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## Christian Social Ethics in Switzerland

### Presence, Issues, Challenges

#### *Abstract*

Christian Social Ethics (CSE) in Switzerland is essentially shaped by the confessional conflict history of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a society with different languages and cultures, as well as more recent social developments such as migration and secularization. In the first part, some highlights on sociohistorical developments are shown; in the second part an overview of the landscape of institutions and organizations is given, which currently stand for activities in the field of CSE. The third part deals with projects, persons and publications of CSE in Switzerland. The conclusion is that CSE in Switzerland today is characterized by a multitude of philosophical, political and sociological theories, which makes it difficult to draw a clear line. Topics include digitalization, interreligious discourse, the relationship between religion, economy and politics, human rights, ethical investment, climate change, and migration.

#### *Zusammenfassung*

Die Christliche Sozialethik (CSE) in der Schweiz ist wesentlich von der konfessionellen Konfliktgeschichte im 19. Jahrhundert, der Gesellschaft mit unterschiedlichen Sprachen und Kulturen sowie neueren gesellschaftlichen Entwicklungen wie der Migration und Säkularisierung geprägt. In einem ersten Teil werden einige Schlaglichter auf soziohistorische Entwicklungen geworfen, im zweiten Teil ein Überblick über die Landschaft von Institutionen und Organisationen gegeben, welche gegenwärtig für Aktivitäten im Bereich der CSE stehen. Im dritten Teil geht es um Projekte, Personen und Publikationen der CSE in der Schweiz. Als Fazit ergibt sich, dass die CSE in der Schweiz heute von einer Vielfalt philosophischer, politik- und sozialwissenschaftlicher Theorien geprägt ist, die klare Abgrenzungen schwierig macht. Themen sind u. a. die Digitalisierung, der interreligiöse Diskurs, Bezüge zwischen Religion, Ökonomie und Politik, die Menschenrechte, das ethische Investment, der Klimawandel sowie die Migration.

Today about one third of the Swiss resident population is Catholic, of which a significant part is the result of immigration; around 25 percent of the Swiss population are foreigners, among them a large part with Catholic background. Against the expectations, the remaining other two thirds of inhabitants aren't all members of the Protestant Reformed Church, but only one fifth, or 22 percent, and that with a declining trend. About one third lives without religious affiliation, 6 percent are Muslims and the remaining 7 percent are members of different religious

communities (cf. Bundesamt für Statistik 2023). This statistical data reflects both the secularization and migration-processes that have shaped changes in the Swiss confessional and religious landscape over the past decades (cf. Stolz et al. 2022).

The concept of Christian Social Ethics (CSE), which will be the focus here, at least from a Catholic perspective, is both essentially shaped by the self-understanding of the discipline in German-speaking countries and strongly associated with the Catholic Social Teaching. As Markus Vogt rightly points out: “The ‘hallmark’ of Catholic social ethics are the so-called social principles.” (Vogt 2019, my translation, MZ)

In contrast, while thinking about CSE in Switzerland, one of my first personal associations concerns the *Institute of Social Ethics* at the Protestant Faculty of Theology in Zurich; it was founded in 1964 by Arthur Rich (1910–1992), who is also known for his famous work on business ethics. This first hint suggests that with regard to CSE in Switzerland we have to bear some special aspects in mind: Although two thirds of the resident population is German-speaking – another fifth French, eight percent Italian and a small minority of less than one percent Rhaeto-Romanic-speaking – some formative historical, political and confessional differences from the other German-speaking countries must be taken into account.

What I try to show in the following is, first, to tell something about the socio-historical background of CSE in Switzerland; secondly, to describe the corresponding landscape of institutions and organizations; thirdly, to exemplary deal with projects, people and publications in the context of CSE today and to come finally to a brief conclusion. Needless to say, the following remarks are highly subjective and written from a Catholic point of view.

## 1 Socio-historical context

The last war in Switzerland broke out in 1847, lasted less than four weeks and was a civil war from some Catholic (the *Sonderbund*) against Protestant cantons, the so called *Sonderbundskrieg*. The conflict was dominated and ended by the Protestant cantons, the last two battles having taken place in Lucerne and Fribourg, where important Catholic faculties are to be found today. The Swiss Confederation was, so to speak, a Protestant invention and was founded only one year after this

civil war, in 1848, the year of the European revolutions. A first Catholic member of the government, the seven-member Federal Council, was tolerated only in 1891 after a more-than-40-year period of culture war (cf. Altermatt 2009).

In addition, it is worth mentioning that the non-denominational *Swiss Society for the Common Good (SSCG)*, already founded in 1810, has given and continues to give essential impulses to the welfare state since the founding of the Swiss Confederation: It was the driving force behind the establishment of numerous social institutions in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in Switzerland; today, thanks to donations and legacies, the organization has a capital of more than CHF 100 million.

The decades of confessional conflict were shaped by several important decisions concerning our issue, namely the foundation of the *Union catholique d'études sociales et économiques* in 1884 by the ultramontane Cardinal Gaspard Merillod (1824–1892) in Fribourg. The results of an international conference of this association were reported to Rome and eventually became an important point of reference for Leo XIII in the drafting of the first social encyclical *Rerum novarum* (1891). Another important landmark was the foundation of the University of Fribourg in 1889; while this institution was then and still is not a Catholic university in the true sense of the word, the whole idea of that foundation nevertheless was an ultramontane issue, creating a place directly linked to the Vatican and at a declared distance from the Protestant capital in Bern. Certainly, a lot of other initiatives typical for the *milieu catholique* were founded during that period, but in comparison with Austria and Germany these were more important on a communal and cantonal, than a national level; e. g. the organized *Caritas* even today is fragmented into a lot of independent cantonal suborganizations, and – apart from a few exceptions – Switzerland never knew hospitals, schools or charitable institutions as the responsibility of the churches as we know it from neighbor countries.

The *Faculty of Theology* in Lucerne was founded 1938 and thus several years after Fribourg, the *University of Lucerne* only recently in 2000 on the basis of a positive cantonal referendum. The relatively small *Theological Highschool Chur* in the eastern part of Switzerland and the *Faculty of Theology* in Lugano in the southern, Italian-speaking part of the country, were founded also quite recently, in 1968 (Chur) and 1993 (Lugano, since 2021 as an official part of the new founded University of Lugano), respectively.

To get an idea of the social importance of the Catholic community and its political power today, a glimpse to the Catholic political party in Switzerland could be helpful: The ancient *Conservative Catholic Party*, later and until 2020 called *Christian Democratic People's Party (CVP)*, today called *The Center (Die Mitte)*, has recently deleted the reference to the Christian religion in their party name. Today the party reaches about 15 percent of the electoral vote at the federal level. In other words: The Catholic subculture in Switzerland in general does not have a significant influence in the public, politics<sup>1</sup>, media or cultural life. This diagnosis also applies to CSE, at least for those activities that go back to Catholic traditions.

Important and controversial political issues in Switzerland today are state neutrality in connection with the war in Ukraine, relations with the European Union, e. g., regarding migration, globalization and human rights – the latter especially in connection with international trade in raw materials.

## 2 Institutions and organizations

Four faculties of Catholic Theology exist in Switzerland today: The bilingual faculty in Fribourg offers the possibility of studying theology in French and German, Lucerne and Chur in German, Lugano in Italian. At last, a French-spoken special Chair dedicated to CSE remains only in Fribourg, while the German-spoken Chairs specialized for CSE in Lucerne and Fribourg – due to necessary financial savings – were eliminated in the years 2004 and 2010, respectively, and were replaced by part-time researcher positions.<sup>2</sup> The faculties in Chur and Lugano never had a Chair specializing in CSE. If one takes into account that the remaining Chair in Fribourg today is dedicated both to special moral theology *and* CSE, one can summarize that during the last two decades CSE has been more or less eliminated in the Swiss faculties of theology.

- 1 In parliament, however, Die Mitte has an important function as the tipping point, while the votes of the left and right parties neutralize each other; in this sense, the centrist party can currently exert great political influence, at least when its members vote unanimously.
- 2 The author of this text has held both part-time positions, first in Lucerne from 2004 to 2010, then in Fribourg since 2010 until today.

Contrary to this tendency, the *Institute of Social Ethics* at the Theological Faculty in Lucerne has survived until today. It was founded in 1981 by Franz Furger (1935–1997), who in 1987 was appointed to the prestigious Chair of Christian Social Sciences at the University in Münster, Germany. The existence of the Institute in Lucerne has been tied to the Chair of Theological Ethics since 2004.

Beyond scientific theology there exist some other institutions and organizations traditionally working in the field of CSE. Some of them are struggling for their survival since several years, e. g., the small *Institute of Social Ethics/Ethics 22* of the Catholic Workers' Movement (KAB) in Zurich, moreover the *Left Wing* of the political party *The Center (Die Mitte)*, formerly called *Christian Social Party (CSP)*, or even *Justitia et pax*, a commission of the Swiss Bishops' Conference in Fribourg. At the same time, others can hold their own and continue to set important accents in the area of CSE, e. g., *Caritas Switzerland*, a relatively small organization operating on the national level and located in Lucerne, also the *Paulus Akademie* in Zurich – a Catholic forum for religion, ethics, society and politics founded in 1962 – with its *Department of Business and Social Ethics*, or the 1968-founded, church-based *Swiss Pastoral-Sociological Institute (SPI)* in St. Gallen.

Besides these Catholic institutions, some important Protestant organizations have to be mentioned, e. g. the already-cited *Institute of Social Ethics* at the Faculty of Theology in Zurich – one of the five Protestant Theological Faculties in Bern, Lausanne, Geneva, Zurich and Basel – that deals in research and teaching with questions of theological and applied ethics. Or the *Office of Theology and Ethics* of the Protestant Reformed Church Switzerland in Bern, that stands out with a lot of publications in the field of political and social ethics, often written by the theologian and philosopher Frank Mathwig (\*1960), to name just two examples.

With regard to business ethics in general, the *Institute for Business Ethics* founded in 1989 at the University of St. Gallen has been of great importance for many years and is now an internationally renowned center; Peter Ulrich (\*1948), founder of the well-known *Integrative Business Ethics*, headed the institute for 20 years. The initiative to establish this facility goes back to the *Catholic College (Kollegienrat)*, the parliament of the Catholic denomination in the canton St. Gallen. The first step was the foundation of a *Research Center for Business Ethics* in 1983, which was essentially supported by the University, the canton's churches and by Georges Enderle (\*1943), a Catholic theologian and economist, who later

became Professor of International Business Ethics at the University of Notre Dame, USA. Today's research areas concern (i) economy, culture and ethics, (ii) normative economics and (iii) business and human rights.

A different, namely socialist-oriented, institution that has existed since 1906 until today is the monthly journal *Neue Wege*. For many years subtitled *Zeitschrift für den religiösen Sozialismus* – today: *Religion, Sozialismus, Kritik* – the journal has been examining developments in politics, business, society and the Church from a socialist perspective in Switzerland (cf. Spieler et al. 2009).<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, there are three promising and forward-looking initiatives in Switzerland today concerning – among other activities – efforts in the field of CSE: Firstly, the 1995-founded *Center for Ethics* at the University of Zurich, which stands out because of the many projects, initiatives and activities located there. It is a multi-faculty initiative with the participation of the Chairs in Ethics within the Faculties of Theology, Philosophy and Medicine; more than 50 scientific members of staff are currently working in this internationally networked environment. Secondly, the inter- and transdisciplinary *Center for Religion, Economy and Politics (CREP)*, with its coordination center also at the University of Zurich: It is a joint institution of various Swiss Universities – Zurich, Fribourg, Lucerne, Lausanne, Basel and the Collegium Helveticum – and addresses religion in its interactions with business and politics; in addition to a number of other activities, the Center offers a Master Degree Program in Religion, Economy and Politics. Last but not least, the *Swiss Center for Islam and Society (SZIG)*, an interfaculty institute of the faculties of Theology, Law and Philosophy at the University of Fribourg; its founding director and member of the present board of directors is Hansjörg Schmid (\*1972), a Catholic theologian and expert in the field of CSE, who – together with his international team of codirectors and young researchers – does research on social-ethical questions of plural coexistence in society with a focus on Muslim positions.

In summary, while traditional institutions are partly or completely disappearing, new multi- and transdisciplinary initiatives in the field of ethics in general and CSE in particular have emerged in Switzerland during the last decades.

3 All issues since 1906 are fully accessible online at <https://www.e-periodica.ch/digbib/volumes?UID=new-001> (20.05.2023).

### 3 Projects, people, publications

Following the tradition of the mentioned *Union catholique*, the Brazilian Dominican Carlos Josaphat Pinto de Oliveira (1921–2020) – he held the French-spoken Chair for CSE in the University of Fribourg until 1994 – together with the *Jacques Maritain International Institute* in Rome, established a text-collection of the church-teaching on CSE worldwide in Fribourg. Unfortunately, this project was already discontinued in the 1990s (cf. Berthouzot et al. 1997). At the same time and place important impulses were given both by Dietmar Mieth (\*1940) and Bénézet Bujo (\*1940), who hold the German-speaking Chair for CSE until 1981 and 2010, respectively. Today Elisabeth Zschiédrich (\*1981) is part of the research team in Fribourg; she completed her PhD on the issue of *Parenting and the Common Good* (cf. Zschiédrich 2018) and is now doing her research in the field of political theory. She works with Daniel Bogner (\*1972), who holds the German-spoken Chair of Theological Ethics and has special expertise in CSE in general and political ethics in particular.

One of the sustainable initiatives of Dietmar Mieth was the foundation of the bilingual book series *Studien zur theologischen Ethik (StHE)* in 1979, which meanwhile comprises more than 160 volumes. The first four volumes were written or edited by Carlos Josaphat Pinto de Oliveira and Dietmar Mieth, respectively. The idea of this book series – as it was realized during thirty years by Adrian Holderegger (\*1945) – is intended to bring together writings of young researchers, of eminent representatives of the field and records of important symposia and meetings. Two new publications are, first, by Hille Haker (\*1962) from Chicago, who outlines a new *Critical Political Ethics* from a Catholic perspective (cf. Haker 2020), and, second, Walter Lesch (\*1958) from Louvain-la-Neuve who deals with topics of *Europe, Migration and Populism* (cf. Lesch 2022).

Projects of the *Swiss Centre for Islam and Society (SCIS)* at the University of Fribourg cover issues on Islam and society, with a special focus on Switzerland and on aspects of Islamic self-reflection. In addition to its own book series, numerous research papers are published, most recently, for example, a book edited by Hansjörg Schmid and Amir Sheikhzadegan on *Islamic Social Work* (cf. Schmid, Sheikhzadegan 2022).

The activities in the *Institute of Social Ethics* at the Faculty of Theology in Lucerne were significantly influenced for many years by Hans Halter

(\*1939), who led the Institute as director until his retirement in 2004. One of his scholars is Béatrice Bowald (\*1965), who wrote her doctoral thesis on the topic of prostitution from a social-ethical perspective (cf. Bowald 2010) and later worked for the *Parish Office for Industry and Business* in Basel. From 2013 to 2016, Monika Bobbert (\*1963) held the Chair of Theological Ethics in Lucerne and headed the Institute, before being called to Münster, Germany, as Franz Furger had already been. During that period, first Manfred Stüttgen (\*1969), now Professor for Banking and Finance at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts, and then Anna-Maria Riedl (\*1982), today Professor for CSE at the Faculty of Catholic Theology in Bonn, Germany, were active as part-time researchers and lecturers in CSE. While Manfred Stüttgen specializes in ethical investing (cf. Stüttgen 2019), Anna-Maria Riedl published recently on the dialogue between Judith Butlers, philosophy and theology (cf. Riedl 2021). Since 2017, Peter Kirchschräger (\*1977), together with his large research team, restarted a new period of activities in the Institute, including research projects on business ethics, ethics of artificial intelligence and ethics of human rights. He organizes an annual *International Human Rights Symposium*, a new Master in Ethics and recently published a monograph on *Digital Transformation and Ethics* (cf. Kirchschräger 2021).

The *Swiss Pastoral-Sociological Institute (SPI)* in St. Gallen, a research institute supported by the Catholic Church, has an intensive publication activity on social, cultural and religious change in contemporary society. It is currently headed by Arnd Bünker (\*1969). Findings and results of the research serve as a basis for the development of concepts and perspectives for pastoral planning and practice in the Catholic Church in Switzerland.

With regard to the *Paulus Akademie* in Zurich, it should be particularly emphasized that, with Dana Sindermann, someone is responsible for the *Department of Business and Social Ethics* who has published her dissertation on the topic of *Recognition in the Work Context* (cf. Sindermann 2021). The PhD was carried out at the *Institute for Business Ethics* at the University of St. Gallen and is a prime example of a study in business and corporate ethics; in 2020, it was awarded the Ambros Lüthi Foundation Prize for Business and Corporate Ethics.

Markus Huppenbauer (1958–2020) was director of the *Center for Religion, Economy and Politics (CREP)* from 2017 until his sudden death and author of numerous publications in the field of CSE, e. g. on leadership



and responsibility (cf. Huppenbauer 2017); he was also managing editor of the book series *Religion – Economy – Politics*, a scientific publication platform of the Center with the aim of analyzing the interrelations between religion, economics and politics in a transdisciplinary and innovative way.

The *Institute of Social Ethics* at the University of Zurich is devoted to theological, theoretical, and applied ethics, with a focus on religion in the contemporary world. Areas of expertise include political, environmental, medical, and business ethics. With a strong international focus, the Institute aims to bring together ethical reflection and public policy analysis to address matters of domestic and global concern. Johannes Fischer (\*1947) headed the Institute from 1998 until 2012, Michael Coors (\*1976) currently holds this position. From 1983 to 1987, Ina Praetorius (\*1956) was an assistant at the Institute and has since then been a very productive and well-known freelance writer and speaker in the field of CSE; one of her social-ethical themes concerns *Care Economy* (cf. Praetorius, Meier-Gräwe 2023). Recently, Christine Schliesser (\*1977) has finished her second thesis in the institute with a monograph on the role of theology in the public ethic discourse in Germany and Switzerland (cf. Schliesser 2019).

Finally, a special feature concerning CSE in Switzerland is the *Caritas Social Almanac*, edited annually by *Caritas Switzerland*. The Almanac has been published since 1999, each year on a socio-ethically relevant topic such as poverty, social welfare, age, digitalization, right to work, demography, social policy or, in 2023, *Inequality in Switzerland*; each year the Almanac also offers a contribution on current socio-political developments in Swiss society. A second series, entitled the *Almanac of Development Politics*, has been published since 2015 on poverty and poverty reduction worldwide, in 2023 on the topic *Urbanization in the Global South*.

In summary, the above conclusion concerning institutions and organizations also applies to the observations on projects, people and publications: While topics more or less remain consistent, methods, scientific perspectives and research objects has become diverse. Denominational or ecclesiastical references play a role only to a limited extent; they have been largely replaced by interreligious, transdisciplinary, and secular perspectives.

## 4 Conclusion

Today, CSE in Switzerland is characterized by a multitude of philosophical, political and sociological theories, which makes it difficult to draw a clear line. The traditional *social principles* have almost completely lost their meaning. Churches and religions themselves have become the subject of research and are viewed from a systems theory perspective, i. e. in their relationship to other subsystems such, as politics or economics. Diversity has become an issue, both in society and in research, teaching and the self-understanding of CSE. Important topics of CSE in Switzerland today include, among many others, digitalization, interreligious discourse, the relationship between religions, economics and politics, human rights, ethical investment, climate change, and migration.

I remember an anniversary event in 2010 at the *Institute of Social Ethics* in Zurich on the occasion of Arthur Rich's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday: there were about 150 people present, almost all of them – like me today – older, graying men; on the other hand, Ina Praetorius with her provocative feminist positions was part of the closing panel, which caused some tension in the room – at the famous *Kirchgasse 9* in Zurich (cf. Stolz 1999). It became clear that if there is to be a future for CSE in Switzerland, it will be diverse, run by men *and* women, younger *and* older, theologians *and* researchers from other disciplines, Swiss *and* immigrants, Christians *together* with Muslims, Jews and agnostics, etc. The Future has already begun.

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