

Catholic Social Theory and Practice in the 21st Century: A Challenge for Believers in the Middle East

Eugene Richard Sensenig

*Notre Dame University-Louaize
Lebanon*

This year¹¹⁶ we celebrate the 125th anniversary of Catholic social teaching. On 15 May 1891 Pope Leo XIII issued the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (Of the New Things) promoting a revolutionary change in Christianity's understanding of the rights and duties of the capitalist class and organized labor. Equally damning of both laissez-faire liberalism's plan to totally deregulate the economy and socialism's dream of ending private ownership of the means of production (POMP), this authoritative papal circular letter promoted a third path to a better world. The social teachings of the Catholic Church have provoked much controversy over the years. Today, the revolutionary challenges set out in the Vatican's al-

¹¹⁶- A version of this paper was delivered in May of 2016 at the International Conference on Thomas More's *Utopia*, organized by Notre Dame University-Louaize in Lebanon; the links between the ideas here and More's work are briefly addressed in the final section of this paper.

ternative, faith-based approach to peace, freedom, and social justice are again seen as an option for those seeking a spiritually grounded and economically sound route to solidarity, reciprocity, and ultimately the survival of the human race.

Rights and Duties of Capital and Labor in the North and South

Social discourse within the Roman Catholic Church at the time of the issuing of *Rerum Novarum* can be understood as a dual response to the challenges of extreme poverty and a sense of alienation during the height of the Second Industrial Revolution (c. 1870-1914), as well as to the class warfare that resulted as a response to these phenomena. Catholic Social Teaching (CST)¹¹⁷ sought to steer a path between the radical challenges to private property on the left and right wing attempts to turn back the clock of time to a period long gone, in which industrialization, urbanization, universal education, mass migration, and the transformation of gender roles still seemed preventable. CST thus occupies a middle

117- In this context CST will refer to mainstream approaches to social theory within the Catholic Church based on the Compendium of the Social Doctrine. For an overview see Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004). http://www.antoniano.org/carbajo/FST/Readings/Magisterium/EN_Compendium_CST.pdf, retrieved 14 May 2016. The entire spectrum of Catholic thinking on social issues will be referred to as 'Catholic Social Theory' in order to include left-wing ideologies such as Liberation Theology and right-wing approaches such as the Alt-Right in the United States.

ground between Marxist and other anti-capitalist ideologies, on the one hand, and reactionary, anti-liberal, and anti-modern world views, on the other.¹¹⁸ As shall be described below, in the Global North CST continues to play the role of a moderating, faith-based, third path to social progress, between adherents of left-leaning Liberation Theology and the right-wing Alt-Right forces within the body of believers. In the Global South, however, the situation is much more complex.

What does CST mean to followers of Christ in the Middle East today? How does the historical challenge of *Rerum Novarum* play itself out in the region in which the Abrahamic religions originated, but where Christians today have become an increasingly embattled minority? Which role can the struggle for freedom, social justice, and good governance, all core attributes of the Catholic Church's social teaching, play in helping to sustain the faith in the MENA region?

To understand the reception of modern Christian concepts of social justice in general, and the Catholic understanding of solidarity and reciprocity in particular, it will be necessary to explore the context in which these ideas first emerged in Europe and how develop-

118- Domènec Melé, *Three Keys Concepts of Catholic Humanism for Economic Activity: Human Dignity, Human Rights and Integral Human Development*, in: Domènec Melé and Martin Schlag eds, *Humanism in Economics and Business: Perspectives of the Catholic Social Tradition*, (Dordrecht: Springer Science+Business Media, 2015) 113-136.

ments in the Middle East differ from the situation in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, and Italy, where CST originally took root in the 19th century.¹¹⁹ To do this, we must not only differentiate between the situation in the Global North and Global South, but take a more nuanced look at the position of Christians in the Middle East and other regions with a significant Christian presence such as Latin America, Sub-Sahara Africa, or the Philippines. Furthermore, the environment in which Middle Eastern Christians promote social justice is strongly influenced by a longstanding secularist tradition within a number of countries in the region. Many secularists perceive of Christianity as a natural partner for progress. Others see a faith-based approach, as well as the influence of religion in society in general, as part of the problem which can only be resolved by pushing religion to the sidelines.¹²⁰

In order to study the challenges that CST represents for believers in the Middle East, focus will be placed on the significant socio-economic differences between the Global North and its former colonies in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, on the one hand, and between and within the regions of the Global South, on the other.

119- Roger Aubert, *Catholic Social Teaching: An Historical Perspective*, (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2003).

120- Rouba El-Helou and Eugene Sensenig, *The "Gender-Citizenship Nexus": Lebanese Family Status Law and the Challenge of Legal Pluralism*, (Beirut: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2017) 4, 21-22.

Can the relationship between social justice and faith be better understood when viewed from the perspective of political economy, i.e. from the bottom up as opposed to the top down? In other words, have industrial and technological developments in the Global North significantly impacted social welfare policy, the liberalization and deregulation of the business sector, and ultimately the framing of political and security concerns, thereby shaping the thinking of the churches and individual believers around the world? To test this hypothesis and ultimately answer this question, the ‘Dialectic Method’, a form of philosophical argument first proposed by Socrates and further developed by Hegel and Marx, will be applied here. In order to compare the European regions of origin of CST to the situation in the Middle East, the foundations of the Industrial Revolution in the Global North will be analyzed using a dialectical ‘Basis—Uberbau’ (base—superstructure) approach. The foundations for class conflict, so convincingly condemned by Pope Leo XIII at the height of the revolutionary crisis in Europe in the decades prior to World War I, will be juxtaposed to the socio-economic situation in the Middle East. Did the economic and social environment, or ‘base’, in the Arab World, have a decisive impact on the role of the church and thus influence its position on the peace, social justice, and freedom agenda spelled out in *Rerum Novarum*? Have the distinctions between the socio-economic ‘base’ in Europe and the Arab

World also led to divergent paths toward social justice within the Church in both regions of the world?

In order to better understand the unique trajectories of Christian communities in the heartland of CST, a brief review of the founding period of reform discourse will be beneficial. To comprehend the initial intention of the Catholic scholars and church leaders, such as Tommaso Maria Zigliara, Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler, and Cardinal Henry Edward Manning, who supported Pope Leo XIII in drafting *Rerum Novarum*, one must reflect on the social and political conflicts in Europe during the decades prior to the promulgation of this encyclical during the second half of the 19th century. This will require a brief presentation of the impact of the Second Industrial Revolution on society in the Global North. Of equal importance was the highly detrimental influence of laissez-faire capitalism on the moral fabric of society in the region, along with the debate within the Catholic and Protestant churches with respect to it. It is important to note here that both rapid industrialization and radical deregulation of the economy played only a limited role in the predominantly Eastern Orthodox countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, e.g. Czarist Russia and the recently independent Balkans states of Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia, and especially Greece.¹²¹

121- Nikos Kokosalakis and Effie Fokas, *Greece, Overview of the National Situation*, in: Anders Bäckström et al, *Welfare and Values in Europe: Transitions related to*

The role model function of those influential Catholic and Protestant countries active in the Middle East at the time (e.g. France, Germany, Italy, UK, and USA), was not replicated by their Orthodox equivalents. Russian influence was transformed by the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 and the Balkan states simply lacked the resources and international clout. For this reason, emphasis will be placed primarily on dialogue between the CST faith tradition and the Protestant Social Gospel. References will be made, however, to the dichotomy between the role and social responsibility of organized religion and government institutions in the Orthodox tradition in order to reflect on possible explanations for the state-centric approach to the social justice agenda in the ME-NA.¹²²

The Road to Rerum Novarum in the Global North

Using the base-superstructure approach to social development and the Church's response to it described above, emphasis will be placed here on the foundational moment guiding modern Christian social thinking,

Religion, Minorities and Gender, volume 2. Uppsala: Uppsala university, Acta universitatis upsaliensis, Studies in Religion and Society 5, 2012) 237-261.

122- Johan Gärde, *Concepts on Zakat, Caritas, and Diaconia in the changing social welfare landscape of Europe*, (Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought), 36:1-2, 2017, 164-198, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15426432.2017.1311242>; Robert Hamd, *Generous Neighbors? Guest Workers and the Church in the Middle East*, (Saarbrücken: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2013); Erik Blennberger and Mats J. Hansson, eds *Diakoni, tolkning, historik, praktik*, (Stockholm: Verbum, 2008).

namely, the early Industrial Revolution. Beginning in the decades prior to the French Revolution, it built on a gradual shift in economic power away from the landed aristocracy and clergy to the bourgeoisie, with its wealth based on manufacturing and commerce. By 1789 economic power in Central and Western Europe was clearly in the hands of the entrepreneurial classes, leading to a rapid expansion of the Liberal concept of total socio-economic deregulation, or *laissez-faire*. Classical Liberalism was not only directed against the influence of the traditional aristocratic state, with its antiquated concept of 'Divine Right of Kings', but also against the institutions of organized religion and their charitable control over the educational and healthcare sectors. By the Council of Vienna at the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, the Industrial Revolution was in full swing, gradually replacing traditional agriculture and crafts-based manual production with mechanized farming and manufacturing.¹²³

The net result of this process was the rapid demise of the economic base for large swaths of the traditionally conservative population in the countryside, towns, and small cities. While anti-aristocratic and anti-clerical sentiment had largely been dominated by the radical

¹²³- Patrick Karl O'Brien, *The Contributions of Warfare with Revolutionary and Napoleonic France to the Consolidation and Progress of the British Industrial Revolution*, Working Papers No. 150/11, (London: London School of Economics, 2011).

liberalism of the French Revolution and laissez-faire mentality that accompanied it, the mood became more differentiated by the mid-19th century.¹²⁴ The Great European Revolution of 1848/1849 (often referred to as the Spring of Nations or Springtime of the Peoples) saw the expression of mass organized socialist protest against the excesses of capitalism for the first time. This was expressed in the Communist Manifesto completed the previous year, which called on workers to join forces with the middle classes against the clergy and aristocracy, but to then take the revolution one step further and challenge the rights of all propertied classes to POMP.

The European aristocracy and clergy were divided on the issues of liberalism, democracy, and secularism at the end of the Napoleonic period. Whereas Britain, and to a limited extent post-revolutionary France, supported a brand of progressive Conservatism propagated by Edmund Burke in his 1790 work, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Catholic Austria, Protestant Prussia, and Orthodox Russia formed the Holy Alliance in the months after the Congress of Vienna in an attempt to prevent liberalism from ever taking hold in Europe again. It was to be the armies of this Holy Alliance which played a decisive role in 1848 in putting down the combined lib-

¹²⁴ Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Century*, in 3 volumes, (New York: Harper and Row, 1981-1984); Peter Temin, *The Cambridge History of Capitalism*. In "Journal of Economic Literature", 2015, 53 (4): 996-1016, DOI: 10.1257/jel.53.4.996

eral and (albeit fledgling) socialist revolutionaries and thus stabilizing their regimes in Central and Eastern Europe. This dichotomy of progressive conservatism in the West and reactionary conservatism in Central and Eastern Europe was reflected in debates within the religious institutions of the day.¹²⁵

Both laissez-faire liberalism and revolutionary socialism posed existential threats to the conservative power elites in the Holy Alliance of the three “divine monarchies” of Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox Europe. Spearheaded by the Chancellor of Austria at the time, Klemens Wenzel von Metternich, the Holy Alliance proved to be successful in maintaining control over the superstructure, e.g. the media, educational sector, and civil society as a whole. However, the proverbial Metternichian system of world order was incapable of stopping the foundational driving force behind both liberalism and socialism in Europe, the Industrial Revolution. As the mechanization of production progressed, fossil fuel powered manufacturing and transportation led to an increasingly mobile, educated, and urbanized European population. The railroads, the introduction of machine tools, and power driven technologies across all sectors made the bourgeoisie unstoppable. Liberalism promised a new world in which everyone was free and judged solely on their own merit. Socialism in turn re-

125- Noël O’Sullivan, *Conservatism* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1976)

sponded by promising a future in which everyone would be equal and would contribute to society based on their own capabilities. Both the liberal and socialist utopias were antithetic to the conservative mindset, based on core values such as family, religion, and dedication to inherited wealth, which would be passed on in better shape to future generations.

As a response to the salvific messages propagated by liberalism and socialism, the Catholic Church issued the encyclical *Quanta Cura* in 1864 under Pope Pius IX to which was attached as an annex the *Syllabus Errorum* (Syllabus of Errors). Both classical liberalism and revolutionary socialism had taken positions openly hostile to the role of organized religion in society. More importantly, they negated the significance of faith-based institutions in navigating the relationship between those who owned the means of production (aristocracy, clergy, and bourgeoisie) and those who did not (the proletariat, landless peasants, and the few remaining systems in which various forms of slavery were prevalent). The *Syllabus of Errors* was backward looking in that it criticized the excesses of moderate and absolute rationalism, the predominance of civil society, socialism, communism, liberalism, and secularism without offering an alternative societal model which would have been able to compete with the earthly salvation promised by its declared enemies. In the seventy-five years after the

beginning of the liberal French Revolution and the sixteen years following the birth of socialism during the Springtime of the Peoples, the response of the Catholic Church had been largely limited to a rearguard defensive stance similar to that taken by the secular “divine monarchies” on the continent. During the final half of the 19th century any illusions that the effects of the Industrial Revolution could be reversed appeared to be increasingly desperate. Changes in the base of society were overwhelming its superstructure.

By the 1870’s, the “one-nation conservatism” of British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli and the “state socialism” of the conservative German Chancellor, Otto von Bismarck, had set out to counter the brutality of unbridled laissez-faire liberalism, to meet the needs and reduce the suffering of the urban working classes, to undermine the powerful British Labor and German Social Democratic movements, and ultimately to unify their respective nations around a conservative world view and plan for the future.¹²⁶ These policies proved to be short sighted largely because they did not take the impact of the gradual introduction of universal suffrage into consideration and as the right to vote was slowly expanded throughout Europe to include the petit bourgeoisie and working class, traditional conservatism proved to be too limited in scope.

¹²⁶- Ibid.

By the 1880's, Christian Social labor unions, political parties, and consumer cooperatives had been organized in many parts of continental Europe to offer socially conservative and politically progressive workers an ideological home.¹²⁷ The papal encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, issued forty-three years after the Revolution of 1848, was able to put these developments in a succinct theological and socio-political perspective. Unlike the Syllabus of Errors, Pope Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical "Of the New Things" tackled both liberalism and socialism head on by offering a coherent alternative based on the concept of a unified society allied along lines of dignity and mutual respect for both employers and employees. By recognizing the existence of conflictual relationships between the social classes and embracing the need for workers organizations, *Rerum Novarum* gave those workers disappointed by reactionary conservatism and alienated by socialist anticlericalism a third option. In addition, this encyclical clearly distanced itself from those Christian entrepreneurs who had embraced the liberal concept of laissez-faire capitalism in which neither the government nor Christ's church was responsible for

127- John W. Boyer, "Austrian Catholics and the World: Facing Political Turmoil in the Early Twentieth Century" in: Solomon Wank, et al, eds., *The Mirror of History: Essays in Honor of Fritz Fellner* (Santa Barbara: ABC Clio, —) 315-349; Emmerich Tálos and Alois Riedlsperger, eds, *Zeit-Gerecht - 100 Jahre katholische Soziallehre: Catalogue for the Exhibit "Time and Justice: 100 Years of Catholic Social Theory - Perspectives, Orientation, Initiatives"* in: the Museum Industrielle Arbeitswelt (Museum of the Industrial Working World); Steyr, Upper Austria, 1991.

the needs of the poor and unfortunate. Finally, the concept of subsidiarity established by this encyclical placed responsibility for societal cohesion and social justice clearly with the workers organizations, the employers, and the Church, recognizing the state as a player of last resort to be called in only when conflicts could not otherwise be resolved.¹²⁸

The lengthy introduction presented above, highlighting the technological, economic, and political context in which CST developed was necessary primarily in order to juxtapose the situations in the Global North and Global South. In summary, a uniquely Christian approach to establishing social justice, as opposed to mere charity focusing on the symptoms of inequality, was able to develop in Europe and North America in the slip stream of the Industrial Revolution and the gradual maturation of the Liberal, Conservative, and Social Democratic partisan movements. Constant technological advancements led to an undermining of the economic power base of the landed aristocracy and organized religion. The economic, and thus political, dominance of the entrepreneurial classes promoted both liberalism, as well as revolutionary socialism as a response to the ex-

128- Pedro Teixeira and António Almodovar, "Economics and Theology in Europe from the Nineteenth Century: From the Early Nineteenth Century's Christian Political Economy to Modern Catholic Social Doctrine" in: Paul Oslington, *The Oxford Handbook of Christianity and Economics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) 113-134.

cesses of 19th century capitalism. However, by the 1890's, laissez-faire liberalism had run its course and been replaced by the welfare state, supported by the liberals and conservatives alike, along the lines of Disraeli's and Bismarck's concept of entrepreneurial paternalism. Finally, during the decades immediately prior to World War I, the radical form of revolutionary socialism propagated by Marx in 1848 had developed into revisionist Social Democracy, which accepted POMP in exchange for universal suffrage, including voting rights for the working class, and an ever expanding welfare state.

In order to build a bridge to discourse on CST in the Global South, in general, and the MENA region, in particular, a few aspects of the experience in the Global North after World War I will be reviewed in following. Prior to 1914, Christian Social parties gradually began to play a dominant role in parliamentary politics, in many cases replacing more traditional conservative parties which had focused on the interests of large land owners, industrialists, and the powerful merchant classes. With their focus on workers who had either been forced off their small farms or lost their livelihoods as craftsman or small businessmen, the typical CST based political movement combined traditional conservative values such as promoting the family, the role of the Church, conventional gender roles, and respect for private property with issues often associated with the left-wing so-

cialist, communist and anarchist movements, including public funding for health care, housing, and education, fair wages and safe and healthy working conditions, and ultimately the right to organize labor unions and negotiate collectively with their employers. As such, CST was not limited to helping the poor, but also asked why so many people in the affluent, industrial centers of Europe and North America were so desperately poor. In this manner, Christian Social movements offered Christian and other conservatively minded workers an option in tune with their non-antagonistic values towards religion, but one that spoke truth to power and stood up to the liberal and conservative power elites in their respective countries.

In the period between the two World Wars CST played a major role in the dual struggle against fascism in Italy, Germany, Austria, Spain, and in the Bolshevik movements throughout the democratic countries of Western and Central Europe; Germany, Hungary, and Austria being a case in point. Many Christians sympathized grudgingly with fascist parties and governments because they seemed to offer a bulwark against the Soviet Union and its allies in the West. In Italy, the Catholic social activist Giorgio La Pira, who would become the Christian Democratic mayor of Florence after WWII, played a key role within the Catholic Church in fighting the fascist movement of Benito Mussolini. The Cardi-

nal of Cologne, Josef Frings, actively opposed the Nazi government of Adolf Hitler, breaking with the complacency of his predecessor in one of Germany's most important Catholic cities.¹²⁹ In German occupied Belgium the pre-war Catholic social leader Cardinal Joseph Cardijn openly opposed the Nazi regime and organized resistance against its oppressive policies. After WWII Cardijn became one of Europe's most important advocates of peace, freedom, and social justice, along with Italy's La Pira. Many individual Catholics opposed the harsh conditions imposed by the fascists of their time. One of the most remarkable is Franz Jägerstätter, a simple Austrian peasant who stood up against the brutality of the Nazi regime and was executed in 1943 because of his refusal to serve in the German military. He was later recognized as a martyr of the faith by Pope Benedict XVI and beatified in 2007. Of particular importance is the co-founder of the Catholic Workers Movement in the United States, Dorothy Day. An early supporter of feminism, socialism, and labor union radicalism, she converted to Catholicism at the age of 30 and built the Catholic Social labor movement during the years of the depression; founding the *Catholic Worker* newspaper and

129- Annette Mertens, "Widerstand gegen das NS-Regime? Katholische Kirche und Katholiken im Rheinland 1933-1945", in: *Internetportal Rheinische Geschichte*: <http://www.rheinische-geschichte.lvr.de/Epochen-und-Themen/Themen/widerstand-gegen-das-ns-regime-katholische-kirche-und-katholiken-im-rheinland-1933%2588%25921945/DE-2086/lido/57d13613522708.12312072> (retrieved 17.07.2018).

a network of urban and rural Catholic intentional communities together with the French De La Salle brother and social activist Peter Maurin. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops endorsed a proposal to canonize Day in 2012, which is still pending.

The transition from the 20th to the 21st century was marked by the end of fascist and military rule in the predominantly Catholic countries of the Mediterranean and Latin America, on the one hand, and the collapse of Communism in Central and Eastern Europe, on the other. With the demise of totalitarianism and the end of the historical split between the East and the West, the much older and more fundamental issues directly related to human dignity, freedom, and the negative impact of global capitalism returned full-force. Now unadulterated by the ideological fault lines and long-standing global conflicts between Moscow and Washington, the struggle for social justice could be seen in a new light. The impact of climate change, poverty and disease in the Global South, protracted military conflicts, and the ever widening technological gap between the world's haves and have-nots are challenges to which CST has provided responses since its inception 125 years ago. In the Global North a renewed openness for faith-based responses to social and cultural problems has gone hand-in-hand with an increased interest in the vibrant faith-traditions of Catholics and Protestants throughout

Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Whereas the religious communities in the metropolitan centers of power in Europe and North America tend to be culturally liberal and economically conservative, Catholic, Anglican, and other Protestant communities in the Global South tend to embrace more traditional family values, while simultaneously supporting more courageous approaches to rethinking the global terms of trade and international division of labor. Finally, the Church of the South has seen a rapid spread of “basic ecclesial communities” or the “Church at the grassroots” since the 1960’s in Latin American and the Philippines, and more recently in Africa and other parts of Asia including Korea, India, Hong Kong, and Taiwan.¹³⁰ Faith-based approaches to social change, including mainstream CST and Liberation Theology, and the grassroots church movement have a long tradition in the South and North, as can be seen in the case of the intentional communities and workers’ rights movement championed by Dorothy Day. The struggles of the church Global South continue to challenge Christians in the Global North and thus

130- Marcello De C. Azevedo, *Basic Ecclesial Communities: A Meeting Point of Ecclesiologies*, *Theological Studies* 46 (1985), <http://cdn.theologicalstudies.net/46/46.4/46.4.1.pdf>, retrieved 22 June 2017; Dieter Tewes, (2013). *Kirchliche Basisgemeinden—Kleine Christliche Gemeinschaften—Lokale Kirchenentwicklung: Eine (Begriffs)Klärung aus deutscher Sicht*, in: *The Discussions of the Tübinger Symposium “In der Welt von heute? Kirche unterwegs in christlichen Basisgemeinden”* (17.-20. Jan. 2013) http://kcg.missio-blog.de/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2013/09/Artikel_T%C3%BCbingen2013_Basisgemeinde-Begriffe_Tewes.pdf, retrieved 17 April 2017.

provide a bridge into the 21st century along the lines of freedom, peace, and social justice.

“Saints or Communists?” Catholic Social Teaching in the Global South

Dom Hélder Pessoa Câmara: *Quando dou comida aos pobres, chamam-me de santo. Quando pergunto por que eles são pobres, chamam-me de comunista:* (“When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why they are poor, they call me a Communist”)¹³¹

The final section of this presentation will be dedicated to comparing the development and impact of *Rerum Novarum*, and CST in general, in the Global North, to developments in the Global South and the Middle East in particular. Emphasis will be placed on the unique characteristics of economic, technological, and political developments in the former European colonies in Latin America, Africa, and Asia as well as the specific environment in which Christians find themselves in the MENA region today.

When reviewing the major distinctions between the trajectory of CST in Europe and developments in its

¹³¹ Zildo Rocha, *Helder, O Dom: uma vida que marcou os rumos da Igreja no Brasil* (Helder, the Gift: A Life that Marked the Course of the Church in Brazil), (Brasília: Editora Vozes, 2000) 53.

former imperial holdings, two issues seem to be of particular significance. The first and most foundational difference is the pace at which technology, the economy, and military capacity has advanced in the North and South. The second issue, which distinguishes Christian communities in the Middle East from their coreligionists in overwhelming Christian regions throughout the world, is the status of the Church in society. The *Basis—Überbau* dialectical approach will be used to link advancements in the means of production (i.e. the base) to changes in culture, religion, and social relations (superstructure). This interpretive lens can help juxtapose the late introduction of heavy industry, mechanized agriculture, and global commerce in the colonies of Africa, Asia, and Latin America to the nature of faith-based social justice discourse in the Global South. Modern class relations between the landed clergy and aristocracy, the bourgeoisie and proletariat, and local state institutions were introduced in the South over a period of several hundred years by Spanish, Portuguese, French, British, Dutch, and later German, Italian, and American colonial powers.

In the Spanish and Portuguese empires, Catholicism rapidly became the dominant religion of both the immigrant and indigenous populations. This had a pronounced influence on the reception of CST in Latin America, the Philippines, and the Portuguese colonies

in Africa and Asia during the period of industrialization in these regions. Workers in the Iberian colonial mines, plantations, metal works, food processing plants, and transport industries were strongly influenced by their counterparts in Europe and North America.¹³² Because Catholicism was predominant, developments in the faith communities in the colonies ran parallel to the experience in the colonial motherlands. The martyred archbishop of San Salvador, Óscar Arnulfo Romero (1917–1980) and the current president of Caritas International, Cardinal of Manila Luis Antonio Tagle, are symptomatic of mainstream CST in the former Iberian empires. Both combine a conservative approach to social and cultural values with a politically progressive stance on social justice on both the local and global levels. The late Brazilian theologians, Dom Hélder Câmara (1909–1999) and Paulo Freire (Brazil 1921–1997), are just two representatives of a movement in the mid-20th century which called on the Church to reinvigorate its mission of transforming society from below. Referred to as subsidiarity,¹³³ this principle sees the collective self-organization of society as a preferred response to

132- Scott Mainwaring and Timothy Scully eds., *Christian Democracy in Latin America: Electoral Competition and Regime Conflicts* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003).

133- Brian J. Benestad, *Church, State, and Society: An Introduction to Catholic Social Doctrine* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011) 278–280; Patrick McKinley Brennan, *Subsidiarity in the Tradition of Catholic Social Doctrine*, in: Michelle Evans and Augusto Zimmermann eds., *Global Perspectives on Subsidiarity*, (Dordrecht Springer Science+Business Media, 2015) 29–48.

challenging oppression and promoting human dignity and freedom. Practical struggles championed by these movements include land reform, labor union organization, and access to reliable and affordable healthcare, education, transportation, housing, water, and electricity. Câmara and Freire were not formally part of the larger movement dubbed Liberation Theology,¹³⁴ which was headed by their contemporaries Leonardo Boff in Brazil, Gustavo Gutiérrez in Peru, Juan Luis Segundo in Uruguay, and Jon Sobrino in Spain, and which has been accused of synthesizing CST, Marxist social analysis, and a state-centric approach to social reform.

The Christians of the Middle East are unique in many ways.¹³⁵ They are not only the descendants of the original, first century Church, and thus not the product of European colonial expansion, but more importantly for this topic and as opposed to the experience of the former Iberian colonies in Asia, Africa, Latin America, the social justice agenda in the MENA region is strongly influenced by its “inner diaspora”¹³⁶ status. The Orthodox

134- Bastiaan Wielenga, *Liberation theology in Asia*, in: Christopher Rowland ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 39-62.

135- Along with this author’s personal experience during two decades in the Middle East, much of the insights for this topic have been taken from Kenneth Cragg, *The Arab Christian: A History in the Middle East* (Louisville KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991).

136- The term “inner-diaspora” has been adapted from discourse on peoples who have become foreigners in their own land, such as the disposed populations following the collapse of the European empires after WWI, see Katalin Lajos, *Variants*

and Catholic, and more recently Protestant, communities must navigate the common problems facing all Christians around the world along with the realities of a 2000 year old faith-tradition which has been relegated to a minority status since the Arab-Muslim conquest of the Levant and Egypt in the mid-7th century.

Thus, the colonial experience of the Church of the Middle East is starkly different than that of Christians in the rest of the Global South. In Latin America or the Philippines the Church is built on a legacy of Iberian empires subjugating and converting vassal populations with overwhelming force. In the Arab world the situation was the exact opposite. Following the successful “*fatah*”, or opening, of the MENA region for Islam, the originally predominant Christian Church has had to survive and flourish as minority communities for almost one and a half millenniums. This had clear consequences for the mission of CST in the Middle East. Relegated to their respective millets, or confessional groups, under Muslim administrative law, the good news “Of the New Things” seemed to be limited to the Christian communities in the region.¹³⁷

of *Identity-Identity in Change*, (Miercurea-Ciuc: Pro-Print Publishing House, 2016) <https://www.degruyter.com/downloadpdf/j/ausp.2016.8.issue-3/ausp-2016-0040/ausp-2016-0040.pdf>, retrieved 15 November 2017 and Raymond Pearson, *Hungary: A State Truncated, a Nation Dismembered*, in Seamus Dunn and T. G. Fraser, *Europe and Ethnicity: The First World War and Contemporary Ethnic Conflict* eds. (London: Routledge 1996) 95-103.

137- Abdulaziz Abdulhussein Sachedina, *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism*

No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house: Matthew 5:15 (NRSV)

The Christian prerogative of spreading the *light* of their message “to all in the house” was thus limited for over a thousand years by an Arab-Muslim and later Ottoman contextualization, which tolerated religious practice for the “People of the Book” within the consociational confines of their respective faith communities. As the Middle East transitioned from a traditional merchant, craftsman, peasant society, to a modern, global, capitalist economy under late Turkish rule, and later French and British colonial domination, the limitations placed on the propagation of the Christian social justice agenda would prove to be stifling. Whereas Arab nationalism, liberalism, and socialism were not impacted by the logic of the millet system, CST has not been permitted to have the same enlightening impact on society at large that it has enjoyed in the Global North and the predominantly Christian regions of the Global South.

From its origins in the early proletarian movement prior to the Revolution of 1848, Catholic labor leaders were able to influence both their Protestant and Marxist

(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 96–99; Bruce Masters, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Arab World: The Roots of Sectarianism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 61–62.

counterparts because of the backing they received from progressive members of the European clergy such as the above mentioned Zigliara, von Ketteler, and Manning. The late industrialization of the Orthodox regions of Europe and their lack of colonial expansion has meant that Russia and the Balkan region were only marginally engaged in this exchange. The rooting of the Christian labor movement as an integral part of civil society, as well as the revolutionary message proclaimed by *Rerum Novarum*, enabled Catholic reformers to play an important role in setting the agenda for social change around the world, in particular in the former colonies in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The exception has been the Middle East. The reasons for this are still up for debate,¹³⁸ however, the following factors seem to have played a significant role. The belated industrialization and exposure to the global market economy in the Middle East went hand-in-hand with limitations on confessional labor organizing, thus undermining the development of genuine Catholic Social unions, workers consumer cooperatives, and labor parties. The pillarization of society based on the millet system has created segmented loyalties, which cut across class lines, focusing group affiliation within respective confessional sects instead of

¹³⁸ This issue has been discussed at length during various conferences and workshops at NDU, including Thomas Scheffler, *Christian Social Teaching: An on-going history of exchange between East and West*, presentation to the workshop “Christian Social Theory: A European-Middle Eastern Dialogue, Zouk Mosbeh: Notre Dame University, 2008.

within ideological camps based on world views such as liberalism, socialism, and CST.

A state-centric approach to charity and social justice stands in stark contrast to the concepts of subsidiarity and grassroots solidarity propagated by *Rerum Novarum* and later Catholic social encyclicals.¹³⁹ The Orthodox tradition, which is by far the largest in the MENA region, places emphasis on government institutions when dealing with social injustice. This has started to shift with the adoption of the “Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today’s World” by the Pan Orthodox Council in Crete in 2016, which contains extensive guidelines related to peace, freedom, and social justice.¹⁴⁰ However, state-centric approaches to social justice still play a strong role within the ranks of Middle Eastern Christianity. With respect to the Protestant community, recent research has demonstrated that the Anglo-American and Central European traditions based on the Social Gospel and

139- For an overview see Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004). http://www.antoniano.org/carbajo/FST/Readings/Magisterium/EN_Compendium_CST.pdf, retrieved 14 May 2016.

140- Jonathan Luxmoore, Historic Orthodox Council ends with upbeat but cautious message, National Catholic Reporter. See <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/historic-orthodox-council-ends-upbeat-cautious-message>, Jun 27, 2016, retrieved 23 March 2017; Der Bischöfliche Jubiläumssynod der Russisch-Orthodoxen Kirche, Moscow , 13-16 August 2000, Die Grundlagen der Sozialdoktrin der Russisch-Orthodoxen Kirche (http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_1369-544-1-30.pdf?050120163338); Daniel P. Payne, *Eastern Orthodoxy’s Theology of Economics*, in: Paul Oslington, *The Oxford Handbook of Christianity and Economics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) 197-205.

German Evangelical Social Theory have had only limited impact in the MENA region.¹⁴¹ More significantly, the politically and economically conservative thinking of the Alt-right, be it based on Protestant “Christian-Zionism” or the thinking of Catholic right-wing luminaries such as Julius Evola and Steve Bannon,¹⁴² has tainted the image of Western Christianity in the MENA region. In response, the one example of Liberation Theology in the Middle East which bears some similarity to its Iberian role model can be found within the ranks of Palestinian Catholics, Orthodox, and Protestants, who have linked their struggle for peace, freedom, and social justice to the traditions of CST, as well as faith-based anti-racism movements in the United States and South Africa.¹⁴³

141- Johan Gärde, *Concepts on Zakat, Caritas, and Diaconia in the changing social welfare landscape of Europe* (Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought) 36:1-2, 2017, 164-198, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15426432.2017.1311242>; Robert Hamd, *Generous Neighbors? Guest Workers and the Church in the Middle East*, (Saarbrücken: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2013); *Luther Decade 2007-2017* with NEST and USJ, with support of NDU and AFBB. Looking forward to Quincentennial of the Peasant Wars ('Comparing Popular Rebellions' - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/205680216637407/>)

142- Peter Montgomery, “Catholics, Conservatives and Capitalism,” in: *The Public Eye Magazine*, 21 April 2015, <https://www.politicalresearch.org/catholics-conservatives-and-capitalism/>, retrieved 5 May 2017; Kevin E. Schmiesing, “Another Social Justice Tradition: Catholic Conservatives” in: *University of St. Thomas Law Journal*, Vol 2/2 Spring 2005) 308-325.

143- CAFCAW (2014). From the Nile to the Euphrates: The Call of Faith and Citizenship, A Statement of the Christian Academic Forum for Citizenship in the Arab World, 2014 Diyar Publisher, Bethlehem, www.cafcaw.org, (https://web.archive.org/web/20160509222804/http://www.diyar.ps/uploads/file/Agreement_beirut%20conference_EN_online_final.pdf) retrieved 03 June 2018; Elisa Farinacci, *Palestinian Liberation Theology. Seeking Social Justice Through a De-Zionization of the Holy*

Catholic Social Leaders in the Middle East

In preparation for this presentation, this author surveyed the existing literature in search of examples of CST in the Middle East.¹⁴⁴ Using Catholic labor leaders, journalists, intellectuals, and community organizers in Europe and the Americas as a point of reference and soliciting feedback from experts and activists in the MENA region, the following overview was compiled. Based on the role models of Cãmara, Cardijn, Day, Freire, Frings, Jägerstätter, La Pira, and Tagle as described above, the following examples of CST in practice provide a cross-section of experience in the fields of welfare provision, training, and civil society activism. It should be noted at the outset that the traditional fields of labor union organizing and grassroots mobilization for infrastructure development are only marginally part of the CST mix in the Middle East.

Two of the most prolific representatives of CST in Egypt,

Scriptures, (Bologna: The European Conference on the Social Sciences 2014 University of Bologna: Official Conference Proceedings, 2014); https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319959585_Palestinian_Liberation_Theology_Seeking_Social_Justice_Through_a_De-Zionization_of_the_Holy_Scriptures, retrieved 22 May 2018; Mitri Raheb, (2012). *Toward a New Hermeneutics of Liberation: A Palestinian Christian Perspective*, in: Mitri Raheb, *The Biblical Text in the Context of Occupation: Towards a New Hermeneutics of Liberation (Bethlehem: Diyar Publishers 2012) 11-27.*

¹⁴⁴ Three good resources are Roy P. Domenico and Mark Y. Hanley, *Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Politics*, Volumes 1 and 2: (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 2006); Paul Oslington, *The Oxford Handbook of Christianity and Economics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); and Christopher Rowland ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

Henry Habib Ayrout, and Katia Antonio Mikhaël, are both of Lebanese decent. Ayrout (1907-1969) was active in the field of land reform, working with local communities in Upper Egypt to promote development for the most needy. Mikhaël, an Xaverian sister from Lebanon, worked with the Egyptian Bishops Conference to provide training for Catholic clergy and laypersons alike in the field of CST.¹⁴⁵ The Lebanese Grégoire Haddad, Youakim Moubarac, and Afif Osseiran are the three names most commonly mentioned in association with CST in their country. However, Louis-Joseph Lebret is the Catholic social activist in Lebanon who most closely fits the international norms. Moubarac (1924-1995) was a Maronite priest who dedicated most of his life to Christian-Muslim dialogue, rural development, and the promotion of food sovereignty. He founded the Lebanese

¹⁴⁵ Karl Ammann, a personal friend and representative of Caritas Germany pointed out in various discussions that Ayrout was a Syro-Lebanese Egyptian, who established the Catholic Association for Schools of Egypt (today known as Association of Upper Egypt for Education and Development (AUEED) in 1940. His study of the Egypt's *fellahin*, *Moeurs et coutumes des fellahs* (The Egyptian Peasant), was first published 1938 and is regarded as a major work on the subject. He advocated land reform in Egypt. He directed all his efforts to help the needy in Upper Egypt and to push the development process forward. His book *The Peasant* introduced an applicable paradigm for development capable of alleviating the suffering of the poor. (<http://www.upperegypt.org/who%20are%20we/Ayrout.htm>). Mikhaël, wrote a trilingual (English, French, Arabic) training manual on Catholic Social Teaching and organized the first seminar on Catholic Social Teaching in Alexandria, trainees included bishops and other parts of the civil society (mainly religious congregational representatives working in the social field). She was involved in providing the same training in the Coptic Catholic Seminary in Maadi. The training sessions, which focused on Justice and Solidarity issues, promoted the idea that CST is not only an intellectual reflection but also has to do with daily activity and projects.

Development Cooperative based on the principle of “basic ecclesial communities” established in Latin America. Haddad is known in Lebanon as the “Red Bishop of Beirut”. He was the Archbishop of the Melkite Greek Catholic Archeparchy of Beirut and Byblos from 1968 to 1975. His radical support for the separation of church and state and an integration of CST and Marxism led to his early retirement after which he led a variety of leftist, faith-based social movements until his death forty years later.¹⁴⁶ Osseiran, a Latin Catholic priest who converted from Shia Islam, was primarily involved in promoting projects focusing on homeless youth and impoverished working children. In this capacity he challenged the complacency of both the state and the Church with respect to the working poor.¹⁴⁷ Finally, Louis-Joseph Lebreton is a bit of an anomaly within the Lebanese context because he was actually a French brother in the Mendicant order of Dominicans, a Catholic social activist and

146- Haddad was responsible for bridging the gap between Marxism, Catholicism, feminism, ecologism, and other forms of left-wing activism in Lebanon. This author knows many individuals whose professional careers and personal lives have been uniquely influenced by him.

147- According to Karl Ammann, many critical voices described the Shia convert, Father Afif Osseiran, as one of the few “true Christians in Lebanon” during the Civil War. Although much of his work was charity based, his life was a reminder of need for the church to serve the poorest of the poor and not just the rich and powerful. From a well-established and influential Shia family in Sidon, he became a Catholic (and eventually ordained a Catholic priest) while maintaining many of his Muslim social practices. References to his legacy can be found at the Fondation Père Afif Osseiran. (<http://www.fondationpereafifosseiran.com/index.php>) / (<https://www.editionsducerf.fr/librairie/livre/6903/afif-osseiran-1919-1988>) / (<http://conversion-religion-catholique.com/fr/afif-osseiran>).

labor organizer in his native Brittany, and as a consultant to the Lebanese government under President Fuad Chihab attempted to apply the lessons learned in France and later Latin America to the Middle East.¹⁴⁸

The application of CST in the Palestinian context is similar to the rest of the Middle East in that Christians in Israel and the Occupied Territories are confronted by the same “inner diaspora” environment as are their coreligionists throughout the region.¹⁴⁹ However, the attempt on the part of mostly Evangelical Christians in the Global North to reinterpret the Bible to justify political Zionism has made their struggle particularly

148- *Lebret first served in the Middle East* during the First World War with the Lebanese squadron and was later director of the Beirut Port. In 1960, at the request of President Fuad Chehab, he returned to Lebanon with a team from IRFED, where he conducted a country-wide socio-economic study from 1960 to 1964. (Report in French title “Besoins et possibilités de développement du Liban,” a 20-volume Development Plan). In the period between his military service in the Middle East and his research activities as part of IRFED in Lebanon, he entered the Dominican Order, returned to his native Brittany and dedicated his life to helping the fishermen and rural poor of the region. This included not only charitable measures, but led as well to organizing labor unions, and working on the structural and economic causes of their poverty. He “investigated links between unemployment and the fishermen’s starvation wages, between the chaotic local organization of fishing enterprises and the international effort of large firms to monopolize choice fishing banks, between the tremendous vulnerability of small fish merchants and the broad market structures they could not control”. Thus, he not only helped the poor, he asked *why* they were poor and did something about it in his native region and later in the Global South. This approach was then applied to Lebanon with only partial success. Denis Goulet, *Lebret’s thoughts on development*, <http://www.lebret-irfed.org/spip.php?rubrique95>, retrieved 11 March 2015.

149- Naim Stifan Ateek, *A Palestinian Theology of Liberation: The Bible, Justice, and the Palestine-Israel Conflict*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017); Samuel J Kuruvilla, *Radical Christianity in Palestine and Israel: Liberation and Theology in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013).

difficult. Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem Michel Sabbah,¹⁵⁰ Greek Catholic Patriarch Lutfi Lahham (Gregorius III Lahamus), and Greek Catholic Archbishop of Akko, Haifa, Nazareth and All Galilee Elias Chacour, have played an important role in emphasizing the emancipatory messages of the scriptures with respect to both national self-determination and social justice. In all three countries, however, CST diverges from the international norm in that it does not focus primarily on promoting infrastructure development and labor union rights, two issues which are desperately underdeveloped in the MENA region.

There is Some Good in This World, And It's Worth Fighting For. . .

In conclusion, what are the main issues with which Catholic social theory has been struggling over the last 125 years and how are they related to Thomas More's *Utopia*? Be it mainstream Catholic Social Theory based on the authoritative foundation of the Compendium of Social Doctrine, Liberation Theology with its blend of Christian activism and Marxist political economy, or the revisionist and economically conservative positions of the Alt-Right within the Catholic Church, all three seem to have been confronted with one key question re-

¹⁵⁰ Michel Sabbah, H.B. Msgr., *Faithful Witness. On Reconciliation and Peace on the Holy Land*, Hyde Park (NY): New City Press, 2009).

lated to the issue at hand, i.e., it is it desirable to create a society on earth in which good is rewarded and evil is punished, or is this Utopian communal form of life an utter illusion? The eminent British intellectual historian, Quentin Skinner, has argued over the years that Thomas More was convinced of the former. He was determined to challenge POMP in the same manner that secular and faith-based revolutions did in later centuries. According to Skinner, “what he said at this crucial moment was precisely what he meant,” that is, “I am fully persuaded,” he goes on, “that no just and even distribution of goods can be made and that no happiness can be found in human affairs unless private property is utterly abolished. While it lasts, there will always remain a heavy and inescapable burden of poverty and misfortunes for by far the greatest and by far the best part of mankind.”¹⁵¹

Based on the dual principles of subsidiarity and solidarity, CST would reject More’s Utopian assumption that a just society is achievable through the use of institutional authority. In this respect Liberation Theology would be closer to More’s thinking and the Alt-Right would disagree with both of them.

But where do we go from here? To build on a statement made by J.R.R. Tolkien in *The Two Towers*: Is the good

151- Quentin Skinner, The Lesson of Thomas More, in: (The New York Review of Books, October 12, 1978), <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1978/10/12/the-lesson-of-thomas-more/>, retrieved 10 February 2016.

in the world, which he rightly states is worth fighting for, the establishment of a predominantly good society, or should we rather strive personally to be good in an otherwise overwhelmingly evil world? The message of *Rerum Novarum* for the Middle East is that in either case the state is not the solution. CST places the burden for a better world squarely on the shoulders of workers and entrepreneurs. It is their personal responsibility to create their own self-regulated associations, unions, and self-help organizations and thus counter both the state-centric approach typical of Liberation Theology and the focus on the market place so often found in the thinking of the Alt-Right. On the most fundamental level however, the concept of “basic ecclesial communities” might provide an answer and give More’s *Utopia* a shot at realization.¹⁵² The “Church at the grassroots”,¹⁵³ based as it is on voluntary individual cooperation on the lowest rungs of society, opens up the possibility of lived utopia amongst a community of peers. For the Middle East this could provide the opportunity for Christians to live their faith proactively and to not only help the poor, but to ask *why* they are poor, and thus to put their light on the lampstand and give light to all in the house.

152- Eugene Sensenig, *Looking for a City with Foundations: Intentional Urban Communities as a Christian Response to Violence, Oppression, and Injustice*, in: Peter Simonic (ed.), *Solidarity and Reciprocity*, (Oddelek za etnologijo in kulturno antropologijo, Filozofska fakulteta, Univerza v Ljubljani: Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana Press, Zupanic’s Collection 34, 2018)

153- Norlan H. Julia, S.J., *Beyond Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs): Challenges to the Reception of Communio Ecclesiology in Asia*, (Journal of Loyola School of Theology / Landas, Volume: 26 Issue: 1, 2012) 127-138.