

Theories of Solidarity

The term *solidarity* has been used in social, political, and religious discourse for over 200 years. However, very little attention has been given to defining and theorizing exactly what is meant by it.¹ The idea of solidarity has had concrete influences in two arenas in contemporary social life—politics and religion. The concept of *fraternité*, or brotherhood, is a precursor to solidarity and shares some of its meaning. Let us begin our examination of solidarity by looking into the familial nature of the term *fraternité*.

IN THE BEGINNING: *FRATERNITÉ*

The political idea of fraternity, or brotherhood, was built upon the foundation of the family and the social bonds that united its members. Some of the earliest converts to Christianity were Greco-Roman households that were built on filial and familial ties. Early Christian communities invoked the language of family to describe their relationship with fellow believers and thought of themselves as a family of faith. In the fourth century, monastic communities of religious men began to set themselves apart from society and refer to one another as “brothers” in the faith. By the sixth century, communities of women religious developed parallel models of sisterhood.

The use of the idea of brotherhood within Christianity was theological as well as social. In his teachings, Jesus radically redefined family by claiming, “Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother” (Mark 3:35). That the language of brotherhood was definitional for understanding the relationships between early members of the Christian community is evidenced by the frequency with which Paul addresses the recipients of his letters as “brothers.” This language is theologically consistent with the emphasis on God as “Father” that develops within the early Christian community. While the association of God with a father was present in the Hebrew Scriptures, the metaphor of God *as* Father becomes an important image for understanding God in the early church.² While Jesus was understood as God’s son, it was not until

the second century that the theological proposition that Jesus *was* God became prominent, and not until the Council of Nicea in 325 that the doctrine of the Trinity became orthodox Christian theology.

By the Middle Ages, the idea of a “brotherhood” based on bonds other than blood or faith began to extend to the secular world to describe the social identities and ties shared by men in a particular profession such as merchants, artisans, and their apprentices.³ Norwegian philosopher Steinar Stjernø argues that during this time and through the Enlightenment, as society generally grew more secular, the term *fraternity* gradually lost its religious connotations.⁴ While the term is widely associated with the French Revolution through the rallying cry of “*liberté, égalité, fraternité*,” it did not appear in the 1789 French political document *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen*, nor the next nine constitutional documents. It was not until the Constitution of 1848 that it appeared as a formal political concept in the governance of France.⁵

Philosopher John Rawls, an eminent scholar on issues of justice, noted that “[i]n comparison with liberty and equality, the idea of fraternity has had a lesser place in democratic theory. It is thought to be less specifically a political concept, not in itself defining any of the democratic rights.”⁶ The way that the principles of liberty and equality have been developed in Western political philosophy, these concepts primarily refer to the liberty or equality of the individual in relation to society. As such, they conform to the emphasis on the rights and responsibilities of individual persons that classic liberalism seeks to promote as the foundation of political organization.

Fraternity, by contrast, is more closely associated with rights and responsibilities that correspond to our relationships with particular groups of people to whom we are related by blood, faith, or other social bond. The idea of brotherhood was used in the French Revolution to promote feelings of friendship and camaraderie in ways that downplayed the occupational differences and class distinctions among the revolutionaries.⁷ However, in contemporary rhetoric, the concept of fraternity refers more to moral obligations that we owe to people we claim as our “brothers” (or “sisters”) than to individual political rights. As a concept rooted in the moral obligations that arise from social relationships, it is a more complex political concept than equality or liberty and stands at odds with the liberal foundations of individualism that undergird contemporary Western democracies. While the concept of fraternity or brotherhood has both religious and secular origins, the use of this term has largely been eclipsed by the term solidarity, which shares very similar associations. The concept of solidarity has also been used in both

political theory and Christian theology, and we will examine its usage in each setting.

DEVELOPMENT OF SOLIDARITY IN POLITICAL THEORY

In 1821, French philosopher Charles Fourier published *Theorie de l'Unite*, in which he offers a new model for social and political organization based on the formation of utopian communities that he called phalanxes. These phalanxes, which were modeled after the housing of military personnel, allowed 1,500 people to live and work together in common households. For this reason, his work is seen as a forerunner to socialism. However, Fourier did not imagine the elimination of private property or class differences, but rather the formation of a harmonious society that was rooted in a shared feeling of community or solidarity.

While the term *solidarity* was present in the Napoleonic Code in 1804⁸ to refer to the collective responsibility of debt repayment and insurance,⁹ Fourier's use of the term two decades later developed several aspects of the term that reflect the complexity of the idea to this day. In keeping with Fourier's vision for self-sufficient communities where people were able to live in harmony and fulfillment, he uses the term *solidarity* in four distinct ways. First, like its legal usage in the Napoleonic Code, solidarity described a kind of social insurance that provided for a collective repayment of debt. Second, solidarity referred to a willingness to share resources with those in need. Third, it related to a general sentiment or feeling that a community of people held for one another. Finally, Fourier used it to indicate concrete public policies that would provide a guaranteed minimum income to support families.¹⁰ These four usages of solidarity—legal obligations, moral responsibility, sentiment, and public policy—reflect the disparate nature of the understanding of solidarity over the last two hundred years and help to explain why it has been difficult to build much consensus around the coherent use of the term.

Pierre Leroux, the next philosopher to use the term, understood the idea of solidarity as primarily about social relationships between people. In fact, he saw society as largely a social rather than a political entity, and he believed the purpose of socialism was to organize greater and greater solidarity in society. While Fourier's concept of solidarity had been limited to his utopian communities, Leroux understood the term as more broadly applicable to the organization of society as a whole.¹¹

It is no coincidence that the idea of solidarity came to the fore in the early days of the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution as the focus in

philosophy and political and legal theory began to shift from the community to the individual. As we saw with the term *fraternité*, solidarity is also an idea that stands in tension with the individualism that undergirds ideas of liberty and freedom. However, unlike *fraternité*, which is almost exclusively concerned with the communal aspects of relationship, solidarity is a concept that attempts to balance the individual and the community and to live into the tension between an increasing focus on individual rights and liberty and traditional concerns for the common or collective good. One of the most influential new ideas that dominated thinking in the eighteenth century, championed by Adam Smith, was the idea that the behavior of individuals pursuing their own self-interest in the market sphere would, in the aggregate, create a healthy and well-functioning society. There was a philosophical shift in which the social unit of attention moved from society as a whole to what is good for individual members of society.

Auguste Comte, a French philosopher who was one of the founders of the field of sociology, was opposed to the increasing individualism that accompanied the industrialization of production and the accompanying laissez-faire economic thinking.¹² As a budding sociologist, Comte was interested in examining and understanding the functioning of societies or groups of people. He recognized the tensions that existed between individualism and social well-being, but he emphasized that there is a radical interdependence that lies at the core of human life. This radical interdependence demonstrates the paradox of the worldview of individualism that was developing in his time. Even as industrialization and the development of assembly lines and manufacturing processes divided people and reduced them to cogs in a machine, people's radical dependence on one another was manifest by the fact that they must work together to produce the material goods needed to survive. Comte believed that because the processes of industrialization moved people toward separation and disunity, government must act deliberately to facilitate the development of a feeling of solidarity among its citizens.¹³ Comte's rather vague use of solidarity to refer to a "feeling" that he assumed his readers would understand was developed in more detail in the work of Émile Durkheim.

Durkheim was the first person to systematically differentiate between different types of solidarity.¹⁴ As a sociologist, Durkheim was interested in understanding what holds societies together. He was not swayed by the arguments of the social contract, self-interest, or rational calculation; he argued instead that society is held together by people's shared social bonds and values. Durkheim recognized that shifts in modern society were changing the ways in which these social bonds were shaped, formed, and adopted, but he held

them to be essential to social cohesion nonetheless. He used the term *mechanical solidarity* to describe the bonds that hold people together in traditional society. These bonds reflect the similarities that people share in their life experience and worldview as these are shaped by common living conditions, culture, belief systems, religion and rituals.¹⁵ Durkheim argued that traditional societies have strong bonds of solidarity that unite them because people in those societies share a common worldview and perspective on life. In modern societies—where there is more variation in life experience, culture, religious beliefs, education, and work experience—people do not share the same social bonds of tradition and values that characterize traditional societies. Here Durkheim picks up on Comte’s characterization of the interdependence that characterizes human life, even in industrial societies.

Paradoxically, even as modern societies move toward a celebration of the individual, our actual lives are more dependent on one another as we move into specialized labor that requires us to rely even more on others to help us meet our daily needs. As society moved away from an agrarian and artisanal orientation—in which many people were able to provide for a large number of their day-to-day needs—to a more specialized and labor-saving model of economic production, our interdependence increased. As the work of each individual becomes more and more narrowly defined in an industrial society (and here Durkheim is referring exclusively to wage labor in the workforce), our capacity to meet a greater portion of our own needs declines. Thus, like the organs in the body that perform specialized functions but depend upon the healthy functioning of the whole in order to survive, the solidarity that is present in modern (industrial) societies is an *organic solidarity*. Because Durkheim held that solidarity was the social glue that held societies together, he was concerned that societies were shifting from a mechanical experience of solidarity to an organic experience of solidarity as modernity transformed the nature of work and our social relations in the process. He believed that stark differences in social inequities could interfere with the development of organic solidarity; thus all people should have access to pursue positions and experiences that corresponded to their natural abilities.¹⁶ Social justice and equality were thus foundational to Durkheim’s understanding of a healthy society bound together by the social bonds of organic solidarity.

While solidarity was not nearly as important a concept to Max Weber as it was to Durkheim, Weber used the idea of solidarity in two important ways that will bear on further discussions. First, Weber proposed that there are two distinct kinds of social relationships that govern how people behave in society. The first, which he refers to as *Vergemeinschaftung*, describes actions

and behaviors that are exercised within the boundaries or confines of particular meaningful relationships. These actions are based on a shared sense of community and can be designated as reflecting a sense of social solidarity. The second kind of social relationship, *Vergesellschaftung*, is far removed from personal relationships and the corresponding social obligations and refers to actions that are taken exclusively for personal or material advantage.¹⁷

While there is not always a clear dividing line between these two types of relationships and behaviors, they do reflect two distinct ways of thinking about social, political, and economic actions in contemporary life. The first is governed through the social control of the community as decisions are made in the context of community and subject to the approbation or praise of one's colleagues, peers, family, and friends. The second is more appropriately governed by external controls that correspond to democratic principles of fairness and equality. Simply put, in relationships of solidarity there is an internal system of accountability, while relationships of exchange oriented toward material gain are governed by external authorities.

The second contribution that Weber makes to thinking about solidarity is that his description of groups or communities that exhibit solidarity demonstrates the importance of a shared feeling that binds them together in a way that offers a common identity—a “we,” so to speak. For Weber, this necessarily presupposes an in-group and an out-group. If there is a “we,” then there must also be a “they.”¹⁸ For the first time, the idea of solidarity is not just used to identify what binds groups of people together, but also to illustrate how this common bond may differentiate the group from others in potentially conflicting ways.

Stjernø points out that the development of the concept of solidarity within the political and social conditions of France in the early nineteenth century meant that it was originally employed by philosophers and thinkers interested in promoting stability and social order in the wake of the political unrest of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic empire.¹⁹ Additionally, the development of capitalism and the social changes prompted by the Industrial Revolution also figured prominently in the development of solidarity as a sociological concept to help make sense of the changing social environment. As the term was taken over by German thinkers in the work of Max Weber and subsequently by Karl Marx and his followers, it took a decidedly political turn as it became more closely associated with the actions and identities of workers and worker movements. Weber's notion of confrontation and conflict came to play a more central role in the development of the concept of solidarity as it took root in the Marxist and socialist traditions.

While Marx did not use the term *solidarity* very frequently in his own writing, Stjernø argues that his work reflects two different ideas that correspond to the idea of solidarity.²⁰ The first kind of solidarity represents the relationships and bonds between members of the working class due to their common struggle against oppression under capitalism. It is this notion of working-class solidarity that will develop into the dominant form of political solidarity within the socialist party in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The second form of solidarity Stjernø identifies is an ideal or utopian version of solidarity that Marx envisions can only exist within communist societies. For Marx, it is only within the perfect freedom of communism that genuine and true social solidarity can be achieved among people. The first form of solidarity is an instrumental means of moving toward the true freedom and community that is only possible in a communist society.

It was one of Marx's followers, Karl Kautsky, who transformed the abstract rhetoric of feelings, social bonds, and relationships into concrete political action. Kautsky argued that "the goal of social democracy was to transform society into one where the economy was based upon solidarity."²¹ By this he meant that worker ownership of the means of production and an emphasis on social or cooperative production offered a more stable and egalitarian economic foundation for society than the capitalist system, which produced great wealth for a small class of people and exploited the workers in the process.²² Kautsky also argued that the political base of a social democratic party should move beyond the working class to include other working people who were exploited by capitalism and shared common concerns with the proletariat, who were traditionally defined as laborers who depended upon wage labor for survival in a capitalist system.

Despite attention to the concept of solidarity by these and other intellectuals in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, the concept of solidarity remains vague and insufficiently theorized to the extent that it is a word and a concept that means many things to many people. Its popular association with worker's movements through the popular song "Solidarity Forever" and the Polish labor movement's adoption of the name "Solidarity" in the 1980s has prompted many people to associate the term with communism and socialism. However, the term has been used far more broadly in political philosophy and has a rich history within the Christian tradition as well. The idea of solidarity offers fruitful possibilities for helping to think about faith commitments, political responsibilities, and relationships with neighbors—near and far.

DEVELOPMENT OF SOLIDARITY IN THEOLOGICAL DISCIPLINES

To the extent that the concept of solidarity reflects a deep relationship of affection and mutuality between individuals or groups of people, it is reminiscent of the guiding normative value of love that has shaped Christian theology and practice from the earliest days. In both its *agapē* (selfless love) and *philia* (love of friends and family) forms, love is a dominant theme in the New Testament and the early Christian church. The idea of solidarity in the social and political sense in which it is used by philosophers, social scientists, and politicians began to emerge in Christian thought in the late nineteenth century as both the Protestant and Catholic churches struggled alongside their secular counterparts to discern appropriate responses to the changing social and political world brought about by the Industrial Revolution.

Within Protestant churches in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Social Gospel Movement in the United States and the Christian Socialist movement in Europe echoed the concerns raised by Auguste Comte, Émile Durkheim, and Max Weber about the growing tensions between an increasing individualism in capitalist society and the reality of human interdependence even in the modern world. The exploitation and suffering of workers and people living in poverty prompted Protestant ministers, leaders, and laypeople to develop a theology of justice and compassion that supported the needs and interests of exploited workers by working toward public policy reforms like minimum wages, worker safety, reasonable workweeks, and the elimination of child labor. In 1908, the Federal Council of Churches endorsed the “Social Creed of the Churches,” which detailed an explicit public social agenda for Protestants that grew out of their faith commitments to justice and equality. While none of the Social Gospelers used the idea of solidarity as a major foundation for the development of their theology or their movement, their work in partnership with marginalized and oppressed workers to improve their social situation and to work toward justice in society reflects the heart of the idea of solidarity. The Social Gospel Movement relates to a longer tradition of social Christianity that reflects over a hundred-year commitment to the practice of solidarity as a concrete way to live out God’s prophetic call to justice in our world.²³

The shift from the Middle Ages to the world of the Enlightenment also caused the Roman Catholic Church to rethink its role and position in society, particularly in the political realm. While papal authority and the magisterium had a long history of collusion in political power and governance in Europe, the emerging democracies of the nineteenth century required Roman Catholics to rethink the relationship between politics and religion. In 1891, with the

publication of *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Leo XIII signaled a new approach to the modern world that put the ancient alliances between throne and altar to rest.²⁴ *Rerum Novarum* established the papacy's commitment to a just social order by declaring allegiance to the poor and needy in society and by reminding Roman Catholics of their Christian obligation to charity. However, Leo XIII did not leave the responsibility of the poor solely to charity; he also called for social reforms that would redress the growing inequalities in society. Much like the Social Gospellers, without using the term *solidarity* the Roman Catholics called for Christians to develop ministries and actions of social justice that would lead to the development of social solidarity in society. The publication of *Rerum Novarum* is regarded as the beginning of what has come to be known as "Catholic social teaching," which is "the application of the word of God to people's lives and the life of society."²⁵

Roman Catholic commitment to charity and social justice continued throughout the twentieth century. Pope John XXIII introduced the term *solidarity* into papal discourse in 1961 in *Mater et Magistra*, which was issued on the seventieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*. It was intended to update the Catholic Church's teaching on issues of poverty and the human condition in light of the many social and technological changes that had occurred in the intervening years. John XXIII described himself as taking up the torch of his predecessors in attempting to seek "appropriate solutions to the many social problems of our times"²⁶ when he called for government assistance for people in need and for government action to reduce economic inequality in societies and in the world at large.²⁷ His use of the term *solidarity* largely refers to the character of Christian relationships of "brotherhood," reinforcing some of the overlap between the ideas of solidarity and brotherhood, or *fraternité*, discussed earlier.²⁸ In 1967, Pope Paul VI issued *Populorum Progressio*, a papal encyclical that addressed "the development of peoples." Paul VI uses the term *solidarity* ten times in this statement, though his use largely describes solidarity as the characteristic that he thinks should define the attitudes and relationships that ought to exist between political entities or nation-states.²⁹

Stjernø argues that the Roman Catholic concept of solidarity is rooted both in compassion and collective action to help the poor and underprivileged and in a recognition of the need to move beyond individual charity to address the depth and breadth of the problems of inequality that threaten our world. Solidarity finally becomes a prominent theme of Roman Catholic social teaching with the contributions of Pope John Paul II, who develops a much more vigorous usage of the term.³⁰ John Paul II carefully links the idea of

solidarity with other key principles of Catholic social thought, including the common good, love, justice, and subsidiarity. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, a papal encyclical issued in 1987, best represents his use of the idea of solidarity as an organizing principle for addressing social problems.

In *Sollicitudo*, John Paul II strongly critiques the reigning political discourse focused on the “logic of blocs” that characterized Cold War political divisions.³¹ He denounces both “liberal capitalism” and “Marxist collectivism” as inadequate to respond to the pressing moral concerns of the day,³² which he identifies as the problems of poverty, inequality, and underdevelopment. The theme of solidarity is such a prominent aspect of his charge for how the world should shape political and social relationships in ways that can effectively respond to these problems that Robert Ellsberg has characterized his proposed alternative as “the logic of solidarity.”³³ For John Paul II, this logic of solidarity represents an interdependence between peoples and nations that reflects a commitment to the common good³⁴ and a theological affirmation that the “goods of creation are meant for all.”³⁵ Yet because he is aware that ideas like solidarity, interdependence, and the common good are critiqued as being too closely associated with or influenced by Marxist collectivism, he also is careful to argue that solidarity must be balanced by freedom.³⁶ His interest in breaking the dichotomy of East/West and capitalism/communism prompts him to argue that attention to the common good that all humans share and the development of attitudes and relationships of solidarity offer a middle way through these tensions. For him, relationships of solidarity are rooted in the theological claim that people are to regard one another as moral equals who are “neighbors”; he also claims solidarity as a Christian virtue.³⁷ John Paul II focuses on solidarity as a concept that defines human relationships as bonds of family and friendship, which then form the basis for the development of societies that actually care for their citizens—especially those who are the most marginalized and in need of assistance.

However, the prominence of the term *solidarity* within Christian theological discourse is arguably due to the centrality of the concept in liberation theology. Gustavo Gutiérrez coined the term “liberation theology” in 1971 to describe a new theological movement that embodied the increasing commitment of priests, nuns, theologians, and churches to address the structural conditions of poverty in Latin America that contributed to the desperation of the majority of the poor.³⁸ Responding to the call of Pope John XXIII for the Second Vatican Council to recognize the Roman Catholic Church as the “church of the poor,”³⁹ religious leaders in Latin America began to conceive

of a regional episcopal gathering that would take up this charge in light of the social context of poverty in which they lived and worked.

The Conference of Latin American Bishops in Medellín, Colombia in 1968 marked a new public stance of the Latin American church to renounce its privileges and to side with the poor and oppressed.⁴⁰ While this commitment to the poor and marginalized was in line with Catholic social teaching since *Rerum Novarum*, Medellín moved beyond calling Christians to respond to the situation of poverty in Latin America with a charitable heart. Rather, it sought to identify the structural foundations of poverty as a prelude to seeking social justice that would establish a meaningful peace in the region.⁴¹ Prominent leaders like Gutiérrez, Oscar Romero, Leonardo Boff, and Jon Sobrino spoke out about the need for liberation from the oppression of poverty and repression that marked the sociopolitical context of many Latin American countries in the latter half of the twentieth century. In this struggle for liberation, solidarity was a principal theme.

Sobrino offered the most well-developed discussion of this theme in the 1982 book *Theology of Christian Solidarity*. In it, he focused largely on the development of relationships of solidarity between churches from outside Latin America and Christians and churches in Latin America.⁴² Sobrino associated the desire of Christians to develop relationships of solidarity with the poor in Latin America during this time with their growing knowledge of the persecution of the church and its people.⁴³ Sobrino described these developing relationships of solidarity as the expression of the true mission of the Christian church—to live into the catholicity of the church as the one universal church that reflected and represented the oneness of God.⁴⁴

The concept of solidarity within liberation theology began as an attitude that the institutional church ought to take as a way of supporting and helping to empower the poor. One of the principle tenets of liberation theology was the idea of the self-determination of the poor, which accompanied an increasing recognition that the liberation of the poor could not be left to the wealthy and elite. In response to *Populorum Progressio*, in which Paul VI proclaimed development as the new name for peace,⁴⁵ the “Message of the Bishops of the Third World” articulated a growing consensus that “the people of the poor and the poor of the peoples . . . know from experience that they must rely on themselves and their own strength, rather than on the help of the rich.”⁴⁶ This emphasis on empowering the poor led to the development of base Christian communities (BCC) where marginalized people gathered together to study Scripture and to talk about how to create social change in their communities and their countries. Rather than seeing themselves as the leaders and instigators

of this growing liberation movement, Latin American theologians argued that the institutional church needed to be in solidarity with the BCCs, meaning that the church would pledge to use its power, authority, and resources to support the liberation struggles of the people. In the Medellín statement, when the bishops called themselves to solidarity with the poor, they described this as making the problems and struggles of the poor their own.⁴⁷ Base Christian communities and liberation theology continued to grow throughout the 1970s, as did poverty and political repression in many parts of Latin America.

The idea of churches and individuals acting in solidarity with the churches and peoples of Latin America really took hold in the early 1980s in response to the political turmoil in Central America. This turmoil became increasingly more public with the murder of Archbishop Oscar Romero and four US Catholic women in 1980, the “disappearance” of countless civilians who were murdered by off-duty military personnel known as “death squads,” and the influx of refugees into the United States seeking political asylum and sharing stories of the atrocities of civil war and paramilitary activity. As awareness of the political repression in various countries in Latin America grew, many US churches responded by organizing the “Sanctuary Movement.” Sanctuary churches were local congregations that provided asylum and support for political refugees that the US government refused to recognize. In addition to addressing the needs of refugees, many of these people and their institutions understood their commitment to solidarity with Latin America to entail developing personal or ecclesial relationships with people and churches in Latin America, to travel to trouble spots as a way of raising attention to the issues, to lobby Congress to change US asylum laws, and to advocate for the closing of the “School of the Americas,” a US government training facility in Georgia where many Latin American military leaders were trained in techniques of torture and repression. In this way, US churches and US Christians (and others) acted exactly the way Latin American theologians had called for the non-poor to respond. They reacted with solidarity with the poor and repressed in their region by using their status, power, influence, and financial resources to stand with the poor and marginalized as partners fighting together against injustice.⁴⁸

In the years since the word *solidarity* began to be used in Latin American liberation theology, it has become ubiquitous as a clarion call in situations of injustice. It has been embraced by liberation and feminist theologians such as Beverly Harrison, Sharon Welch, Ada-Maria Isasi-Diaz, Mary Hobgood, and Anselm Min.⁴⁹ With the exception of Min, these feminist and liberation theologians have used the term *solidarity* to refer to relationships between people of privilege and people who are oppressed. While their projects have

not been to offer a systematic definition of what they mean by solidarity, each author has emphasized aspects of solidarity that contribute to the development of a robust ethic of solidarity. Harrison highlights that solidarity requires accountability to oppressed people, Welch describes solidarity as the theoretical content of liberation theology, and Isasi-Diaz defines solidarity as the enactment of the gospel demand to love our neighbor.⁵⁰ Hobgood draws on feminist and liberationist definitions of solidarity as accountability and mutuality to dissect real experiences where solidarity was lacking in an effort to examine what accountability to “world-majority” women would look like.⁵¹ Min, whose work is the most recent, identifies himself as a liberation theologian but develops a theology of “solidarity of others” as a new paradigm that he argues moves beyond liberation theology.⁵² For Min, liberation theology has been too focused on the differences that separate people. The idea of “solidarity of others” that he offers is meant to be a new way of seeing human relationships as based on interdependence rather than individualism (which he sees as promoting the idea of difference).

SOLIDARITY AS THE FOUNDATION FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Historically, solidarity has been a challenging and rigorous principle. It continues to hold the potential to offer people of privilege a transformative avenue for engaging the world and using their privilege for the common good. However, the casual usage of the term to describe everything from purchasing a handbag,⁵³ to donating money, signing a petition, or wearing a bracelet risks undermining solidarity’s potential for the kind of social change prompted by something like the Sanctuary Movement. Furthermore, the danger of connecting the practice of solidarity with the consumptive activity of shopping is that it threatens to undermine the power of the term to encourage people to engage in a structural critique of the patterns of global capitalism that are contributing to the continued impoverishment of many of the poorest of the poor. While it would be foolhardy to try to rescue solidarity from the many ways in which its usage belittles its deeper transformational aspects, it is useful to think carefully about the ways in which the idea of solidarity can serve as the foundation for a transformation ethic for people of privilege.

Within theological discourse, the principle of solidarity has primarily developed in three concrete ways. The first way focuses on how base Christian communities (or other communities of poor and near-poor people) work together with one another as support networks for engaging in the process of social change. The second way focuses on how the institutional church (or churches) can develop ecclesial relationships of solidarity with the poor in order

to take up their cause, to partner with them in development, resistance, and justice, and to speak for them when they lack access or voice. The third way is as a strategy or tool that can contribute to the support of a short-term action, campaign, or relief effort.

Both of the first two usages of solidarity indicate a longer-term commitment to partnership and long-term social change, while the third usage is an attempt to capitalize on the moral value of the first two usages in order to leverage short-term support for a particular agenda. Because the concept of solidarity has been so closely tied to liberation theology for the past forty years, each of these approaches begins with the reality of the poor and marginalized as its starting point. What has yet to be fully developed is an ethic of solidarity that starts from the reality of life in the first world and that focuses on the ways in which solidarity can offer people of privilege opportunities to build relationships and networks of solidarity that allow them to build new lives rooted in the interdependence of the human community reflected in the mandate to love your neighbor as yourself. Because a first-world ethic of solidarity begins from a position of privilege rather than a position of marginalization, analyzing and understanding privilege must be its starting point.

Notes

1. Two scholars have paid significant attention to examining the history and meaning of this concept. German philosopher Kurt Bayertz organized a conference on the topic in 1994 with two colleagues and subsequently edited a book, *Solidarity*, ed. Kurt Bayertz (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic, 1999). The book's twenty contributors examine both the history of this idea and how it has been used and appropriated in different disciplines and spheres of society. In 2004, Steinar Stjernø published a more in-depth intellectual history of solidarity, *Solidarity in Europe: The History of an Idea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). This book traces the history of the concept through its two primary manifestations in European tradition, social theory and theology. Additionally, in 2008, philosopher Sally J. Scholz examined how the concept of solidarity might contribute to a theory of political solidarity, *Political Solidarity* (University Park, PA: Penn State, 2008).

2. See Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1982), and *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia, Fortress, 1987) for detailed discussion about the use and value of metaphorical language for the divine.

3. Stjernø, *Solidarity in Europe*, 26–27.

4. *Ibid.*, 27.

5. Véronique Munoz-Dardé, "Fraternity and Justice," in *Solidarity*, ed. Kurt Bayertz (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic, 1999), 94, n.3.

6. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 105.

7. Stjernø, *Solidarity in Europe*, 27.

8. Sven-Eric Liedman, "Solidarity," trans. Ken Schubert, *Eurozine*, 2002, originally published as *Att se sig själv i andra: Om solidaritet* (Bonnier Esså, 1999).
9. Stjernø, *Solidarity in Europe*, 28.
10. *Ibid.*, 28.
11. *Ibid.*, 29.
12. *Ibid.*, 31.
13. Liedman, "Solidarity," 4.
14. Kurt Bayertz, "Four Uses of 'Solidarity,'" in *Solidarity*, ed. Kurt Bayertz (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic, 1999), 12. Durkheim develops his analysis of solidarity in Émile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893, trans. W. D. Halls, 1933; repr., New York: Free Press, 1997).
15. Stjernø, *Solidarity in Europe*, 33.
16. *Ibid.*, 34–35.
17. *Ibid.*, 37.
18. *Ibid.*, 38.
19. *Ibid.*, 39.
20. *Ibid.*, 46.
21. *Ibid.*, 48.
22. Karl Kautsky, *The Class Struggle (Erfurt Program)*, 1892, trans. William E. Bohn (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1910).
23. For more detail about the history and development of social Christianity, see Gary Dorrien, *Soul in Society: The Making and Renewal of Social Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).
24. Stjernø, *Solidarity in Europe*, 64.
25. John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, encyclical letter on social concern, December 30, 1987, as quoted in Robert Ellsberg, *The Logic of Solidarity: Commentaries on Pope John II's Encyclical "On Social Concern"*, ed. Gregory Baum and Robert Ellsberg (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989), ix.
26. John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, encyclical letter on Christianity and social progress, May 15, 1961, 50.
27. Stjernø, *Solidarity in Europe*, 68.
28. In *Mater et Magistra* he uses the term solidarity three times in the sense of brotherhood/*fraternité* (23, 155, 157), and twice in a more generic sense of human connection and relationship (146, 190).
29. Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, encyclical letter on the development of peoples, March 26, 1967. These references are found in paragraphs 44, 48, 52, 62, 64, 65, 73, and 84. In addition to these eight references, he once uses the phrase "human solidarity" to describe an obligation associated with being part of the human species (17) and once as a Christian obligation associated with hospitality (67).
30. John Paul II's experiences of living in Poland through Nazi occupation, studying theology in both Poland and Rome, teaching and serving as bishop in Poland during the Soviet era, and serving as Pope during the rise of liberation theology in Latin America certainly all contributed in significant ways to his own understanding of the meaning and importance of the concept of solidarity. See Kevin P. Doran, *Solidarity: A Synthesis of Personalism and Communalism in the Thought of Karol Wójtyła/Pope John Paul II* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996) for an analysis of how John Paul II's understanding of solidarity is influenced by both communalism and personalism. See also Baum and Ellsberg, *The Logic of Solidarity*, for extended discussion of his use of solidarity in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*.
31. John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 20.
32. *Ibid.*, 21.
33. Baum and Ellsberg, *The Logic of Solidarity*, xi.
34. John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 38.

35. *Ibid.*, 39.
36. *Ibid.*, 33.
37. *Ibid.*, 39–40.
38. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1973).
39. Gustavo Gutiérrez, “The Meaning and Scope of Medellín,” in *The Density of the Present: Selected Writings* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999), 67.
40. *Ibid.*, 79.
41. *Ibid.*, 87–88.
42. Jon Sobrino and Juan Hernandez Pico, *Theology of Christian Solidarity* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1985; originally published 1982).
43. *Ibid.*, 6–7.
44. *Ibid.*, 12.
45. Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, 76.
46. Gutierrez, “Meaning and Scope,” 77.
47. Latin American Bishops, “Poverty of the Church” (Conference of Latin American Bishops, Medellín, Colombia, September 6, 1968), para. 10.
48. In 1985, James McGinnis published *Solidarity with the People of Nicaragua*, outlining the ways in which US Christians could act in solidarity with the people of Nicaragua in an attempt to not only support them in their struggle but to work to change US policies that were covertly supporting the Contras in their attempt to destabilize the ruling Sandinista social democratic party that had overthrown the Somoza dictatorship. James McGinnis, *Solidarity with the People of Nicaragua* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1985).
49. Beverly Wildung Harrison, “Theological Reflection in the Struggle for Liberation,” in *Making the Connections: Essays in Feminist Social Ethics*, ed. Carol Robb (Boston: Beacon, 1985), 235–66; Sharon Welch, *Communities of Resistance and Solidarity: A Feminist Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1985); Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, “Solidarity: Love of Neighbor in the 1980s,” in *Feminist Theological Ethics: A Reader*, ed. Lois K. Daly (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 77–87; Mary Elizabeth Hobgood, “Solidarity and the Accountability of Academic Feminists and Church Activists to Typical (World-Majority) Women,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 20, no. 2 (2004): 137–65; Anselm Min, *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World: A Postmodern Theology after Postmodernism* (New York: T&T Clark, 2004).
50. Harrison, “Theological Reflection,” 244; Welch, *Communities of Resistance and Solidarity*, 46; Isasi-Diaz, “Solidarity” 78.
51. Hobgood, “Solidarity and Accountability,” 137–49.
52. Min, *The Solidarity of Others*, 3.
53. “Scarlett Johansson Designs a Handbag for Haiti,” *Oxfam International* press release, last modified February 4, 2010, <http://www.oxfam.org/en/pressroom/pressrelease/2010-02-04/scarlett-johansson-designs-handbag-haiti>.