



May the following contribution stimulate the exchange and discussion on basic income - in all countries, including Europe. Especially in Catholic contexts, but by no means only there. Basic income, understood as a human right, concerns us all.

At the same time, may the text encourage people to proactively get involved in basic income, for example, by signing the European Citizens' Initiative "[Unconditional Basic Incomes \(UBI\) throughout the EU](#)" and by supporting the UBI in the framework of the [Conference on the Future of Europe](#).

Dr Markus Schlagnitweit, Director of the [Catholic Social Academy of Austria](#) (ksoe)

Pope Francis and Basic Income in the context of Catholic social teaching and theology

Now also the Pope: Two years ago, on Easter Sunday 2020, Pope Francis wrote a letter to members of popular movements (movimientos populares), which are mainly active in Latin America, paying tribute to their often hidden work. He mentioned street vendors, rubbish collectors, harvest workers, smallholder farmers, construction workers and people in care work (and meant women as well as men). The Pope referred to their important contributions to social coexistence. However, because they remain largely invisible to the economy with its market-oriented mechanisms, their work is not recognised accordingly, let alone do they receive legal guarantees that protect them.

This social phenomenon is by no means limited to the Latin American context: According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), two billion people worldwide - one third of them women - work without any health, accident, or unemployment insurance nor have a pension. In the context of the global pandemic and its necessary countermeasures, which severely restrict economic life, even more people could end up dying from hunger, poverty and disease than from the virus itself due to the lack of social security. Similarly, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) points out that in the poorest countries of the world, seven out of ten workers live from informal work, from which they have no entitlement to social welfare, and therefore calls for a basic income for these people. Based on such observations, the Pope in his letter also supports the idea of

a basic income for working people in precarious or informal situations - not only for, but also after the pandemic crisis has been overcome:

- This kind of basic income would honour a demand that is "so human and at the same time so Christian: no worker without rights."

Only half a year later, in autumn 2020, Pope Francis followed up once again: In his book "Dare to Dream!"¹, which has now also been published in German and is based on conversations with the journalist Austen Ivereigh, he shows courageous ways out of the COVID-19 crisis and calls for nothing less than a completely new world order or a realignment of society in the post-COVID world. The idea of a universal unconditional basic income (UBI) again plays a central role. The Pope's most important arguments in favour of this are:

- A UBI would transform labour market relations and guarantee people the dignity of being able to reject employment conditions that would keep them in poverty.
- It could therefore provide people with the basic security they need, remove the stigma of a paternalistic welfare state that keeps them dependent, and make it easier to move between jobs, as technology-driven ways of working increasingly require.
- Finally, a UBI could free all people to link earning a living with contributing to the community.

In his letters, Pope Francis does not elaborate on his arguments for a UBI to the extent that there is much to be gained from it for the political debate on the concrete further design of a UBI-based social system, its financing and its consequences for other areas of society, such as education, health, etc. Numerous critical comments on the Pope's advocacy of a UBI therefore accuse him of a lack of realism, doubt his expertise or relativise the Pope's statements with a view to his cultural background:

It is possible that the papal idea of a "universal basic income" only means a kind of worldwide social minimum safeguard at such a low level that it would bring an improvement for hundreds of millions of people in the poverty-stricken regions of this

¹ Pp. Franziskus, Wage zu träumen! Mit Zuversicht aus der Krise, München (Kösel) 2021, ISBN 978-3-466-37272-0.

world, which the Pope possibly has in mind more than his predecessors, but is in fact out of the question in European social contexts.²

Nevertheless, strong conclusions can be drawn from Pope Francis' central thoughts on UBI for the inner-church debate on a UBI, for which the Catholic Social Teaching [hereafter: CST] must form the central reference basis. Occasionally, this of all things is used against the idea of a UBI - wrongly, in my opinion.

1. The rights and dignity of working people

The papal letter of Easter Sunday 2020 also found a broad resonance within the Church: Particularly noteworthy in our context is the reaction of the President of the Conference of Jesuits of Canada and the USA, Timothy Kesicki³, who placed the Pope's concern squarely in line with the first social encyclical of the Catholic Church, *Rerum novarum*, whose publication this year marks the 130th anniversary: A basic income could contribute significantly to securing the rights and dignity of working people.

Since *Rerum novarum*, it has been a fundamental demand for justice in the Church's modern social proclamation that all working people, and with them all those for whom they bear responsibility, should be able to live securely from the proceeds of their labour ("family wage"). However, it would be missing the point if this demand were only to be met by a solidary struggle of the working people to guarantee sufficient wages and to organise social safety nets for all those who are unable to work due to illness, accident, old age, education, unemployment or other causes. The above-mentioned ILO and UNDP data, on the other hand, draw attention to the growing number of people in precarious employment - irrespective of pandemic-related distortions on the labour markets - who have work but cannot generate a living wage for themselves and the people entrusted to them, let alone for the case of loss of income due to fateful events.

But even the guarantee of a bare subsistence level of family income (either through gainful employment or, in the case of incapacity, through corresponding social transfer payments)

² According to the chairman of the German Federation of Catholic Entrepreneurs (BKU) U. Hemel in an interview on Domradio.de from 4.12.2020 (<https://www.domradio.de/nachrichten/2020-12-04/wirtschaftlich-unrealistisch-bku-zu-papst-forderung-nach-bedingungslosem-grundeinkommen>).

³ Cf. 'Faith in Action' from 12.4.2020 (<https://faithinaction.org/news/pope-francis-sends-letter-to-movement-leaders-on-easter-sunday-amid-covid-19-calls-on-world-to-consider-universal-basic-wage/>).

was not enough to meet the actual basic concern of *Rerum novarum*: this first social encyclical sought an answer to the social question of the social integration of the industrial workforce, which was essential in its time. This question of integration, however, is by no means limited to questions of mere subsistence; rather, it must find an answer in the guarantee of general basic civil rights and freedoms, as well as fundamental social, economic and cultural rights, such as those guaranteed by a constitution, as formulated some half a century later in Article 22 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948: "Everyone, as a member of society, is entitled to social security; he is entitled to the enjoyment, through national measures and international cooperation, and with due regard for the organisation and resources of each State, of those economic, social and cultural rights which are indispensable to his dignity and to the free development of his personality". Article 23 of the same Declaration elaborates on these rights and establishes the right of everyone to work, to free choice of employment, to decent and satisfying working conditions and to protection against unemployment. In doing so, however, it obviously emphasises the historically developed (but ultimately contingent) view of modern gainful employment societies, according to which human work is simply equated with gainful employment and the exercise of which at the same time represents the "normal case" for the establishment of livelihood security or the prerequisite for "enjoying [...] indispensable economic, social and cultural rights". The right of every human being to work, enshrined in Article 23, thus becomes a right to gainful employment and, in the form of a free market economy that has become almost common worldwide, to marketable, "tradable" work.

The guarantee of a right to gainful employment that secures one's livelihood - especially while preserving other fundamental rights such as free choice of occupation, appropriate and satisfactory working conditions and protection against unemployment - is, however, in both logical and practical contradiction to fundamental market economy principles, especially to the central control function of the free play of supply and demand. This aporia is addressed in two ways in modern gainful employment societies: In order to ensure the right to gainful employment that secures one's livelihood, which in the logic of the gainful employment society itself becomes a basic existential human need, the measure of economic growth must no longer be oriented to the satisfaction of other basic needs, but

primarily to the production of a sufficient supply of gainful employment.⁴ On the other hand, under the normative premise of securing one's livelihood through income from gainful employment, which characterises gainful employment societies, the human right to work is being turned into an obligation to work: for example, long-term studies on the development of labour market policy measures to combat unemployment and of eligibility requirements for unemployment benefits show a steady erosion and weakening of the conditions of reasonableness when accepting gainful employment.⁵ In addition, there are tendencies to link the entitlement to transfer payments under social law in the case of unemployment to the performance of work. Concrete models of unemployment benefits (to which one is entitled by paying into the social insurance system) no longer granted without the provision of socially necessary or useful services in return, have long existed or are already being implemented in some places. In fact, these tendencies clearly show the primacy of a justification of compulsory work over the implementation of a right to work corresponding to human dignity. In any case, the prioritisation of such a duty to work over the right to work is an obvious, constant temptation in a gainful employment society.

However, state (social) legislation in particular must not succumb to such a temptation. In view of the required neutrality of the state towards different concepts of "good life" on the part of its citizens, it is unacceptable to postulate one possible form of life - namely the historically contingent and ideologically based work ethic of the gainful employment society - as a generally binding norm and to lay it down in social law. Instead, it would be the task of the ideologically neutral state to develop and ensure new possibilities for everyone to participate in society's wealth.

The two aforementioned human rights articles can provide a reliable standard of value that can be derived from historical development: The declaration of a right to work in Article 23 came about - as mentioned - in the socio-historical context of modern industrial society. Today - in view of both the factual impossibility and the primarily technologically justified unnecessariness of ensuring this right for all - it would have to be supplemented, if not replaced altogether, with the "right to a living income" as a basic social right. An unconditional basic income would at least materially guarantee the general, universal

⁴ "Economic growth to secure and increase jobs" is the guiding economic policy slogan that entails a series of distortions, ranging from overproduction, planned obsolescence of products and artificially stimulated consumption to disastrous ecological consequences.

⁵ Cf. for example E. Tálos/H. Obinger, *Sozialstaat Österreich (1945-2020)*, Innsbruck (Studienverlag) 2020, ISBN 978-3-7065-6052-8.

human right to social security and social participation independent of being in gainful employment.

2. *What is "work"?*

The questionability of the historically contingent work ethic of modern gainful employment societies, which still dominates most current social policies, is based above all on its narrowing of the concept of work to those services that are considered "tradable" on the relevant markets and are therefore paid for. Defenders of this normative coupling of gainful employment and livelihood security - especially in discussions about the UBI in specifically Christian contexts - often refer to a "biblical" principle: In the 2nd Epistle to the Thessalonians of the Apostle Paul it says: "Whoever will not work, neither shall he eat."⁶ Only those who do not want to work would not be entitled to maintenance according to the biblical standard. In the sense of the Bible, this does not apply to people who want to work, but do not have or cannot find adequate work to secure their livelihood. In the biblical parable of the workers in the vineyard⁷, everyone receives the same living (family) wage at the end of the day - those who only found work just before the end of the working day and thus only worked for a short time and logically with a correspondingly lower output, just as much as the others who had already worked (and in some cases significantly) longer. The right to a livelihood thus addressed is in no way measured by the work performed or the market value or yield of the work performed, but only on the principle of willingness to work. The aforementioned parable can, however, be interpreted even further along its inner logic: If the market value of the work done in the sense of the biblical concept of justice is not a suitable justification for its (livelihood-securing) remuneration, or is uncoupled from it, should this not also apply in general to the marketability of human work, i.e. to the question of which form of work generates a claim to payment at all? In other words: The Bible does recognise a (moral) duty to work as a prerequisite for the right to social security, but in no way equates this with "marketable" work!

This is precisely what Pope Francis emphasises in his Easter Letter 2020 when he focuses on the countless people who perform socially meaningful, important, even necessary, but obviously not marketable, "tradable" work. It is precisely for these people that he demands a socially guaranteed livelihood. In fact, the linking of social security to

⁶ 2 Thess 3,10b

⁷ Matt 20,1-16

marketable, "tradable" gainful employment in the traditional social systems leads to paradoxical, ultimately absurd and in any case unjust distinctions: The cook, the teacher, the carer for the elderly "work", because they receive a wage for their work; the housewife, the mother, the daughter caring for her elderly parents do more or less the same, but do not "work", or only to a small extent, according to the criteria for willingness to work and other social entitlements in the traditional social system. There are now widely recognised economic studies that calculate that worldwide at least two-thirds of all socially necessary or meaningful services are unpaid - and largely performed by women: in households, in the form of voluntary work, etc. There are now widely recognised economic studies that calculate that worldwide at least two thirds of all socially necessary or meaningful services are performed unpaid - and largely by women: in households, in the form of voluntary work, etc. These are - and Pope Francis also refers to this at least implicitly in his book "Dare to Dream! - services that are indispensable for a functioning social coexistence and contribute significantly to the quality of life. But they are neither recognised as work by the prevailing consciousness nor by the current social systems. Occasionally, there are attempts to counter this injustice - always within the framework of the paradigm of the working society of linking work and income - by, for example, also counting periods of family work in the calculation of social security benefits. But firstly, many other unpaid labour services are still not recorded. Secondly, recording this completely (if at all possible) would lead to an almost universal economisation of all spheres of life, which would not be at all in the spirit of CST: It is precisely the provision of unpaid services between people that is a direct expression and at the same time a learning field for solidarity, which is to be regarded as an indispensable "basic vitamin" of social cohesion.

There is no question about it: according to the biblical view of man, and accordingly also in CST, work is constitutive for the development of the human person. In this context, CST even speaks of the "dignity of work" and does not hesitate to postulate work as a moral duty of every human being according to his or her possibilities. This is also in no way disputed by Pope Francis when he speaks out in favour of a universal basic income. However, the biblical concept of work and the CST based on it, like Pope Francis' is not limited to the narrow concept of gainful employment. For CST, work not only has a natural function in the service of securing subsistence or earning a living: as participation in the divine work of creation (religious dimension), it must also have a positive relationship to the environment and the world around us. Work also has a personal dimension, insofar as

human beings realise their personal dignity as the image of their creator God.⁸ After all, work also integrates people socially, creates recognition for them and opportunities for social participation and involvement. This social and political dimension of work demanded by CST is largely denied in the prevailing market economy, at least to all unpaid work. The moral duty to work mentioned in 2 Thessalonians and affirmed by CST can in any case only apply to forms of work in which the dimensions of truly human work demanded by CST are in a balanced relationship to each other, i.e. the natural function does not unilaterally dominate over all other dimensions. Accordingly, not every form of gainful employment offered on the labour market today is automatically "good" and dignified work that serves the development of the human being and to which alone a person can be morally obliged. And from the CST's point of view, a social system that measures the fulfilment of this duty to work exclusively in terms of integration into the labour market and only "steps in" if this is impossible must be met with criticism. Conversely, the implementation of a UBI can make a valuable contribution to breaking the link between social security and social participation and gainful employment in line with the market, which generates social injustice and other distortions, as well as the narrowing of the concept of work to just that. Experience shows that the debate about UBI alone also brings forward the indispensable debate about the meaning, dignity and significance of work for the development of the human person as well as for social cohesion.

3. Liberation for personal responsibility

The subsidiarity principle of the CST prohibits all socially superordinate units from taking on tasks that can also be solved by subordinate social units.

At the same time, however, it also obliges the superordinate units to intervene - subsidiarity in the true sense of the word - where subordinate units are overburdened.

Conservative polemics against a UBI locate its contradiction to this basic principle of the CST. Their accusation is that a UBI denies people the ability to provide for themselves; rather, they are "forcibly made happy" by transfer payments that they may not even need or want. Apart from the purely formal-logical flaw in this accusation⁹, it should be evident

⁸ However, these demands are by no means met by activities that are paid for, but which may be destructive to the environment, increase social injustice or seriously harm or humiliate the working person themselves.

⁹ Apart from the fact that modern UBI concepts often provide for reforms of income taxation to the effect that, on the basis of an appropriate tax progression, people with correspondingly high incomes would "pay back" their basic income to the general public via income tax anyway, people would be completely at liberty to donate, give away etc. their UBI if they absolutely do not want to accept it.

from what has been said above: The prevailing market economy does not create sufficient and equally accessible opportunities for all people to fulfil their moral duty to do "good" work in the sense of CST; due to its own logic, it also has no original interest in doing so. Against this background, however, a UBI does not contradict the subsidiarity principle of CST, but can - on the contrary - even be justified by it.

In view of the failure of the market economy to offer all willing people an opportunity for "good" work in the sense of CST and thus for a form of livelihood that is humane and socially just, a UBI has a subsidiary effect in the true sense of the word¹⁰: Only in this way does the individual gain the freedom to pursue work that fulfils the CST requirements for "good" work, and to which alone he or she can be morally obliged. It is precisely this view of subsidiarity that Pope Francis also puts forward in his book "Dare to Dream" as a line of argument for the introduction of a UBI: A UBI would reshape labour market relations and guarantee people the morally indispensable freedom¹¹ to reject employment conditions that endanger their dignity, keep them in poverty or that they are forced to accept solely due to existential survival pressure.

In his book, the Pope goes even further: completely against the arguments of opponents of the UBI, who try to denounce a UBI as social paternalism or an expression of welfare state paternalism, he also warns against the stigmatisation of a paternalistic and at the same time dependent welfare state, but sees a UBI precisely as an antidote to this, because it increases the freedom and thus also the responsibility of the individual in any case instead of limiting it.

The fact that, in the Pope's view, a UBI would make it easier to switch between jobs, as technology-driven ways of working increasingly require, also shows how much he considers a UBI to be a genuine, contemporary "subsidiary" to guarantee the principle of subsidiarity, understood entirely in the sense of CST, with its twofold thrust mentioned earlier.

¹⁰ From Latin *subsidiium* = help, support.

¹¹ Conservative circles like to shorten the subsidiarity principle of the CST to the "principle of individual responsibility". In doing so, they deliberately overlook the fact that - following a basic ethical paradigm - responsibility always presupposes freedom in the sense of being able to choose between different options for action without restrictions or external influencing factors. The absence of this basic freedom makes any talk of "responsibility" meaningless. Where this basic freedom does not exist, it must - as a prerequisite for the application of the principle of subsidiarity and at the same time on its basis! - first be established!

4. *Strengthening solidarity*

Solidarity can be described as the "basic vitamin" of social cohesion. The CST therefore understands solidarity not primarily as a moral demand or an attitude of solidarity as a moral virtue, but rather as a fact of being, as a constitutive element and basic condition of functioning social life. As much as the singular human person is the "root cause [...], bearer and goal of all social institutions"¹² which possess their justification to the extent that they promote, protect and guarantee their free development, the freedom of the human person is in turn not an end in itself but, as its precondition, inseparably linked to the moral responsibility of the individual human being as a social being. In other words: society and its institutions must serve the free development of the human person; this, in turn, develops precisely in the active, participatory shaping of social life.

Critics of a UBI see it as endangering the basic CST principle of solidarity in two ways:

- a) If the share of the population that creates the economic values to finance a UBI for all becomes smaller and smaller, this could overstrain its willingness to show solidarity and ultimately lead to a division of society. However, this argument is only valid in the paradigmatic concept of work and value creation (which is questionable, as has already been shown) of a society of gainful employment, which only recognises classic gainful employment that can be traded on the labour market as work that creates economic value.

However, economic values are also generated without remuneration - as the Papal Easter Letter 2020 also points out - even in the majority of cases. Ensuring a sufficient livelihood for those people who predominantly or even exclusively make their contribution to society in this way without guaranteed remuneration would therefore be an expression of social solidarity - and not a threat to it.

- b) The reference to the danger that a UBI could be misused by significant parts of society to avoid making their own productive contribution to social life does not really hold water either. Rather, it can be assumed that human solidarity behaviour is to a large extent shaped by social experiences: Could it not be that only those people who experience themselves as unappreciated, exploited or excluded by the society in which they live understandably have little motivation to give something back of their own free will to this society that treats them "badly"? And conversely,

¹² Vaticanum II, *Gaudium et spes*, 25.

can we not assume that a society that signals unconditional appreciation and acceptance to all its members - e.g. through a UBI (!) - can count on a high willingness of its members to give a lot back to this society that treats them "well"? Precisely because of this, a UBI would enormously increase the degree of social solidarity - both on the level of solidary attitudes and solidary behaviour and actions.

Pope Francis' argument that a UBI could free all people to link earning a living and working for the community is likely to point to precisely this connection. The Pope seems to take these two aspects of human social life for granted and at the same time as equally important. Both are indispensable and necessary for the development of the human person and both are mutually dependent. In any case, a UBI can guarantee the necessary balance between them much better than a gainful employment society, which prioritises earning a living and at the same time appropriates the fruits of the equally vital commitment to the community free of charge.

5. Highest moral standard

Finally, a fundamental comment on the interdependence of freedom and moral responsibility: critics of a UBI often fear serious damage to the performance and work ethic of a society. "With a basic income, no one would want to work any more," they say, painting a gloomy picture. But it is not only that they represent an extremely pessimistic view of mankind.¹³ The moral concept used here is also extremely questionable. It is implicitly assumed that people can only be made to behave with moral integrity through external pressure or sanctions. However, this ignores the first basic condition of moral action: Freedom. Moral responsibility presupposes freedom (just as freedom, of course, requires its responsible use).

Admittedly: The danger of abuse is always present where there is freedom. But should this be kept as small as possible through legal pressure or the threat of sanctions?

In any case, experience from pedagogy shows that an education that is limited to drawing boundaries, prescribing rules and enforcing sanctions and never releases people into freedom does not generate morally upright people. The result is, at best, morally controlled

¹³ Don't they believe that every human being has an original, albeit sometimes "buried" interest in doing something meaningful or purposeful with his or her life? And what is experienced and regarded as "meaningful" depends, as experience shows, on its recognition by the world around us.

people who always skim along the edge of what is permissible (but by no means what is good per se), while they are not able to act morally in the full sense of the word, i.e. out of inner insight and freedom. It is certainly the task of the state legal system to set the necessary framework and standards for a functioning social coexistence. However, Christian ethics cannot be satisfied with the mere legal safeguarding of the social order; rather, the goal must always be the development of the human person as a moral being, i.e. the responsible handling of human beings with or in their freedom.

Pope Francis seems to be convinced that a UBI would in any case increase the freedom of all people. In the assessment of Christian social ethics, however, this increased freedom does not in any way mean a danger to public morality, but - on the contrary - a significantly increased moral claim of society towards all its members as moral subjects! Accordingly, the more freedom a society grants in the sense of individual freedom of action and guarantees its members, the greater the justification for severely sanctioning behaviour that is harmful to society.¹⁴

The argument that a UBI promotes antisocial or even individually immoral behaviour is therefore without any basis. On the contrary, a UBI makes far greater moral demands on individuals than traditional social models: no one who benefits from a UBI can say: "Actually, I wanted to do something completely different with my life, but I never had the opportunity. The freedom granted by a UBI instead confronts people with the unjustifiable question as to the meaning in their lives. Perhaps this is precisely what makes many people - consciously or unconsciously - worried and sometimes even afraid when thinking about a UBI. This fear should be taken seriously, but it is not a fundamental argument against a UBI. Rather, it signals important tasks for the education system: the educational goals of public institutions would have to be oriented less towards the requirements of the labour markets and more towards the need to enable people to develop their very own abilities and talents and, on this basis, to be able to answer the question about the meaning of their lives in a positive way.

¹⁴ In a UBI society, this would apply in particular to undeclared work, corruption, etc.

6. *Theology of basic income*

"Is the concept of a UBI based on a realistic view of man and does it take the biblically founded, sinful brokenness of man sufficiently seriously?" is finally the decisive theological-anthropological question on the idea of a UBI. In other words, is the human being ready for a UBI? Doesn't he rather need supervisory authorities and other means of pressure in order to act in a socially acceptable and not antisocial way, i.e. in order not to exploit the given freedom to the detriment of himself or society?

For the Christian faith, this raises an even more far-reaching fundamental question: as much as it is true that biblical anthropology does not pay homage to any naïve optimism with regard to a "natural, original goodness" of human beings, it does not share the anthropological pessimism of the UBI sceptics. For this would in the same breath denounce the entire biblical message, especially the message of the Sermon on the Mount, as (politically) irrelevant and unrealistic. The core idea and basic dynamic of this belief is that it is possible for the human being to be healed through the experience of the always unconditional divine attention and love and, in response to this experience, to be able to overcome the limits of egocentrism and to love unconditionally again. This is the unsurpassable core of the biblical, especially the Jesuan message! - Anyone who dismisses the human image of a UBI as unrealistic, naïve and misguided must allow himself to be reproached by Christian theology for reproaching God Himself with a false, unrealistic human image when He offers man the gift of His love - unconditionally: without prior performance, without service in return, without any other merit and only in the confidence that man is able to find an adequate answer to this unconditional prior performance of God.

Against this background, the concept of a UBI could thus even be seen as an attempt at a direct socio-political implementation of the basic biblical category of unconditionality: Society unconditionally grants and opens up to people the freedom to behave in accordance with this positive advance performance and to contribute what they can to a successful social coexistence - or not. The personal responsibility that is expected of the individual with the granting of a UBI is - as has already been pointed out - incomparably greater than in all other social models that are based on performance control and punitive prohibitions of abuse. But it is precisely this - certainly risky - imposition of freedom and

responsibility that finds its model in the unconditionality in which the Biblical God imposes and hands himself over to man.

Pope Francis does not make any such explicitly theological references in his positive statements on a universal basic income. But the very fact that he expresses his views on the idea of a UBI for the first time and in an Easter letter of all places suggests that his advocacy of a UBI should also be anchored in such an explicitly theological justification.

7. Summary

Certainly, the final manifestation and realisation of the Kingdom of God is yet to come. In the eschatological tension between "already and not yet", the realpolitik path to the implementation of a UBI will not happen without compromises and intermediate steps. In this sense, a UBI society will not be implementable from one day to the next, but will require intelligent, but nevertheless determined implementation steps in many areas of social policy, the enumeration or presentation of which is not the task of this article. The concept of a UBI should rather be seen as a socio-political demand for direction or a goal with real-political relevance, provided that realpolitik is not understood as goal-blind pragmatism, but as the implementation of all those steps that are necessary to achieve a goal that is recognised as meaningful and desirable.

At the same time, it must be clear that the introduction of a UBI does not mark a one-track path: whether a UBI only serves to socially "drive out" and thus further marginalise precarious population groups or rather it modernises social organisation and social policy under the conditions of unprecedented productivity - especially due to technology - and frees them from the distortions and injustices caused by the industrial-social (but thus historically contingent) gainful employment paradigm, is by no means a foregone conclusion and will have to remain the subject of political debate. Finally, it would be naïve to believe that a UBI would solve all the problems and challenges of social cohesion and social justice in one fell swoop.

This naivety is certainly not to be imputed to Pope Francis, who nevertheless clearly advocates a UBI and - as this article has tried to show - can thus consider himself to be standing firmly on the ground of the Church's social doctrine. It may be that the image of man and society that underlies the concept of a UBI and the Christian faith is not shared

by everyone. However, it does not contradict the basic principles of the CST, but - on the contrary! - it can be brought into harmony with them and can even be justified from a biblical-theological point of view. This article is intended to show that at least Christians - irrespective of their party and political preferences - should take a serious look at it.

Vienna, June 2021

Dr Markus Schlagnitweit, Director of the [Catholic Social Academy Austria](#) (ksoe)

Translated from [German](#) by [Jeremy Cope](#).

Translation financed by Katholische Sozialakademie Österreichs (Catholic Social Academy of Austria) and Netzwerk Grundeinkommen, Deutschland (Network Basic Income, Germany)

The logo for ksoe consists of the lowercase letters 'ksoe' in a bold, red, sans-serif font.

<https://www.ksoe.at/>



Netzwerk
Grundeinkommen

<https://www.grundeinkommen.de>

<https://www.grundeinkommen.de/english>