



How Social Media can be used to promote Catholic Social Teaching: A Lebanese Case Study

*Como as redes sociais podem ser usadas para promover o Ensino
Social Católico: Um caso de estudo Libanês*

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Abstract

Since the emergence of social media websites and applications, researchers have been intrigued by the fast attraction of these platforms of millions of users worldwide. From Instagram to Tiktok and Reddit, social media platforms are connecting people from all around the globe. Many articles examined the relation between social media and the church, how this type of media could affect the church and whether the use of social media would impact the growth of the church or not. However, few articles tackled the relationship between social media and Catholic Social Teaching (CST). Thus, this article aims at analyzing the different aspects of the bonds that tie social media to Catholic Social Teaching. It pinpoints the positive impact social media have on the promotion of CST as well as the challenges and limitations that might come along using these platforms. It also uses the specific case of Lebanon to highlight the ways social media could be used to promote the common good.

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Resumo

Desde o aparecimento de websites e aplicações de redes sociais, os pesquisadores têm ficado intrigados com a rápida atração destas plataformas por milhões de utilizadores em todo o mundo. Do Instagram ao Tiktok e Reddit, as plataformas de redes sociais estão a conectar pessoas em todo o mundo. Muitos artigos examinaram a relação entre as redes sociais e a Igreja, na forma como estas poderiam afetar a Igreja e se o seu uso impactaria no crescimento ou não da Igreja. No entanto, poucos artigos abordaram a relação entre as redes sociais e o Ensino Social Católico (CST). Assim, este artigo tem como objetivo analisar os diferentes aspectos dos vínculos que unem as redes sociais ao Ensino Social Católico. Isso identifica o impacto positivo que as redes sociais têm na promoção das CST, bem como os desafios e limitações que podem surgir usando essas plataformas. Isso também usa o caso específico do Líbano para destacar as maneiras pelas quais as redes sociais podem ser usadas para promover o bem comum.

Palavras-chave: Redes sociais. Ensino Social Católico. comunicação. Líbano.

Introduction

“Today’s media environment is so pervasive as to be indistinguishable from the sphere of everyday life” (FRANCIS, 2019). In his message for World Day of Social Communications on January 24th, 2019, Pope Francis underlined the omniscience of the media in our lives nowadays while stressing the value of dialogue and the importance of meeting with others. In fact, recent years have witnessed an “explosive growth” in the use of social media in particular as a mean of communication (GUPTA, 2015). Social media are defined as websites that allow users to create a profile and share relationships with other users within the system (BOYD; ELLISON, 2007). In their efforts to gain audiences and stay profitable, traditional media have shifted their focus towards social media. This phenomenon is also called the “social media revolution” (HARPER, 2010).

Likewise, many institutions such as the church have created profiles on social media in attempts to stay active in a new online world. Besides, Catholic Social Teaching reflects upon the different aspects of life and the macro social issues as well as the several ways of addressing these specific issues. According to Wright, it is “a

branch of moral theology addressing contemporary issues within the social structures of society: political, economic, and cultural” (WRIGHT, 2017, p. 11). Moreover, it suggests various principles that help in making decisions and taking actions regarding these issues: “CST contains a set of principles on which to form our conscience in order to evaluate the framework of society and provide criteria for prudential judgment and direction for current policy-making and action” (RYAN, 2000). It comprises three main cornerstones: human dignity, solidarity and subsidiarity that set the path to achieve the common good. Consequently, the principles that set the base for the CST are an invitation to live the Christian faith, an invitation to connect one’s religious life to their social one; it is about walking the talk. And since social lives have been greatly impacted by the rise of social media, the use of social media platforms could aim at promoting Catholic Social Teaching. In fact, Lewis asserts straightforwardly that “faith is a full-time activity and social media is part of our everyday lives, so it is not surprising that the two can overlap” (LEWIS, 2016).

Therefore, the purpose of this article is to shed light upon the ways social media could be used as a mean of promoting CST, the opportunities and challenges that come along with using these platforms, and how social media could be used to advance the common good. Social media platforms offer their users the chance to reach people from all around the globe, as well as larger and more diversified audiences and the youth. Users can also participate in content creation as these platforms are characterized by their interactivity. While social media pave the way for the creation of online communities, they also serve as platforms to raise awareness about current social issues. However, delving into a virtual world could result in superficial and limited engagement only in these communities. It could also lead to the spread of false information and misinterpretation of content. In addition, a lack of digital literacy could pose a serious challenge to the beneficial use of these platforms. And finally, it could potentially expose its users to cyberbullying and cybercrimes. These findings are then applied to the case of Lebanon in order to underline the role of social media in advancing the common good.

It is important to note that this paper does not aim to determine that the use of social media is the most effect way of promoting CST nowadays. It simply aspires to

bring to light the advantages of the use of these platforms as well as its limitations in order to advance the principles of the CST.

Advantages and limitations of the use of social media to promote CST

Many opportunities emanate from the use of social media platforms to promote CST. In fact, social media allow for the transcendence of the barriers of space and time; reaching people wherever they are and at any moment has been greatly facilitated by these platforms (KAICIID, 2014). Actually, “social media platforms have successfully gone beyond transnational communication barriers and have been impactful towards creating change across regions” (BANDOPADHYAYA, 2016). In the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, it was asserted that “with her social teaching, the Church seeks to proclaim the Gospel and make it present in the complex network of social relations” (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 2005, chapter II, para. 62). Using social media would then further help with endorsing the Church’s goal of reaching out to people around the globe.

Furthermore, people who cannot be physically present during an event can, in turn, access information or look at posts of the event at any time they desire to do so and thus be virtually present despite having been unable to physically attend. Surratt described the new communications technologies as “revolutionary technology with the capacity to dissolve time and space” (SURRETT, 2001). Holding online meetings on Skype for example would allow people from all around the globe to meet at the same time, discuss and share their opinions. Moreover, the live feature on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube does not only allow the live broadcast of events to audiences in real time but could also be saved for later access. Thus, these features could be used to hold meetings to educate people more about Catholic Social Teaching and open the way for discussions.

Additionally, social media also make the reach of larger audiences possible. In reality, the reach of millions of people at once is one of the most significant advantages

of using social media platforms. Recent statistics show that in 2020, around 3.08 billion people are actively using social media worldwide, and still this number is projected to increase to almost 3.43 billion in 2023 (CLEMENT, 2020). Now more than ever before, one person can become a mass communicator. Therefore, these platforms have redefined the way people communicate with each other, making it possible for one person to engage in interactions with thousands or even millions of users at a time (ESLIT, 2017). Making one's message able to reach so many people would promote Catholic Social Teaching; as Pope Francis states "if the Net becomes an opportunity to share stories and experiences of beauty or suffering that are physically distant from us, in order to pray together and together seek out the good to rediscover what unites us, then it is a resource" (FRANCIS, 2019).

Moreover, social media platforms are tailored for the attraction of all types of audiences; "some sites cater to diverse audiences, while others attract people based on common language or shared racial, sexual, religious, or nationality-based identities" (BOYD; ELLISON, 2007, p. 210). Thus, social media's audiences include people from all socioeconomic statuses, races, nationalities and religions. One of the CST's main cornerstones calls for solidarity between people and "everyone has an obligation to promote the rights and development of all peoples across communities, nations, and the world, irrespective of national boundaries" (DAVIES, et al. 2010). Being inclusive in nature, the CST calls for unity between people and at the same time, as mentioned above, social media bring people together amid differences. Hence why, social media could be used as an important tool to promote CST.

In addition, Generation Z encompasses people who were born between the years of 1995 and 2015, and it is the first generation of people in history that have known the Internet their entire life. The Global Web Index conducted a research to determine how much time this young generation, who was born and raised in a digital world, spend on social media. According to its results, a young person spends 2 hours and 55 minutes on average on social media per day (GLOBAL WEB INDEX, 2019). Thus, as digital consumption numbers indicate, reaching the youth could be greatly facilitated by the use of social media. At the same time, the church considers working with the youth as "a commission of God" (BOREL, 2004) and thus working towards

reaching the young generation is one of the church's goals. Moreover, the culture of Positive Media could be spread on these platforms through the introduction of the Christian social doctrine. According to Borel "the gospel is truly "good news" to young people – because it shows them that they were created by a God who loves them and they, therefore, have tremendous worth and value" (BOREL, 2004). Besides, using social media to promote Catholic Social Teaching would give the youth a goal in life which is to turn the teachings into actions; "the gospel's mandate to activism involves youth in God's work in the world, giving their lives significant and eternal purpose" (BOREL, 2004).

Social media are differentiated from other media outlets since they are powered by User-Generated Content (UGC) also known as "crowdsourcing" (BARUAH, 2012). Nchabeleng et al. argue that "social media also provides opportunities for users to generate, share, receive and comment on social content, thereby facilitating two-way communication not possible with other media such as press releases, radio or television appearances" (NCHABELENG; BOTHA; BISSCHOFF, 2017). Thus, social media are interactive platforms driven by people's thoughts, ideas, feedback, and experiences expressed in shared posts, comments or even audiovisual content. This interactivity feature could help further a reflection upon the social issues presented in the CST by, for example, commenting and replying on a social media post regarding a certain issue while expressing one's views on it. Furthermore, social networks allow any sender of messages to be a receiver of them as well and then the receiver becomes the sender. This flow of communication paves the way for the engagement of users in discussions and debates about political, social or even cultural subjects. Likewise, the CST addresses these contemporary issues and presents "the catholic criteria for prudential judgment and direction in developing current policy-making" (Wright, 2017). Therefore, users can share their opinion regarding these topics while accessing information about the church's stance on these issues through its official social media accounts and pages.

In his message for World Day of Social Communications, Pope Francis stressed the importance of investing in relationships, building a network, a community. According to him "from an anthropological point of view, the metaphor of the net

recalls another meaningful image: the community” (FRANCIS, 2019). Even though virtual, social media allow for the creation of an online community which embraces people who have common interests and are bound by a sense of solidarity. Linking different people together in a network on social media platforms increases their engagement and participation in the community (NCHABELENG; BOTHA; BISSCHOFF, 2017). However, Surratt is more skeptical about the use of the web to bring together online communities “while they [communications media] can be used to overcome such physical barriers, they do not force the transcendence of “mental” or ideological boundaries on the part of their users” (SURRETT, 2001). Nonetheless, social media bring together people with shared interests to engage in a certain community. Moreover, being part of a community is the second theme that the CST tackles; call to family, community and participation. In *the Church in the Modern World*; the social nature of man is emphasized “for by his innermost nature man is a social being, and unless he relates himself to others, he can neither live nor develop his potential” (Gaudium et Spes 1965, para. 12). The participation in a community on social media would also provide its members with a sense of belonging and solidarity which is one of the three main cornerstones of the CST. Pope Francis reminds people in his message that social media should not be one’s only source of communication; people should not alienate themselves from society and become “social hermits”, but instead one should use the social web as a “complementary to an encounter in the flesh that comes alive through the body, heart, eyes, gaze, breath of the other” (FRANCIS, 2019).

Finally, “social media can change the world” (SELEPAK, 2017). In reality, social media have a great impact on raising awareness regarding certain social issues. In the past couple of years, the social media world has witnessed the launch of several awareness campaigns. The World Wide Fund for Nature, for example, launched an emoji-based fundraising campaign #EndangeredEmoji encouraging over 60,000 people to donate to help in saving 17 endangered species (WWF, 2015). The ALS Ice Bucket Challenge not only raised awareness about the motor neuron disease but also raised \$115 million for research (ALS Association, 2014). Furthermore, founded in 2006, the #MeToo movement opened a global conversation around sexual violence by giving a voice to its survivors through social media platforms (ME TOO MOVEMENT, 2018).

Thus, social media activism uses posts, likes, comments and hashtags to spark conversations and create awareness around the world about current social issues. This activism is used as a mean to reach a goal; it calls for offline actions and encourages people to donate, volunteer or sign a petition for example (SELEPAK, 2017). However, Mundt et al. argue that “social media, on its own, cannot build and/or sustain movements for social change” (MUNDT; ROSS; BURNETT, 2018). Yet, social media still serve as platforms that give visibility and draw attention to many social issues which is one of the first steps towards taking action. The Catholic Social Teaching offers to the believer *credenda* or things to be believed that become the basis for *agenda* which are the things to be done (BYRON, 1998). Therefore, the CST calls for action, and as aforementioned, social media could be used as a mean to take action. Consequently, social media platforms could be used to promote CST.

Nevertheless, in order to create solid and sustainable foundations to the promotion of the CST using social media, one should be aware of the limits of the use of these platforms to find solutions and alternatives.

Even though the use of social media to create a community has been proven to be successful, the engagement in it is, however, believed to be superficial only. A study conducted by Hall shows that social media use cannot be categorized as social interaction but more as “routine impersonal interactions, such as re-posting, re-tweeting” since the use of social media “decreased perceptions of having had a social interaction, and sharing media or news stories was not considered social interaction either” (HALL, 2016). The lack of interaction on these platforms is due to a lack of personal face-to-face contact (Keller, 2013) which results in superficial encounters and impersonal contacts (Baruah, 2012). In this virtual world, interactions are deemed to have “little to no influence on socio-emotional outcomes” (HALL, 2016). As convenient as it might be, online communication lacks non-verbal cues present in face-to-face interactions such as facial expressions, body movements, gestures, eye contact and tone (SCHROEDER, 2020). For instance, video conferences still exclude important communication factors such as eye contact (SCHROEDER, 2020). In addition, researches in the social psychology field suggest that the engagement in interactions on social media has a negative impact on one’s well-being when it remains superficial

and “do not fulfill needs for acceptance and belonging” (CLARK; ALGOE; GREEN, 2017). However, in its second theme, Catholic Social Teaching calls for the participation in the community and the engagement in its social institutions that are necessary for human fulfillment. Since social media interactions are considered to be superficial engagement in the community, the use of social media platforms could be disadvantageous to the promotion of CST.

Moreover, long-term engagement in online communities could be hard to achieve. In fact, researches related to the interactivity of social media platforms indicate that interactivity is perceived as “the process of message transition and reciprocity” (ARIEL; AVIDAR, 2015). The viability of these online communities is limited because it relies on “interaction patterns of participation and prominence of the group’s founder and a small core of key participants who are heavily engaged in social media [...] networks” (GRUZD; HAY THORNTHWAITE, 2013). Gruzd and Hay Thornthwaite’s 2013 research shows that a large number of users in the social media communities are not always actively connected. Therefore, social media networks do not always allow for long-term engagement of the members in the community. This limited engagement and low level of participation does not coincide with the CST whose purpose is a long-term engagement in the community. Furthermore, reaching certain marginalized communities around the world such as the poor and vulnerable, “people of color, homeless people, and LGBTQ youth” through social media platforms is “often intermittent at best, impossible at worst” since they might not have access to new technologies such as cellphones, computers or even the internet (SEVELIUS, et al., 2020). However, in their article, Davies et al. assert that the Catholic Social Teaching’s goal of “development is to reach those who are most marginalized and is to give expression to the principle of human solidarity”, nonetheless, “a commitment to long-term engagement and sustainability is necessary” (DAVIES, et al., 2010). Hence why social media use could be unfavorable for the promotion of CST.

Many “antisocial” behaviors such as trolling and the spread of false information have come to disturb constructive conversations, and are considered as part of the limitations of the social media platforms’ use (CHENG, et al., 2017). In a study conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2017, Karen Blackmore declares that

“misinformation and anti-social networking are degrading our ability to debate and engage in online discourse. When opinions based on misinformation are given the same weight as those of experts and propelled to create online activity, we tread a dangerous path” (RAINIE ET AL., 2017). The study also reveals that the spread of fake news does not only have a negative impact on the users’ engagement in conversations or interactions, but also leads to confusion regarding the stories shared (RAINIE ET AL., 2017). Furthermore, some people deliberately share “something controversial in order to get a rise out of other users” (HANSON, 2019). This phenomenon is called “trolling”; social media trolls create havoc in discussions and stand in the way of having a fruitful conversation. Pope Francis mentioned that disinformation and distortion of news “are often used to discredit” (FRANCIS, 2019). He also emphasized the importance of being truthful while sharing content on the media, saying “truth is revealed in communion. Lies, on the other hand, are a selfish refusal to recognize that we are members of one body; they are a refusal to give ourselves to others, thus losing the only way to find ourselves” (FRANCIS, 2019). Therefore, promoting CST on social media could be halted by the antisocial behaviors of some users.

Another limitation to the use of social media to promote CST is the limited knowledge of the platforms’ access and use. In fact, a lack of skills in the technical aspect of accessing social media, posting, commenting and sharing could be a real setback to the clear delivery of content (NCHABELENG; BOTHA; BISSCHOFF, 2017). Azevedo asserts that “literacy in the twenty-first century demands a working knowledge of how digital media is produced and how it propels dominant discourses in detriment of those who consume it without the technical knowledge and critical skills necessary for informed engagement” (AZEVEDO, 2019). Consequently, it is important to invest in improving digital literacy through media training in order to effectively convey messages on social media. In his book, Moberg states that “a general emphasis on continuous development, education, and training in communicative skills and the use of new media technologies constitutes a central trait of the technologization of discourse with regard to the nature of effective institutional and organizational communication in a digital era” (MOBERG, 2017). In fact, with the current COVID-19 pandemic and global lockdown, many educational institutions

around the world are providing online trainings to faculty members in order to enhance their digital skills on platforms such as Skype for business, Zoom, Blackboard learn and others. Moreover, schools and universities are resorting to giving online courses and CST is now being taught virtually.

Additionally, users on social media could fall victims to cybercrimes such as invasion of privacy, data and identity theft, defamation, cyberbullying and harassment (ARORA, 2016). According to Baruah, intrusion of privacy is one of the social media networks' most serious issues, especially when "the users are targeted on the basis of their location, age, etc." (BARUAH, 2012). Moreover, Badmos asserts that "on social networking sites, the website is not the product, its users are" since these sites sell the users' personal information to advertisers and marketers who, in turn, provide targeted ads to each potential customer (BADMOS, 2014). Furthermore, users could be targets of hackers who "steal identities nowadays through social media accounts" (IRSHAD; SOOMRO, 2018). Since the primary goal of using social media is to share and receive information, users could share information that is defamatory of someone else (KAICIID, 2014). Defamatory information is defined as "any expression to a third party of content which may tend to lower someone in the estimation of right-thinking members of society generally" (LEWIS, 2015). Social media users could also be victims of bullying on social media platforms. According to Abaido "cyberbullying and online harassment are considerable problems for users of social media platforms, especially young people" (ABAIDO, 2020). Consequently, crimes in cyberspace and more specifically on social media platforms threaten one's safety and dignity. Thus, they pose a challenge to the promotion of Catholic Social Teaching by prohibiting the creation of a safe environment in which members of the community can blossom. Instead, it puts them at risk of harassment and other cyberattacks (BADMOS, 2014) while the CST's goal is to respect people's dignities.

Finally, Lewis states that "flowing alongside the benefits of social media as a platform for freedom of expression is the responsibility to exercise this fundamental right within the limits prescribed by law" (LEWIS, 2015). According to McGoldrick, this freedom stops when direct and abusive expressions threaten other people or groups of people (McGoldrick, 2013). Then, by using social media to promote CST one should

take into consideration the other as Pope Francis called for the responsible use of social media and the web because they are “a resource of our time” (Pope Francis, 2019).

Use of social media to advance the common good

Catholic Social Teaching has three fundamental principles: human dignity, solidarity and subsidiarity, which all contribute to the common good. The common good is meeting and fulfilling the interests of all people by making decisions and taking actions that benefit everyone. In other words, it is “the totality of social conditions allowing persons to achieve their communal and individual fulfillment” (BENEDICT XVI, 2008). According to Ballano, the common good “is concerned with the social welfare of all citizens, rich or poor” (BALLANO, 2019). Thus, it is mainly achieved through the application of policies and laws that preserve people’s freedoms and dignity.

Social media platforms have the power to bring people together and could be used to promote human dignity, solidarity and subsidiarity and thus, the common good.

In the following, the CST’s main cornerstones will be defined and applied to the case of Lebanese social media to shed light on how these platforms could be used to respect the three cornerstones.

Fighting for the respect of human dignities

Human dignity is presented as the prime principle in the CST and is defined as “the intrinsic value of a person created in the image and likeness of God and redeemed by Christ” (BENEDICT XVI, 2008). It is having a feeling of worthiness, to be respected and honored by other human beings. In his paper, Byron considers the human dignity as the “bedrock principle of Catholic Social Teaching” and stresses the idea that human dignity is inherent from birth stating that “it is not what you do or what you have that gives you a claim on respect; it is simply being human that establishes your dignity” (BYRON, 1998).

According to Pope Benedict, human dignity is an “inalienable right” (BENEDICT XVI, 2010); it is the right to life, to have a family, to work, to have religious freedom, etc. Consequently, each person needs their human dignity to be preserved in order to have a certain kind of freedom that allows them to live their faith and, therefore, put into action the Catholic Social Teachings.

In addition, Pope John Paul II states that “no one can take away this human right [...] the right to discharge freely one’s religious duties” (JOHN PAUL II, 1991). Thus, no other human being can take that dignity away which makes human rights, including the right to religious freedom, sacred.

Moreover, there is an ontological similarity between human beings and God; God gave a divine dignity to each human being so at the depth of his core man is completely like God. Therefore, the CST, which finds its roots in the life of Jesus and the Gospel, is based upon the respect of this divine dignity.

Unfortunately, many violations of this right are being encountered around the world. One of the most sensible and concrete cases in Lebanon is the “kafala” or “sponsorship” system that exploits more than 250,000 migrant domestic workers in the country. It strips them of their freedom of mobility within the country, and outside of it (AZHARI; MBAH, 2020). According to Camille Abou Sleiman, Lebanon's former labor minister, this system is a type of “modern-day slavery” (AZHARI & MBAH, 2020).

In April 2020, A Lebanese man by the name of Wael Jerro posted on his Facebook page an “advertisement” for a “domestic worker of African citizenship (Nigerian) for sale with new residency and full legal papers. 30-years-old. Active and very clean” (AZHARI; MBAH, 2020).

This post went viral on social media and hundreds of people shared the post on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook with the hashtags #EndKafala #EndHumanTrafficking. The post reached Nigerian as well as Lebanese officials who took immediate action by arresting the man who posted the ad. He is now awaiting prosecution. Nigerian officials are also working with the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) to ensure the Nigerian lady’s safe return home (AZHARI; MBAH, 2020). Even though the fight is not over and the Lebanese sponsorship system has not been abolished yet, the social media #EndKafala campaign

reached so many people, influencers, human rights activists and organizations and raised awareness to this type of violation of one's human dignity and rights.

Another case of the use of social media as platforms that advocate for the respect of human dignities is the refugee-host community narratives on them. According to a UNDP report, social media have been used as magnifying mirrors that bring to light societal issues in Lebanon (UNDP LEBANON, 2019). The report also shows that three main events spark conversations on social media regarding the Syrian refugee community; a political discourse, macro-level events and smaller-scale incidents that happen in this community (UNDP LEBANON, 2019). These narratives on social media, on Facebook and Twitter more specifically, provide a better understanding of current issues and lead to offline action (UNDP Lebanon, 2019). Social media served in this case as interactive platforms that raised awareness about the refugees' situation in Lebanon. However, the report also shows that there is still hate speech directed towards this community which increases the "toxic nature of online conversations" (UNDP LEBANON, 2019). This is one of the limitations of the use of social media which could hinder the respect of one's dignity and the advancement of the common good.

Standing in solidarity

The second cornerstone of the CST is solidarity. Pope Benedict XVI defines it as being "the virtue enabling the human family to share fully the treasure of material and spiritual goods" (BENEDICT XVI, 2008). Byron evokes the "love-your-neighbor" commandment while explaining this principle since human beings live in an interdependent universe (BYRON, 1998).

Solidarity is then a connection between different human beings; it is feeling with others, living with them, taking care of them and helping them. It is what binds people together even amid differences. Solidarity is essential in every society because it joins people together and "is the fabric for all authentic relationships" (WRIGHT, 2017).

Moreover, solidarity is "a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good" (JOHN PAUL II, 1987). In fact, Byron links this principle to

morality since it “leads to choices that will promote and protect the common good” (BYRON, 1998). Thus, solidarity is about working with the other and for the other with one mutual goal which is to reach the common good in the community.

Diane Nelson took the concept of solidarity to another level by introducing a critical solidarity or “fluidarity” which she defines as being “an attitude and practice that embraces the complexity of engaging the other in pluralized and ever-changing struggles” (NELSON, 1999). Therefore, fluidarity is about urging individuals to accept differences and diversities to help others while constantly questioning one’s own motives and drives.

According to Maruggi; “fluidarity is solidarity challenged by difference” (MARUGGI, 2012). This critical solidarity puts “into creative tension the idea that the other is like us, but is not us” (RICOEUR, 2000) allowing people to meet each other on the foundation of differences to find common grounds to move towards social justice.

With the current worldwide pandemic and spread of the coronavirus, millions of people around the world are in need of health care and other means of sustaining a dignified life. Being that the CST values human dignity, it is in moments like these, that these teachings are turned into actions. Thus, the CST inspires many actions to help local and global communities survive this global crisis.

Many solidarity campaigns were launched since the beginning of the pandemic on social media in Lebanon. One example of these campaigns is “baytna baytak” (“our house is your house”) which is a campaign launched on Instagram and Facebook by young Lebanese citizens. It aims to find free accommodation for Lebanese medics to self-isolate after their shifts (KHALIL, 2020). This initiative was started in order to prevent the health care workers’ families from being contaminated in case the doctors or nurses were to catch COVID-19 during the time spent taking care of patients.

After contacting people on social media, Taymour Jreissati, one of the founders of this initiative, said that “in a week, we managed to ensure more than 100 housing locations to distribute and offer to medical professionals who need to isolate themselves to keep their families safe and of course to reduce the spread in case of contamination” (KHALIL, 2020). As of April 29, baytna baytak has housed 370 frontline medical workers (Baytna Baytak Instagram page, accessed on June 1st, 2020).

The transcendence of the barriers of space and time and the reach of a large audience in such a short amount of time are two of the advantages of social media which helped this campaign grow and turn into concrete action.

Moreover, in January 2020, a social media campaign under the Arabic hashtag “our revolution, your eyes” was launched in support of protestors who sustained eye injuries due to rubber bullets shot by riot police in Lebanon. Lebanese activists started posting selfies covering one of their eyes in solidarity with demonstrators who lost their eyes. It sparked a response from the Human Rights Watch who condemned “the brutal use of force unleashed by Lebanon's riot police against largely peaceful demonstrators” (OSMAN, 2020). Social media served here as platforms that allowed Lebanese people to express their opinions in their community while advocating for the respect of human life.

Thus, these online campaigns not only demonstrate solidary acts but often lead to action on the ground to help those in need.

Subsidiarity through supporting private initiatives

The third cornerstone of the CST is subsidiarity and as Pope Benedict XVI explains it, it is “the coordination of society’s activities in a way that supports the internal life of the local communities” (BENEDICT XVI, 2008). The principle of subsidiarity is then the delegation of decision-making to diverse social groups “in order to allow for authentic freedom and human dignity” (WRIGHT, 2017). These groups help in meeting the needs of society on all levels; educational, religious, political, etc.

According to Evans, subsidiarity provides a hierarchy in societies in which “social institutions are sovereign and autonomous” while complementing one another to tackle societal issues (EVANS, 2013). While giving space to local communities to exist, subsidiarity aims at bringing “individual desires and the demands of the common good into fruitful harmony” since it “lies at the heart of a stable social order by fostering the personal responsibility that naturally accompanies individual liberty” (WRIGHT, 2017).

Regarding subsidiarity, Pope Francis says “no actual or established power has the right to deprive peoples of the full exercise of their sovereignty” (FRANCIS, 2015).

Thus, the government should not stand in the way of private initiatives. Instead, governments should support and assist these initiatives because in return, they will help the state in taking care of the most vulnerable. According to Byron, this principle allows for the efficient handling of problems in society because the people who take part in private initiatives are “closer to the ground” (BYRON, 1998). However, he also points out the violation of this principle by governments who are oppressive or overactive (BYRON, 1998). In addition, private organizations sometimes take the role of the state despite it not being their jurisdiction so it is important to highlight that both of these parties are not “competing alternatives but are complementary” (CLARK, 1993).

One example of these private initiatives in Lebanon is the Children's Cancer Center of Lebanon (CCCL), a center that specializes in the treatment of children with cancer. It is totally dependent on donations. Rima Fakhri, former miss USA and ambassador of the CCCL, launched on May 20 on her Instagram page the #CCCLChallenge to collect funds for the center (Rima Fakhri on Instagram, accessed on June 1st, 2020). The challenge consists of buying Golden Ribbons to contribute to the CCCL's rescue fund. Social media platforms in this case helped in reaching large audiences to raise awareness about the current situation of the CCCL.

Another example of private initiatives taken by Lebanese people on social media is the “by the people, for the people” website launched by the Lebanese diaspora in October 2019. A group of Lebanese people in London created a forum (www.lebaneserevolution2019.com) on which daily news about the revolution are posted. Their aim is to shed light on the pillars, global impact, achievements and art of the October 17, 2019 revolution (AHMAD, 2019). This website also cooperates with the Instagram page “Lebanese Corruption Facts” which posts economic statistics highlighting Lebanon's corruption. This initiative was born out of the frustration of the Lebanese diaspora in London of the biased portrayal of the revolution on traditional media (AHMAD, 2019). The Instagram page could, however, be threatened by the misinterpretation of the content posted. Nevertheless, reaching such a vast audience is one of the advantages of the use of social media to promote subsidiarity in this case.

Therefore, social media could be used to launch campaigns to reach a great number of people and support private initiatives.

Finally, protecting human life and dignity, practicing solidarity while helping the weakest and most vulnerable, supporting NGOs and private initiatives in local and global communities is what Catholic Social Teaching is calling for and social media are platforms that can promote these teachings.

Conclusion

The use of social media platforms has been proven to be beneficial in many cases by helping transcend the barriers of space and time, reaching a larger audience, reaching the youth, allowing users to have a voice, creating a community and raising awareness of certain social issues. However, there are potential risks that come along the use of these platforms such as the achievement of superficial and/or limited engagement only, the spread of false information, the lack of digital literacy and the exposure to potential cybercrimes.

Pope Francis' message acknowledges the opportunities and challenges that come along the use of these platforms, stating "we need to recognize how social networks, on the one hand, help us to better connect, rediscover, and assist one another, but on the other, lend themselves to the manipulation of personal data, aimed at obtaining political or economic advantages, without due respect for the person and his or her rights" (FRANCIS, 2019).

Despite the challenges faced while using social media, these platforms could be used to advance the common good by fighting for the respect of human dignities, encouraging solidary acts and supporting private initiatives. The case study showed how the application of these principles in Lebanon via the use of social media bear the testimony to the successful promotion of the CST on these platforms. Pope Francis ends his message with "this is the network we want, a network created not to entrap, but to liberate, to protect a communion of people who are free" (FRANCIS, 2019).

In conclusion, social media platforms are useful tools to promote Catholic Social Teaching. It is time to get on board with the new digital world for it widens one's

horizons and gives a new way to live one's faith and share it with an online community. Thus, further exploration and assessment of the actual impact of the use of social media on the advancement of CST would be relevant in this context, as well as the evaluation of the effect it has on the society at hand.

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