as an example. Regarding the People's Republic of China, the role of the state leadership is unquestionable. The armed and administrative bodies essential for carrying out persecution fall under the exclusive authority of the

Communist Party. Persecution is clearly a process conceived, directed, and executed by state power.

As Anton Weiss-Wendt summarizes, in cases of genocide, the cooperation of state actors—political leadership, bureaucracy, and armed forces—is absolutely necessary. Consequently, in most cases, the central role of state leadership is inevitable in genocides (ANTON WEISS-WEDT, 99-100.).

Today, we can distinguish two dominant types of state-perpetrated persecution of Christians: anti-religious and religiously exclusive variants. Anti-religious state persecution typically views all religious groups with hostility, whereas in religiously exclusive state persecution, one dominant religious movement in the country enjoys support while all other religious groups suffer persecution. In the case of the People's Republic of China, the ideology of the Chinese Communist Party occupies the supreme ideological role and, by its very nature, persecutes religious groups.

3. Historical Background

The changes that took place during the 19th century largely determined the Chinese attitude toward Christianity. During the Opium Wars and the subsequent period, Western powers actively intervened in Chinese politics, acting toward China much more

as colonizers than as trading partners. As early as the aftermath of the First Opium War (1842), treaties disadvantageous to China were concluded with Western powers, obliging China to fully open its market and granting special rights to those powers (Great Britain, Russia, France, and the United States). Although the Treaties of Tianjin of 1858 were signed by the Chinese, fighting continued for roughly another two years before the Chinese leadership could be forced to ratify and accept the treaties (THE OFFICE OF THE HISTORIAN).

Thereafter, the victorious Western powers were able to pursue their plans in China with much greater freedom; this included the cultural "uplifting" of the Chinese, whom they deemed backward, a process that, in reality, amounted to the imposition of Western culture and Christianity upon Chinese society, often by force. This forceful attitude on the part of the Western powers intensified resistance against all foreign influence among the Chinese, who were increasingly awakening to a sense of national consciousness. Instead of the previously characteristic and expressly friendly attitude toward Christianity, the religion came to be viewed as an enemy and a tool of imperialism. The phenomenon known as "Rice Christians" also contributed to the negative perception of Christianity. This term referred to

Chinese individuals who converted to Christianity not out of religious conviction, but solely for the material aid provided by Christians. The increasingly accumulating hatred of foreigners and Christians culminated in the Boxer Rebellion of 1900, an event that claimed a vast number of lives (SALÁT, a).

In the first half of the 20th century the Christian churches showed a steady growth. Between the bloody insurgencies at the turn of the 19-20th century and the communist power seizing power Christian communities enjoyed relative peace and managed to prosper. In 1946, the number of Catholic faithful reached 3,270,000, and they maintained numerous educational, social, and healthcare institutions. During this same period, up to 1949, the number of adherents of Protestant churches also showed significant growth in China. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the number of Protestant adherents was estimated at roughly 100,000; in less than fifty years, this figure grew tenfold to 1 million believers (Fuk-tsang, 150-151.).

In 1949, the communists led by Mao Zedong won the civil war and extended their power over the entire country. Almost immediately after consolidating their power, they established the Religious Affairs Bureau, which theoretically played a mediating role between various religious denominations and state

power, was responsible for developing state church policy, and although religious organizations enjoyed theoretical autonomy, the Religious Affairs Bureau exercised state control over them. Not long after the creation of the Religious Affairs Bureau, party control over the churches became further stratified.

They established "patriotic" organizations under state control between the period of 1953-1957. The Buddhist Association of China, the China Islamic Association, the National Committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China, the Chinese Taoist Association, and the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association are all under party direction and serve to exercise control over groups and individuals belonging to these recognized religious denominations (SALÁT, b).

The ideology of the Chinese Communist Party is fundamentally anti-religious, which appears in its political practice as well. Varying intensity, the alternation of more violent persecution and general discrimination, is characteristic. The period claiming the most victims was Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution, which was then followed by decades of systematic oppression that, in most cases, did not claim human lives.

4. Legal Framework

Paragraph 36 of the 1982 Chinese Constitution theoretically records freedom of religion; however, it only takes "normal" religions under state protection without defining the concept of "normal" religion. Furthermore, it prohibits religious practices deemed dangerous to social order, the health of citizens, or state education, and specifically prohibits the existence of foreign influence (Constitution of People's Republic of China, Chapter II, Article 36). This phrasing allows for a specifically broad interpretation, thus making abuse of the legislation easier.

Religious groups not belonging to the aforementioned patriotic organizations could operate for a long time as tolerated elements, but under continuous pressure to join state organizations. However, following the Tiananmen Square events in 1989, state control tightened in every area of life, including the case of religious communities, which mainly affected groups not belonging to patriotic organizations.

In 1995, the state leadership classified 15 religious groups as "evil cults," a large portion of which are of Christian background. This list was gradually further expanded, and as the counterpoles to state religious organizations, they are exposed to intensified and continuous persecution (IRONS, 42-44).

Those who are members of any of these groups fall under the scope of Paragraph 300 of the Chinese Criminal Code, and their punishment, depending on the situation, is payment of a fine, confiscation of property, deprivation of political rights, 3-7 years in prison, or even life imprisonment. The law does not formulate the conditions for particularly serious or less serious cases in more detail, leaving space for freer interpretation (Criminal Law of the People's Republic of China, Chapter VI Crimes of Obstructing Administration of Public Order Section 1 Crimes of Disrupting Public Order, Article 300).

In 2004, the Chinese State Council brought new regulations regarding religious affairs. The document creates rules regarding, among other things, religious practice and the status of religious personnel, and endows the state's local religious bureaus with decision-making power in legal and administrative matters over religious organizations under their authority. However, this period passed in relative calm for religious groups situated in the "gray zone" between official and "evil cult" status. The authorities treated these groups more as tolerated factors and only took action in cases of infractions they deemed more serious. Contributing to this attitude was the standpoint of the political leadership at the time, which urged the alignment of religions with

socialist ideas, in the belief that religions could contribute to ensuring the harmony of society (PEW RESEARCH CENTER).

However, the current political leadership is moving further and further away from this approach. With Xi Jinping coming to power, the attitude toward religions has taken on an increasingly hostile image. Stronger action has again been taken against religious groups and activities not approved by the state, and the importance of affairs related to religion has noticeably increased for the Chinese leadership. The Chinese Communist Party has clearly explained that members of religious organizations cannot be members of the party; every party member must be an atheist. At the 19th National Party Congress, Xi Jinping announced the plan of *Sinicization*, which would incorporate the principles of Chinese socialism into religious teachings.Action against religions declared illegal also tightened. Control over religions extended to every level of the state apparatus, from the highest circles to the lowest (IRONS, 47-48).

In 2018, new regulations came into force regarding religious affairs, which further tighten the operation of religious organizations. The regulation emphasizes the exemption of religious organizations from foreign control, highlighting national security

interests. With this regulation, state control over religions generally strengthened further, and rules regarding religious communication, education, and charity significantly tightened as well.

In the same year, the Chinese government issued its white paper regarding its policy and practice on the protection of religious freedom. In this, they explain that religions must serve the interests of the Communist Party, and to this end, active guidance must be provided to various religious groups so they fit appropriately into socialist society. Both the white paper and Paragraph 27 of the National Security Law pay special attention to preventing foreign influence. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights particularly criticized Paragraph 27 of the National Security Law for its broad interpretability, which in their opinion allows space for tighter control exercised over society.

One of the continuously recurring elements of Chinese decision-making is measures aimed at preventing foreign influence. Most recently, these include Document No. 9 of the General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the law on foreign non-governmental organizations that came into force in 2017. The regulations significantly restrict not only foreign groups and individuals but also those Chinese groups that receive financial

support from abroad or work together with foreign organizations. In 2022, the flow of foreign information related to religion was again further tightened. The provision prohibited foreigners from online religious information transfer and further prohibits content that would encourage minors toward any kind of religiosity (ACN a).

These measures specifically negatively affect those religious organizations whose mother churches and largest supporters are located abroad. Maintaining contact becomes significantly more difficult, and in certain cases, without financial support arriving from abroad, small-numbered groups cannot sustain themselves or further finance their operations.

The restrictions did not leave the patriotic religious organizations supervised by the state untouched either. Under a regulation brought in 2021, religious personnel belonging to state organizations may continue their work under stricter supervision. It formulates stricter punishments for persons who do not adhere to religious regulations brought by the state. Furthermore, the provision effectively prohibits the operation of any religious person outside of state organizations (CHEN).

In 2022, another measure, also tightening the operation of state-recognized churches, came into

effect. According to the new regulation, the United Front Work Department and the Ministry of Finance exercise supervision over the religious sites of state churches and regulate donations and offerings to ensure the Sinicization of religion (ACN, b).

5. Christian Persecution in Practice

Among the atrocities committed against civilians ongoing in China, the Uyghur genocide is in the most advanced phase and rightfully receives outstanding attention at the international level as well. However, other ethnic and religious minorities similar to the Uyghurs, including Christian communities, suffer persecution. The persecution of Christians in the People's Republic of China shows the image of a systematically built oppression directed by the state, the goal of which is to eliminate delinquent religious groups or consolidate them into religious organizations directed by the state. Furthermore, [the goal is] the elimination of Christian identity, its alignment with the ideological and political ideas posited by the Chinese Communist Party, and its utilization in achieving the party's goals.

Numerous independent sources report on the continuous oppression of Christians. These patterns, such as institutionalized discrimination and strict social control, are all directed at the oppres-

sion and persecution of Christians. USCIRF reports name the situation prevailing in China in the field of religious freedom as one of the worst in the world. The report highlights the difference between treatment of official and "underground" Christian organizations. Organizations that are officially recognized by the state are required to register with state religious organizations directed by the party; consequently, they are obliged to align their doctrines with the guidelines formulated by the Chinese Communist Party in the spirit of Sinicization.

Those Christian communities that are unwilling to comply with this, to officially register themselves, or do not break off their relationship with foreign Christian groups, are exposed to continuous harassment. Believers belonging to these denominations, but specifically religious leaders, are exposed to heightened danger. There are numerous reported cases that account for physical violence against, detention of, and arrest of these persons. Religious leaders are regularly sentenced, even to multiple years of imprisonment, referring to vague, baseless justifications (USCIRF, 2025).

The report of the Open Doors' World Watch List confirms these findings and highlights that since Xi Jinping came to power, hostility against religions has amplified. Numerous officially unrecognized

Christian communities have been dissolved by force or merged into other recognized organizations by state bodies. For this, the state in many cases applied physical force to close down and dissolve Christian groups and close their gathering places. The report highlights that regarding atrocities affecting Christians, exact figures cannot be presented, as there are myriad cases about which no news report is made; due to fear of retribution, they do not report their grievances, so these patterns provide a picture of the current situation of Christians regarding confirmed cases (OPEN DOORS INTERNATIONAL, 2024).

The reports of Aid to the Church in Need similarly inform of the continuously deteriorating state of religious freedom. Adding to the foregoing are the deteriorating tendencies established in the territory of Hong Kong as a consequence of the influence of the Chinese Communist Party. Although freedom of religious practice still lives, self-censorship has strengthened in the case of religious persons due to the effect of intensifying surveillance. Hostile voices against Christian institutions and groups are increasingly strengthening.

Although Genocide Watch issued a report in 2025 in the case of China, it only mentioned the situation of the Uyghurs (GENOCIDE WATCH). However,

the Stanton genocide scale is usable when projected onto the situation of Chinese Christians as well. Of the ten stages, the phases of classification, discrimination, and polarization are currently observable.

Classification is clear; Christians as a group are separable on a religious basis from the rest of society. From the reports above, systematic, legally recorded, general discrimination against Christian groups and the restriction of their rights are clearly outlined. Polarization is observable in state communication, which in many cases presents Christians as representatives of dangerous and incorrect ideas and as collaborators with foreign forces. Another phenomenon of this stage is the segregation, arrest, and in extreme cases, killing of group leaders. In the case of Chinese Christians, numerous confirmed news sources report on the continuous harassment, surveillance, arrest, and imprisonment of religious leaders (STANTON).

The Early Warning Project, similarly to the other examined reports, classifies China in the highest possible category. The report, which examines and reveals the estimated risks of mass killing, also deals with the situation of the Uyghurs with highlighted importance, similar to the Genocide Watch report. This attitude is completely understandable, considering that proportionately the Uyghurs suffer

the most and cruelest persecution. However, numerous methods brought up in the report, which the Chinese state uses, are observable in the case of its treatment of Christians as well. Such are, for example, targeted group and individual oppression, continuous advanced technological surveillance, mass data collection, control of everyday life, harassment, physical abuse, attacks against identity, arrest, detention, and the use of other criminal legal tools (EARLY WARNING PROJECT, 2021).

6. Synthesis

The evidence presented in this study outlines a comprehensive landscape of religious persecution in the People's Republic of China, confirming that the state employs a systematic, institutionalized strategy to oppress Christian communities. Through the alignment of legal, bureaucratic, and technological tools, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) seeks not merely to regulate religion but to transform it fundamentally to serve party interests, a process explicitly formalized in Xi Jinping's policy of "Sinicization."

Theoretical analysis validates the severity of this persecution. Applying Michael Mann's model of state-perpetrated cleansing, it is evident that this oppression is not accidental but is a process con-

ceived and executed by supreme state leadership, utilizing the full apparatus of the bureaucracy and armed forces. While the physical mass destruction observed in the Uyghur genocide is less prevalent in the Christian context, the situation strongly correlates with Gregory Stanton's "Ten Stages of Genocide." Specifically, the stages of classification (separating Christians from "loyal" citizens), discrimination (via the social credit system and legal restrictions), and polarization (arresting leaders and labeling groups as "evil cults") are currently active and observable.

The trajectory of the last five years indicates a shift from sporadic harassment to structural oppression. By enforcing regulations that prohibit foreign influence and mandating that religious doctrines align with socialist principles, the state effectively attempts to erase independent Christian identity. Ultimately, the data suggests that the People's Republic of China is engaged in a "cold" genocide against Christians, one that prioritizes cultural and social strangulation over immediate physical annihilation, aiming to merge the church into the state apparatus or eliminate it entirely. Without significant international pressure, the space for authentic religious practice in China will likely continue to collapse under the weight of this totalitarian control.

NOTES

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Liminality-Communitas and the catholic social teaching

Theories of subsidiariy and solidarity

Szabolcs J. Illyés

One of the recurring questions of modern social theory concerns how the relationship between a structured social order and the transitional states that temporarily suspend or relativize it can be interpreted. Anthropological transition research—particularly the work of Arnold van Gennep and later Victor Turner—has developed a conceptual apparatus that is not only suitable for the analysis of ritual or tribal societies, but also offers a productive basis for comparison for modern normative social theories.

The conceptual pair liminality–communitas stands in a structural analogy with two fundamental principles of Catholic social teaching: subsidiarity and solidarity. What is at stake here is not a conceptual identification, but a functional correspondence: in both cases, the dynamic balance between the stable structures of social order and the corrective, humanizing fundamental relations that temper them comes to the fore.

1. The concept of liminality: being outside status and structural disposition

According to van Gennep's classical definition, rites de passage are the totality of rites that accompany "every change of place, state, social position, and age." The structure of these rites can be divided into three phases: separation (séparation), liminality (marge/limen), and reintegration (agrégation) (see: Van Gennep, 1909).

The distinctive feature of the liminal phase is that the individual or group falls outside the network of normative social classifications. The liminal person is neither here nor there: their status, rights, property, and markers of identification are temporarily lost. In Turner's interpretation, this statuslessness is not merely a lack, but a potential space in which the possibility of re-formation is opened up (Turner, 1969, 107–109).

This structural suspension is crucial insofar as it reveals that social hierarchy is not absolute, but conditional and learnable. Liminality thus implicitly performs a critical function vis-à-vis the existing order. The social counterpart of the liminal state, in Turner's terminology, is communitas. This is not simply "community," but an unstructured or minimally structured reality in which

individuals relate to one another not on the basis of their status, but on the basis of their sheer human existence. According to Turner, communitas constitutes the second fundamental model of social life alongside structure. Whereas structure is hierarchical, differentiated, and functionally articulated, communitas is egalitarian, homogeneous, and immediate. These are not mutually exclusive, but mutually presupposing forms of reality (Ibid., 110–117).

This insight is consonant with Meyer Fortes's observation that ritual transitions do not merely legitimize structure, but also remind us of its human preconditions. Communitas, therefore, is not an anarchic counter-order, but the moral foundation of social order. According to the principle of subsidiarity in Catholic social teaching, higher levels of society may not usurp functions that lower levels are capable of performing. This principle protects the functional rationality of social structure and the distribution of competences. In this sense, subsidiarity is the normative counterpart of structured order: it acknowledges hierarchy, but does not absolutize it. Analogously, the reintegration phase of the rites de passage also confers clearly defined rights and obligations upon the individual, now in their new status (Fortes, 1962).

The experience of liminality, however—much like the principle of subsidiarity—conveys the message that the legitimacy of structure does not derive from itself, but from its capacity to serve the human person and the common good. Solidarity, in Catholic social teaching, is the recognition that human beings are mutually responsible for one another, regardless of their social status. This principle approaches social life not from the perspective of functions, but from the equality of human dignity. In this respect, the concept of solidarity shows a close parallel with the anthropological experience of communitas. The comradeship, homogeneity, and mutual vulnerability that emerge in the liminal space are not ideological constructions, but lived experiences: the human being stands before the other as a human being (see: Eller, 2024).

Solidarity can thus be interpreted as the institutionalized, normative memory of communitas within structured society. The concepts of liminality and communitas teach that social order is not merely an aggregate of structures, but a moral reality that is continuously reproduced through transitions. In parallel, the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity in Catholic social teaching ensure that structure does not become inhuman, and that community does not dissolve into disorder. The encounter be-

tween these two traditions of thought highlights that social hierarchy is legitimate only insofar as it remains permeable, and that equality is productive only insofar as it leads back into responsible order. The experience of liminality, therefore, is not the suspension of order, but the source of its moral renewal.

2. Liminality and the Principle of Subsidiarity

Social structures can be legitimized only insofar as they are capable of serving the dignity of the human person, while at the same time requiring, from time to time, certain "transitional" experiences that remind them of their own limitations. At this point, however, purely theoretical analogy is insufficient. The question is how Catholic social teaching provides a concrete institutional, political, and moral operationalization of this dual logic: how it orders the system of relations between the person, the family, intermediate bodies, the state, and the international community; how it protects plurality against centralization; and how it requires political action to be realized as service, as responsible participation directed toward the common good.

The elaboration of the strategic principle of subsidiarity in the Compendium—with the primacy of

the person and the family, the autonomy of smaller communities, the demand for decentralization and the reduction of bureaucracy, as well as the balance of public–private cooperation—demonstrates how "structure" can be shaped in such a way that it does not absorb the human bond of communitas. Similarly, the sections dealing with the political responsibility of the lay faithful and the historical arc of papal teaching (from Leo XIII's *Rerum novarum* to the conciliar and post-conciliar developments) make visible how the experience of communitas can be translated into an institutionalized ethics of solidarity: through commitment to the common good, preferential concern for the poor, the practice of dialogue and reconciliation, and the requirement to confront the „structures of sin." (Stocklöv, 2025. 18-42.)

Moving toward a social-ethical program, Catholic social teaching concretizes the anthropological lesson of liminal states in principles that are also normative for modern democracies, global economic relations, and state governance. Accordingly, the following sections provide a normative specification of subsidiarity and political service, in order to render explicit—through historical documents and principled propositions—the structural analogy outlined thus far (Deutsch, 2011. 25-28).

Based on the Compendium of papal teaching, the strategic principle of subsidiarity primarily emphasizes that priority must be given to the person and the family, supporting them within their own spheres of responsibility. The autonomy of smaller communities and organizations must be respected, and external intervention is permissible only when absolutely necessary. Private initiative should be encouraged, while preserving the diversity of society and the distinctive role of each organization in the service of the common good. The protection of human rights and minorities, the reduction of bureaucracy, the decentralization of power, and the balanced cooperation between the public and private spheres are also essential, as they strengthen citizens' responsible participation in public life (OGAS 187).

For the lay faithful, politics is not merely a social activity, but a particularly important form of Christian service. Political participation becomes authentic Christian witness when it is permeated by commitment to the common good, sensitivity toward the poor and those who suffer, the practice of justice, and readiness for dialogue and reconciliation. At the same time, the autonomy of earthly realities and the principle of subsidiarity must also be respected. These are the fundamental principles by which the

political activity of the Christian layperson can be guided. It is the responsibility of every believer to exercise civil rights and duties in accordance with these considerations. This is especially true for those who participate professionally in public life, whether at the local, national, or international level of decision-making. Assuming such roles requires conscious moral commitment: in political planning, in contributions to public debate, and in practical action alike, the moral requirements of social and political life must be reflected. When this moral dimension is absent from political decision-making, institutions become hollow, and the "structures of sin" that form the basis of inhuman systems are strengthened. To be present in politics as a Christian does not mean imposing religious doctrines on others, but shaping public life to be more humane and more just—in the light of faith, yet in the service of the common good. For this reason, Christians must take seriously their preparation for the exercise of political power, especially when they receive this opportunity through democratic means and the trust of voters. They must be capable of defending the democratic system, which guarantees the right of participation, the free election and oversight of leaders, and, when necessary, their peaceful removal. They must reject all secret or unlawful exercises

of power that undermine democratic institutions. Political power must be exercised as service: every decision must serve the common good, in harmony with moral law. Those who exercise power must govern not according to their own interests, but in the spirit of freedom and with moral responsibility, for the benefit of all citizens (Ibid., 565–567).

The first level that opens space for Christian-social political activity—the level of the individual—is emphatically affirmed by Pope Leo XIII in his foundational guidance in *Rerum novarum*: "The human person must stand at the center." Confronted with manifest social injustice, the Church regards the dignity of the human person itself as the highest good on the stage of politics. At the same time, the Church speaks responsibly on questions of social justice, especially when dealing with deep problems for which purely human means offer no satisfactory solutions. Without religion and the Church, these difficulties cannot be permanently resolved, and were the Church to remain silent in such matters, it would be guilty of neglecting its duty. Through her own teaching—drawn from the Gospel—the Church is capable of alleviating social tensions and even facilitating their resolution. She not only shapes the spiritual life of believers, but also provides moral guidance, improves the condition of the poor, and

directs the attention of all social strata to how the situation of workers can be arranged justly and equitably. She also considers the laws and authority of the state important for this purpose, but always according to their proper order.

In Leo XIII's interpretation, the existence of social differences is not in itself an injustice. Human beings differ by nature—in their abilities, strengths, and diligence—and this diversity also serves the good of the community. The functioning of society requires diverse talents and vocations. Manual labor is also part of human life; it existed even before the Fall, but since then, as a consequence of sin, it has often become difficult and burdensome. Earthly life necessarily carries suffering and trials—these cannot be completely eliminated by any system or political promises. According to the Pope's interpretation, those who promise the people painless, perfect happiness raise false hopes and ultimately cause even greater disappointment and disorder. The realistic starting point is the acceptance and appreciation of human life in its fullness—with its joys and its hardships (RN 13–14).

The fundamental document of the Second Vatican Council aimed at social teaching highlights the principle of subsidiarity in relation to international politics. *Gaudium et spes* assigns to the inter-

national community the task of coordinating and promoting development, distributing resources effectively and justly, and regulating global economic relations on the basis of the principle of subsidiarity. To this end, institutions must be established that support the trade of less developed countries, reduce economic inequalities, and promote the sustainable development of these countries through technical, cultural, and financial assistance (GS 55). Analyzing the principle of political effectiveness, Pope Pius XI likewise recommends subsidiarity as a Christian-social value to be integrated into public policy processes. According to the principles of *Quadragesimo anno*, what smaller communities are capable of accomplishing must not be unjustly transferred to a higher-level organization. Such usurpation disrupts the social order, because the task of every association is to support smaller units—not to oppress or absorb them. In contrast to unprincipled centralization, the Pope therefore considers it the correct solution for the state to entrust matters of lesser importance to lower-level communities, thereby enabling it to concentrate its strength and effectiveness on tasks that only it can fulfill. The consistent application of the principle of subsidiarity does not weaken the state, but strengthens it: the better society is organized ac-

cording to this order, the greater the authority and effectiveness of the state will be (QA 79).

Building a stable construction upon the reasoning of his predecessors, Pope Benedict XVI also emphasizes the socio-political importance of subsidiarity. He points out that the all-centralizing, so-called "welfare" total state eventually becomes a rigid bureaucratic apparatus incapable of providing what the suffering person—that is, every person—needs most: personal, loving care. In the process of realizing the Christian-social ideal, what is needed is not a state that seeks to direct everything and regulate every sphere, but one that—according to the principle of subsidiarity—generously recognizes and supports those civil and social initiatives that are able, spontaneously and in direct proximity, to respond to human needs. The view that justly functioning institutional structures are sufficient in themselves and render the personal practice of love superfluous reflects a materialist conception of the human person. This view conceals a mistaken conviction through which the thinking human being unworthily simplifies human existence and ultimately denies its deepest, spiritual dimension (DCE 28).

In *Caritas in veritate*, Pope Benedict XVI places social subsidiarity within broader social contexts by emphasizing that the principle is manifested above

all in the assistance provided to individuals by intermediate organizations and associations that intervene when individuals or communities are unable to accomplish their tasks by their own means. This assistance, however, does not replace but strengthens: its purpose is to promote the freedom, autonomy, and responsibility of those concerned. In other words, it always includes the fundamental intention that support should not entail paternalism, but should be a path leading to autonomous action. The Pope emphasizes that subsidiarity respects the dignity of the person and regards the human being as a subject capable not only of receiving, but also of giving—even under the most difficult circumstances. This principle therefore not only provides protection against over-regulating, paternalistic systems, but also makes explicit the reciprocity inherent in human relationships. At the same time, it offers an opportunity to understand the diverse articulation of society, the plurality of subjects, and the possible harmony among them. Subsidiarity thus serves as a fundamental principle not only at the local or national level, but also in the global dimension. It is particularly suited to the governance of globalization, because it supports human-centered development. However, in order to prevent globalization from degenerating into a centralized, homogenizing

exercise of power, its governance must take place in a subsidiarian manner: across multiple levels, based on gradually organized, transparent forms of cooperation. The document speaks plainly: a system of authority is required that is built upon the decentralization of power, preserves respect for freedom, and at the same time is capable of producing tangible results. In this sense, subsidiarity is not merely a technical instrument of governance, but a fundamental element of a dignity-based social order (CIV 57).

Pope Francis, who is particularly sensitive in the matter of social justice, raises the question: where is the place of politics? In the lines of *Laudato Si'* he points out that insofar as the principle of subsidiarity provides an opportunity at every level for the unfolding of existing capacities, to the same extent it also imposes greater responsibility upon those who possess more significant power in the service of the common good. Although today certain economic sectors wield greater influence than states themselves, an economy that lacks political governance cannot be regarded as acceptable. For an economy separated from politics is incapable of representing any other value-order or mode of outlook, and thus cannot respond to the manifold challenges of the present crisis. The outlook that is insensitive to environmental responsibility is as a rule the same

one that rejects the social integration of the most vulnerable as well. The dominant social model—which is built upon "success" and „private life" — often does not consider valuable those investments whose aim is the catching-up of the disadvantaged, the weak, or the poorer. In this conception, there is simply no place for directing common resources toward the support of the most destitute (LS 196).

The human person can never become merely an instrument in the service of social, economic, or political aims, because he is a free being whose ultimate destiny is directed toward God—states the papal Compendium of the Church's social doctrine. At the same time, every social and historical arrangement—whether cultural, economic, or political—is only temporary and transitional, because the final end of the human person and of the world attains its fulfillment in God. Therefore, every worldview or system that restricts human development exclusively to earthly ends, or endows the state with excessive power—every kind of totalitarian conception of the state, every purely this-worldly idea of development—is contrary to the true dignity of the human person and to God's salvific plan. According to papal guidance, it is therefore the duty of the state to respect the dignity of the individual, to ensure his freedom, and to protect his fundamental

rights. This derives from the conception that the human person is the responsible subject of his own development, who also participates actively in his communal relationships (OGAS 48).

The Compendium highlights: the Church holds democracy in high esteem, since it offers citizens the possibility to participate in public life, freely choose their leaders, oversee them, and, if necessary, remove them by peaceful means. The value of democracy, however, is undermined if narrow interest groups place the state in the service of their own power and ideology. True democracy can exist only if it operates within the framework of the rule of law and respects the dignity of the human person. At the same time, ethical relativism constitutes a serious danger for contemporary democracies, insofar as it denies the existence of objective moral truth. A common view is that only those count as „democratic" who do not assert any absolute truth—while adherence to truth is often regarded with suspicion, as though it ran counter to the principles of democracy. If, however, there is no firm moral foundation behind political decisions, then ideas and convictions can easily become instruments of manipulation. Historical experience shows: when a democracy loses its fundamental values, it easily becomes distorted into a totalitarian system — either openly or covertly (OGAS 407).

The Second Vatican Council points out: freedom is truly deepened when the human person recognizes the natural consequences of living together, accepts the obligations arising from communal existence, and consciously commits himself to the service of the common good. Therefore, it is important, insofar as possible, that the whole Church actively participate in common social initiatives. Those nations deserve recognition in which a broad circle of citizens, living in genuine freedom, contributes to the shaping of public affairs. According to *Gaudium et spes*, one must take into account the particular social circumstances of each people and also the means necessary for the proper functioning of public authority. And in order for citizens to participate willingly in the life of the various groups of society, these communities must represent such values as make communal engagement and service performed for others attractive (GS 31).

Pope John Paul II, the eminent advocate and teacher who highlights the importance of freedom as a socio-political value-factor, in his public-policy interpretation maintains that the quality of a nation's life is closely connected with the extent to which the fullness of human rights is realized and can be enforced within it—above all the right to life, which extends to every stage of human existence.

To this belongs the right of the family — as the protection of the basic unit of human community — the justice manifested in labor relations, the rights connected to political participation, as well as all those entitlements that arise from the human person's transcendent destiny, among them pre-eminently religious freedom: the freedom to profess and practice the faith. According to the teaching of his encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, in the international dimension—whether one speaks of the system of interstate relations or of relations between different "worlds"— it is indispensable that the identity and cultural heritage of every people be accorded full respect. In the spirit of the encyclical *Populorum progressio*, it must be emphasized: every people has an equal right to growth, well-being, and development worthy of the human person—instead of any of them lying "like Lazarus" at the doors as an outcast. The fundamental equality between individuals and peoples, upon which—for example—the Charter of the United Nations is also built, requires that everyone be able to participate in the process of integral and dignified development. Development must unfold within the framework of freedom and solidarity—sacrificing neither value in the name of the other—in order to preserve its moral integrity. The true moral value of progress is realized only if it

is in harmony with those expectations that are connected with the truths and goods that arise from human nature (SRS 33).

For the Christian politician, true development can be authentic only if its roots lie in love of God and love of neighbor, and if it promotes the relationship among individuals as well as among social communities. This is what Pope Paul VI called the culture of love—an ethos that stands at the heart of Christian social teaching in accordance with the teaching of *Populorum progressio*.

Pope Benedict XVI points out: numerous economic, social, and political systems often develop in a direction in which individual and communal freedom is disregarded, indeed oppressed. As a consequence, they are incapable of realizing the justice that they originally set as their goal. As we may read in the encyclical *Spe salvi*, in this historical process Christian hope gradually disappears—although it is precisely this that would be the resource capable of promoting integral human development rooted in truth and freedom. According to *Caritas in veritate*, hope is not merely a spiritual encouragement, but the encourager of reason and the guide of the will. It is already present in faith; indeed, faith itself nourishes and sustains it. From hope springs love, which is rooted in truth, and hope is also the visible sign

of this unity. This divine hope—God's purely gratuitous action—enters into human life as something that cannot be demanded and that far surpasses the natural order of justice. Its possibility lies precisely in the fact that it overflows legitimate expectations; it is not due on the basis of dignity, but arrives as a "voluntary overflow." Hope therefore occupies the first place in the human soul. According to papal guidance, possibility—as also truth, in the manner of love—cannot be possessed, but is given as a gift, and always transcends individual levels (CIV 34).

In Pope Francis's conception, the interpretation of the principle of freedom also has its place: in the lines of *Laudato Si'* he confirms that human freedom is capable of promoting development if it is exercised intelligently and responsibly—yet it is also possible that it gives rise to new difficulties, causes suffering, or even sets back certain areas. This duality gives human history its dramatic character: it is an opportunity for liberation, for growth, for the unfolding of salvation and love—but it can just as well lead to decline and self-destruction. Precisely for this reason, the Church's mission also warns that above all the protection of the human person is at stake—namely, against his own destructive impulses. True ecological responsibility begins from the human person's interior responsibility (LS 79).

In the lines of *Fratelli tutti* as well, the progressive pontiff touches upon the broad, politically natured interpretation of freedom, alongside the principles of fraternity and equality. Yet if political will for dialogue is lacking, it can educate toward recognizing the value of mutual understanding and enrichment. According to Pope Francis, in such a case freedom too loses its genuine content: it narrows, becomes isolation, and gradually becomes distorted into a synonym of independence, possession, or self-serving enjoyment. This, however, is far from the deeper meaning of freedom. The true fulfillment of human freedom lies not in separation, but in love—in the capacity to turn toward others and to grow within our relationships (FT 103).

3. „Communitas", and the Principle of Solidarity

The intellectual tradition that records the structural correspondence between the Christian-social principles of subsidiarity and solidarity renders visible the dialectic of social order and the foundational relation that humanizes it. At this point, however, it becomes necessary to shift the emphasis from anthropological–moral presuppositions toward theological–normative grounding. The question is now no longer merely how the order of social coexist-

ence functions, but rather on what image of the human person and on what horizons of salvation history that socio-ethical program is built which the Catholic Church has articulated in response to the challenges of modernity. According to the point of departure of the Compendium summarizing papal social teaching, the Church's message is of universal validity, since salvation in Christ is a reality offered to every human being. Consequently, the Church's social teaching cannot be narrowed to the inner sphere of religious life, but necessarily extends to the domains of the economy, work, politics, and international relations as well. This universality, however, is not an abstract moral universalism, but a person-centered and solidaristic humanism that regards the dignity and freedom of the human person as the ultimate measure of every social order (Komonchak, 1999. 19-55).

In this context, the historical arc of papal social teaching acquires particular significance, stretching from the anthropological realism of *Rerum novarum*, through the historical reflection of *Centesimus annus*, all the way to the post-conciliar documents responding to the challenges of globalization and the ecological crisis. In the course of this process, the principle of solidarity gradually becomes the moral axis of social order: it appears not merely as

a helping attitude, but as a structuring principle capable of linking individual freedom, communal responsibility, and the requirements of global justice. An interpretive framework opens for the theological deepening and historical unfolding of the concept of solidarity insofar as—from Pope Leo XIII's teaching that reformulates the charitable tradition, through John Paul II's critique of alienation and his personalist understanding of solidarity, to Pope Benedict XVI's dialectic of love and institutions, and Pope Francis's teaching that emphasizes socio-ecological integrality—they examine how solidarity becomes the normative and history-forming counterpart of the experience of communitas (Illyés, 2025. 284-299).

The idea of „communitas" elevates the anthropological and institutional dimension to a new level: in the light of papal teachings, it shows that solidarity is not merely a moral virtue or a political slogan, but the practical expression of the Christian image of the human person, which opens the horizon of social action toward personal self-gift, the service of the common good, and the responsible shaping of history. The Church addresses every human being by this, because salvation is realized solely through Christ, emphasizes the Compendium summarizing the social teaching of the popes. The Church's social message therefore pertains not only to religious life,

but also has an effect on the economy, work, society, politics, and international relations. The Church proclaims a person-centered social order grounded in solidarity that respects human dignity and freedom; for this, however, it is necessary that people practice moral and social virtues, and—by God's grace—strive to build a renewed communal life.

The encyclical *Centesimus annus* appeared in the time of John Paul II and emphasizes the continuity of the Church's hundred-year social teaching. The Pope highlights the principle of solidarity, which his predecessors—under different names, such as "friendship," "social love," "the civilization of love"—had already articulated earlier. The central idea of the document is that the key to human development is that we recognize God in every human being, and every human being in God. The encyclical analyzes the situation after the fall of communism and weighs the possibilities of democracy and the market economy, with particular attention to the importance of solidarity (OGAS 103).

Rerum novarum, which grounds modern papal social teachings, regards the philosophy of ecclesial compassion shown toward the poor as the primary connection of papal spirituality—and thus of Christian-social thought. Leo XIII draws attention to the fact that the Church has always assumed an

outstanding role in supporting the poor, not only through her teachings, but also through the creation and maintenance of concrete institutions. Already in the early Christian communities, love of neighbor was strong: wealthier believers voluntarily shared their goods, and no one lived in misery among them. The diaconal ministry, too, came into being expressly for this helping purpose, by the commission of the Apostles. Biblical truths likewise support this: Saint Paul personally undertook the labors of collecting donations in order to support Christians in need. The donations thus gathered were already called "pious foundations" by ancient Christian writers, which served the provision of the poor, their burial, and the assistance of orphans, the elderly, and those of unfortunate fate (Gabriel, 2019. 188.).

Rerum novarum does not conceal that during this charitable activity the Church gradually also accumulated wealth, but always regarded it as the inheritance of those in need. Often she also sought support for the poor even through begging. As the common mother of rich and poor, she turned to every social stratum, and worldwide called into being countless religious communities and charitable institutions in order to alleviate misery. Although formerly the pagans, and nowadays certain modern societies, criticize the Church because of her chari-

table role and proclaim the primacy of state welfare systems, the self-sacrificing power of Christian love is nevertheless irreplaceable. This power is present exclusively in the Church, since it springs from the heart of Jesus Christ, from whom the Church is inseparable—thus whoever turns away from the Church also distances himself from Christ.

Gaudium et spes regards the sense of international solidarity as a genuine papal strategy: according to the conciliar fathers, together with social development an ever more sensitive sense of responsibility is directed toward helping people, indeed toward their protection, as a result of which, ideally, better living conditions are ensured for everyone, especially for those who cannot determine their fate or languish in ignorance (GS 57).

Saint Pope Paul VI, within the lines of *Populorum progressio*, considers it important to highlight the value-dimension of solidarity at the level of international politics—urging the international intervention activity of more developed countries to set an example before one another as diligent helpers of the uplift of less developed regions (PP 47).

John Paul II is a committed adherent of the idea of solidarity; yet this principled, strategic value, in the words of the encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, becomes truly effective within a community only if

its members mutually recognize one another as persons, as individuals possessing dignity. Those who possess greater influence—whether through material goods or through services—must be conscious of their responsibility toward the weaker and must be ready to share from their property for the sake of the common good. At the same time, he draws attention to the fact that those who lack necessities also cannot withdraw from society, cannot behave anti-socially: precisely in the spirit of solidarity it is their duty, alongside their struggle for their rights, to work actively for the building up of the community. The middle class of society, too, must move beyond the primacy of self-interest: it must assume responsibility for the whole of the community, keeping in view the needs of others as well. According to the Pope, the mutual solidarity observable among the poor, the growing awareness of this, and that peaceful, society-wide mobilization intended to articulate their legitimate demands against state helplessness or corruption can be evaluated as a hopeful phenomenon. By virtue of the Church's evangelical mission, she feels it her duty to be the spokesperson of these masses: to provide vindication of the justice of their demands and to facilitate their realization—doing all this in such a way that the rights and interests of other social groups are not harmed (SRS 39).

Solidarity, examined in the focus of the above, carries as primary content: that no one should regard the other—whether individuals, peoples, or nations—merely as an instrument whom we can exploit because of their work or bodily strength and then set aside when they no longer yield profit. Instead, let us recognize in them the companion of ourselves, with whom our common human dignity and responsibility alike connect us (Sosis-Kiper, 2018. 97).

As a critique of Marxism, John Paul II speaks of the alienation of the person who has come under the influence of dialectical materialist ideology—both in a pastoral–spiritual-directive and in a socio-political sense. Therefore he raises his voice against the process of alienation, for which he considers it necessary first to provide an interpretive overview of the process. In accordance with the lines of *Centesimus annus*, when the human person does not recognize, either in himself or in his fellow human being, the dignity of the person and his magnificent vocation, then he essentially shuts himself off from the possibility of fully living his humanity. At the same time, he becomes incapable of forming with others such relationships as are characterized by solidarity and by the order of communal existence—that is, those for which God originally destined him. For the human person truly finds himself when, by

virtue of his freedom, he is capable of giving himself. This self-gift, according to the saintly Pope, is possible because the human person is by his very essence open to transcendence. The human person cannot give himself over merely to human-scale systems, abstract ideas, or false utopias. As a person, however, he is capable of giving himself to another person—or to a community—and ultimately to God, who created him and who alone is capable of receiving and fulfilling his self-gift completely. Alienation occurs when the human person closes himself off from this personal self-gift, is unwilling to go beyond himself, and rejects those communal forms whose ultimate orientation points toward God. Society, too, becomes alienated if its institutions, economic and consumer systems, shape structures that make the living of self-gift impossible and hinder the unfolding of solidarity between persons. Although Western societies have moved beyond those forms of exploitation that Karl Marx analyzed in detail, alienation nevertheless has not ceased. It continues to live on—often in a refined form—where people mutually regard one another as instruments, and where consumption serves needs that obscure the human person's true, deeper needs. These latter should determine the proper order of the use of material goods and of the satisfaction of needs (CA 41).

Following in the footsteps of his saintly predecessor committed to the idea of solidarity, Pope Benedict XVI, also appreciating in the lines of *Deus caritas est* the idea of a society-level turning toward the destitute, reinforces—with one important statement—the spirit of the Second Vatican Council: "one of the most characteristic features of our time is the sense of solidarity developing between peoples, which is becoming ever more impossible to suppress." He highlights that in present societies numerous state institutions and humanitarian organizations support those initiatives that constitute concrete realizations of global solidarity—whether in the form of aid, debt relief, or significant financial contributions. The scope and impact of these community-level manifestations of solidarity far exceed the range and power of individual actions (DCE 30).

With regard to social solidarity, in the thought-world of *Caritas in veritate* it also finds its place: with respect to societies operating as parts of international communities, according to Pope Benedict XVI it is necessary that, through the strengthening of social solidarity, an opportunity should open for states to apply the principle of subsidiarity more consistently within their internal systems, and to develop such a social provision system as builds more upon the active role-taking of private indi-

viduals and civil society. In this way, not only can more integrated and effective social services be realized, but in parallel material resources can also be saved—among other things by curbing waste and irresponsible management. The means thus freed can be placed in the service of international solidarity. A structure of solidarity should be developed that recognizes and encourages broader participation, operates in an organic, less bureaucratic yet well-organized form. This would make it possible for currently unexploited social energies to be released, and for cooperation among peoples as well as global solidarity to take on a concrete form (CIV 60).

Pope Francis places the principle of solidarity as well within the broader aspect of social justice and environmental protection. According to the lines of *Laudato Si'*, the condition of the institutions of society has a direct effect on the environment and on human quality of life as well. Every violation of civic solidarity causes environmental damage. In this context it becomes clear that social ecology is inseparable from institutional order, and presupposes a system-level network that is gradually built up: starting from the family as the primary community, through the local level, all the way to national and international structures. According to the Pope, accordingly, at every social level those insti-

tutions come into being that provide the framework of human relationships. When these institutions are damaged, this can have grave consequences: freedom decreases, injustice increases, and violence gains ground. In numerous countries, weak institutional functioning directly contributes to the suffering of the population, while providing advantages to those who are interested in maintaining the status quo. Papal guidance also notes: not only in the sphere of public administration, but also in the functioning of civil society and in the everyday relations among people, one can often observe that attitude which distances itself from the fundamental principles of legality and moral norms. This institutional decline in the long term causes not only social, but also ecological deterioration (LS 142).

The word „solidarity," according to Pope Francis's experiences, in itself often does not meet with a favorable reception; indeed, at times it almost becomes a taboo or an object of mockery, as though it should not even be uttered. Yet it is about much more than a few scattered generous acts. Solidarity is the mindset and practice of shared responsibility: the recognition that every human life precedes the exclusive possession of material goods. On the basis of the testimony of *Fratelli tutti*, it even goes beyond individual benevolence: it is a struggle against the roots of social

injustice—against poverty, inequalities, landlessness and unemployment, homelessness, as well as the denial of the right to work and of social rights. This attitude is an open confrontation with power structures based on the "logic of money" and with their destructive consequences. In the deepest sense, solidarity is not merely a moral virtue, but an active mode of shaping history—a path that is realized in practice especially by popular movements (FT 116).

NOTES

pp. XIII. Leo: Rerum Novarum. 1891.05.15. (RN)
pp. XI. Pius: Quadragesimo Anno. 1931.05.12. (QA)
pp. XI. Pius: Nova Impendet. 1931.10.02. (NI)
pp. XI. Pius: Divini Redemptoris. 1937.03.19. (DR)
pp. XXIII. John: Pacem in Terris. 1963.11.04. (PIT)
pp. XXIII. John: Apostolicam Actuositatem. 1965.11.18. (AA)
Vaticanum II: Gaudium et Spes. 1965.12.07. (GS)
pp. VI. Paul: Populorum Progressio. 1967.03.26. (PP)
pp. II. John Paul: Laborem Exercens. 1981.09.14. (LE)
pp. II. John Paul: Sollicitudo Rei Socialis. 1987.12.30. (SRS)
pp. II. John Paul: Centesimus Annus. 1991.05.01. (CA)

pp. XVI. Benedict: Deus Caritas Est. 2006.03.31. (DCE)
pp. XVI. Benedict: Caritas in Veritate. 2013.01.22. (CIV)
pp. Francis: Laudato Si'. 2015.05.24. (LS)
pp. Francis: Fratelli Tutti. 2020.10.03. (FT)
pp. Francis: XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS. Closing Document 2024.11.24. (OGAS)

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The greatest crisis of the age of crises is the corrosion of human dignity, humanity, personal integrity, and—more broadly—every form of corruption committed against humaneness itself. This process extends from the most minor violations of rights, through the faceless, impersonal surges of hatred circulating on community platforms, to the gravest transgression of all: the gradual realization of the crime of genocide.

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