

**From “Solidarity: its Meaning, Implications and Challenges”  
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## **6 Chapter 6: Solidarity and Spirituality – Summary by the Australian Group**

### **6.1 Solidarity as Spirituality**

#### **6.1.1 In debt to one another**

Every person is born into a world not created by himself/herself. From the very beginning we have lived in a network of relationships. Social interaction is an inseparable component of one’s own nature and through it we see the perfect plan of God. The Vatican II document, The Church in the Modern World<sup>1</sup> stressed the inter-dependence which is characteristic of human nature : “*We are all in debt to each other, and all together we are in debt to previous generations and to those who will follow us; in short, we are in debt to the life that we share with all creation*” (GS 25).

This “debt of solidarity” is the basis of a spirituality of solidarity. Solidarity is “*the firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good*” (SRS 38)<sup>2</sup>. Spirituality is to be understood as a way of *seeing, being and acting*. Central to God’s plan of salvation is the person as a member of the human family - past, present and future - who share a common meaning of life and a common destiny. In Christian terms, we are all sons and daughters of God, united by a bond of sisterly-brotherly love, which transcends all racial, social and cultural distinctions. God asks that we work to fully develop all our skills and those of others for the common good. Every Christian spirituality is the spirituality of the Gospel and is lived and perceived from the perspective of solidarity.

The value of one’s own individuality thus takes on a new light, which clashes with the accepted modern philosophical emphasis on “individualism”. This modern philosophy of life emphasises autonomy, self-sufficiency and self-assertion. Instead, the fullest value of life lies in belonging to someone. We were born from somebody, welcomed and cared for by somebody, and we develop as persons to the extent that we journey with someone. We enjoy life only if there is someone with whom we can share it. Solitude (isolation) is not the normal human vocation.

#### **6.1.2 Linked to one another**

In a world in which we all depend on one another, the well being of each person depends on the well being of the whole.

“Under Christ’s direction, the whole body is fitted together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love (Eph. 4:16)”. Solidarity is obligatory for the body to reach its fulfilment. Solidarity is not therefore *an* aspect of existence; it is the **bond** that permits the realisation of existence itself through the vital interaction and the mutual complementarity of the parts.

Nobody can be fulfilled alone; it is when each person is fulfilled that the community lives authentically together, only together. Our fulfilment depends, not only on our own freedom and on that of others, but also on the interweaving of interpersonal and social relationships; in that way we become ourselves together.

### *6.1.3 Responsible for one another*

Christians look at the world in a contemplative way, always feeling more and more part of the world and ready to offer creatively their contribution to renew it as part of the Reign of God. Christian spirituality is founded on the Incarnation of a God who assumed the weaknesses of humanity up until death. Believers intimately feel as personal all that happens to others and to the world. They identify with the world, rejoicing with the world’s successes and suffering with the world’s pain and sorrow. While fully partaking in the world, they pray ‘the’ reality rather than ‘for’ the reality, handing it over to God. Recollection – literally collecting everything and everyone that moves in our world together again - is typical of the prayer which expresses solidarity.

Solidarity should be highlighted as a bond binding us all together and a possibility for our free will, for, through our common nature and faith, in choosing to acknowledge this bond, we can act coherently and with the co-responsibility it implies.

Currently, society’s highest values are independence and autonomy, where all structures are designed to increase an individualistic dimension of life, so it can seem absurd and humiliating to choose such a bond, so limiting our own supremacy and vital space. Within the dominant pseudo-culture self-fulfilment is desirable. But nature itself reveals the essential falsity of self-serving fulfilment and it can be countered by linking ourselves together. Nature also shows that searching for and practising this alternative path makes us authentic. To be in need is a constant component of the human condition. This means that through recognising, welcoming, through accepting and increasing the bond with others, we not only retain our individuality, but also prepare for achieving its fullness. True freedom does not mean enlarging our own spaces and imposing ourselves on others, but in recognising ourselves in others and growing together in them, with them and for them.

It is up to the individual to choose whether or not to live for him/her self. Others are not something to be used or a threat, but are for each and all of us a resource, a surprise and a gift which corresponds to God’s plan: “It has pleased God however to make persons holy and save them not merely as individuals without any mutual bonds, but by making them into a single people, a people that acknowledges God in truth and serves God in holiness...” (LG 9)<sup>3</sup>.

**Co-responsibility, therefore, expresses the bond that identifies humanity and projects it towards further stages of fulfilment in solidarity.** There is no solidarity without co-responsibility. Solidarity is accomplished if and when those involved give and receive reciprocally, ready to assume responsibility for common growth and to take on themselves one another’s destiny.

### *6.1.4 A new style of life as a community in solidarity*

A new life-style emerges; everyone is at the service of others. Through this reciprocity the common good is promoted. It is permeated by the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity and animated by *poverty of spirit* [see JB Metz]<sup>4</sup>. The “other” becomes a manifestation of God, a “sacrament” of the hidden presence of God among us. Defence of our own goods is replaced by sharing of goods, material and spiritual, as in the primitive Church, see Acts 2: 42-48<sup>5</sup>.

In Acts, the Church is both the witness and creator of a new social model, in which persons in need benefit from the goods of the community, and they are not abandoned but considered as the most vital and precious part of the community - all in the name of Christ. It is striking that this new life-style is characterised by joy and simplicity of heart. In contrast to a struggle for survival, a permanent greed that may destroy others, this leads to a simple, stable, serene life, where everyone enjoys each other's goods. Today, this lifestyle is the Christian ideal and illuminates the constant effort to construct the ecclesial community.

#### *6.1.5 Our model of solidarity: The Good Samaritan*

Contemplation allows people not only to discover their own nature and that of the world, but also to transform their consciences and lives. The world is not alien and distant but manifests God's glory in creation and belongs to them. Solidarity becomes their way of being and acting as they conform to Christ and to his life-style and thus reveal and accomplish the truth, the goodness and the beauty of the human person.

The parable of 'The Good Samaritan'<sup>6</sup> illustrates best what is meant 'to live in the image and likeness of God'. This parable is an illustration of humanity reaching its full potential. The Samaritan, by going beyond all divisions and inhuman barriers by his decision to help, proclaimed the social gospel.

For Christians today, to be a Samaritan means doing all in our power to achieve a turning point for a world which continues to reward the strong and forgets the weak. We are called to see the other as self and, in doing so, being in solidarity with the world, a world where humanity goes beyond rules, race, culture, religion and wealth. We seek a humanity, which accepts the differences to the point that differences are of no consequence, this is to become whole/holy, truly human – truly Samaritan.

Paul VI in his discourse at the conclusion of the Vatican Council II, on 7<sup>th</sup> December, 1965, affirmed that the Church must be "Samaritan of the World". The Church is called to be an icon of the continuation of Christ in history, the Samaritan of the world; a Church that lives in solidarity with the world because it is an expression of God's concern for the world's destiny and by living this lifestyle making Christ credible in our world.

## **6.2 The Characteristics of the virtue of Solidarity**

### *6.2.1 Gratitude*

Being aware of our indebtedness, gratitude springs both from acknowledgement and discovery of one's own nature and fragility and from the resources and relationships that shape our development. Life is an absolute and mysterious gift given by God, coming to fruition through humanity and relationships. Therefore, conscience demands a sense of gratitude. This gratitude necessitates as generous an attendance to the needs of others as to our own needs.

### *6.2.2 Humility*

By humbly accepting our humanity, we arrive at an awareness of our debt and the object to whom we owe our trust and our gratitude. The reason for our existence lies in God, who is the source of all love, and in the humanity that has gone before us. Authority over our time and place here rests with God and although we are unique and valued we are small and not the centre of the world. Our moral duty of solidarity means we are responsible for each other and we must develop our talents to create a better world and to strive to uphold the dignity of all persons.

### *6.2.3 Compassion*

"Com-passion" will flow from our awareness of the bond that unites humanity. It is a fundamental spiritual attitude that we must have in the face of the contradictions that we see in the world, above all the structural injustices where the weak, the sick, the "non-productive" and the "non-consumers" are left out. Solidarity means that they too "belong".

One meaning of the word "com-passion" is that of suffering with others, in the sense that we consider their

sufferings as if they were our own. It means a readiness to take upon ourselves the cross of others and to help them carry it, so as to give them courage and hope. It means getting involved in their lives, identifying the reasons for their suffering, and being prepared to struggle with them to overcome that suffering and find some positive meaning in their lives.

Compassion therefore goes well beyond a mere transitory feeling of pity, which is encouraged by the superficial media treatment of human suffering. We can feel deeply moved by some report of personal or collective tragedy, but then “the news” moves on to something else, perhaps banal or frivolous and our feeling remains on the surface level. Feelings of solidarity, participation and real compassion quickly disappear. What survives is that we remain spectators, rather than active participants.

If the general reaction to human suffering stays only at an emotional and transitory level, compassion does not go to the heart of the problem: the need for solidarity, in the sense of supportive responsibility for one another.

Jesus is the supreme model of compassion. By his words and actions he showed his ability to enter deeply into the sufferings of others, and to feel intensely for them. Through their encounter with him, people experienced a healing power coming from him. He was able to penetrate their hearts, stir their consciences and give them a new self-confidence. “Your faith has saved you” was one of his typical words of consolation. His healing ministry reflected a God who is in solidarity with our human condition.

A second meaning of the word “com-passion” is sharing the passion for something or for somebody, for some cause or historical goal. It is the shared attraction for something that is considered so important that it is worth struggling and suffering for, and spending one’s energies on, so that it becomes a life-ideal. It is not a passive suffering but a suffering together, with others, to affirm a value that we believe to be true. We may feel so attracted to something or someone that we try to share that “passion” with others. We are prepared to give all our energies to obtain what we esteem and love, what we want and desire.

We belong to an inter-dependent humanity, bound together in solidarity. This should give rise to “global compassion”, meaning that we are aware not only of the private sufferings of persons and situations close to us, but of the “common” sufferings of humanity.

The barriers that kept us apart are being demolished, like those barriers that kept us apart from foreigners and refugees and asylum seekers. Their sufferings become ours and this makes us more vulnerable. We learn to suffer with those who experience the pain of a world which is not the kind of world God wants it to be. We are much more conscious now, thanks largely to scientific and technical progress, of being part of a “global village”. This helps us to feel and suffer with the whole of humanity, and to suffer one another’s problems together.

This need for “global compassion” is expressed most beautifully and powerfully in the words “*The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts ... That is why Christians cherish a deep feeling of solidarity with the human race and its history* (GS 1). Christian solidarity means a shared passion that the reign of God – a reign of justice, peace and love – will be fulfilled in our human history – God’s plan for God’s people. This was Jesus’ mission, and our “passion” for Christ should lead us to imitate him in his dedication to the world. In this commitment to God’s will for human history, we must be prepared to work and dialogue with those who have the same ideals, even though they may not be Christian.

The passion we speak about is a passion of hope, based on the power of God to fulfil God’s promises. At

the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this understanding of God's will for the world requires an ongoing renewal of the Church, which is God's main instrument for bringing about a better world. It means we must continue to read "the signs of the times" together – church and world – and to pray that the world will be renewed according to the spirit of Christ, as expressed in the Beatitudes (Matt 5:1-12)<sup>7</sup>.

Compassion is the shared passion for building up the Body of Christ (the Church) and the world.

#### *6.2.4 Inclusiveness*

Through humility and compassion we are enabled not only to hear the cries of the poor but to make choices that lead to the causes of their poverty being overcome and replaced by a system of justice and peace.

In a so-called "free market" society, ruled by savage competition and fighting, only the strongest reach the top for only they retain the essential resources from which others are excluded. The majority, always the weakest ones, are excluded from the game, privileges and the rewards.

Inclusiveness, then, is specific to solidarity, for the afflicted are integral to the community rather than being recipients of occasional compassion. Instead they receive from the community a commitment to their inclusion in the social system as well as an ongoing motivation to bring about their own recuperation and self-affirmation.

#### *6.2.5 Seeking solutions for the common good*

The bond that unites all humanity and through which the fulfilment of all depends on the fulfilment of each (c.f. 6.1.2), demands an analysis of the global world situation conscious of the challenges arising from all its complexity and interdependence and how this affects our self-understanding and our responses.

This bond also requires an interpretative understanding of the situation, which permits us to identify the lines of action tending to the growth of humanity rather than those which hinder it. Everything must be oriented towards the values of God's Reign: love and truth, justice and peace, universal communion.

From our world view, which is global, universal, not insular, tribal or biased, we continually seek possible solutions that further the common good. From these solutions, we choose those most suited to the greatest universal common good, individual and collective.

The complexity of the world situation, the interdependence of its cultural, religious, political, economic and social aspects, as well as the multiplicity of approaches and the speed of change, means a continual updating of our research.

We must renew our understanding of the truth of the interwoven facts, their significance and their common features, as well as the truth, the absolute good, from which we contemplate and interpret our existence.

We seek also new insights into what constitutes the universal common good and our practical commitment to achieve it, together with what is God's plan in action and the direction towards which it moves (the history of) humanity.

We must continually discern those choices that determine how to spend one's life within God's plan, so as to live for every person and for communion among persons; and we always seek those processes for building the local common good with a view always to the universal common good.

Living this research ultimately means living in **contemplation**, waiting vigilantly and actively for the Lord who comes. Living joyfully, praising and thanking the Lord for God's saving action and for every particle of truth, goodness and beauty that is the fruit of human effort.

### 6.2.6 *Living in the present*

As a person and as communities, people live as strangers and pilgrims on a journey towards God, where every stage can be only a departure for the next step, so we journey in the spirituality of provisionality with God as our hope.

Solidarity demands provisionality. In humility, searching for truth and goodness, we require detachment so that we accept the results of the search and then perform the necessary actions. In contrast to the accumulation of wealth, in solidarity all have access to the necessities of life as all cultural, material and spiritual goods are always available for the common good. Through this acceptance of provisionality, all accept a temperate style of life and discover that he/she is a pilgrim and that all earthly goods will pass on to others. This lays the foundations for authentic growth.

Provisionality pertains to the limits inherent in every present and fleeting moment. It gives the opportunity for the new and the possible tending towards the higher values of God's Reign. Without provisionality and flexibility, it is impossible to live in the present as the "already but not yet" of hope.

### 6.2.7 *Generosity of spirit*

It is the generous in spirit who welcome reality in its complexity; they reconcile it within themselves, allowing them to take a step forward toward a better future. We cannot just assume the simple attitude of judging and punishing the bad, but rather look for the core good which may provide a way forward. We do this through "*the witness of a living and mature faith, namely, one trained to see the difficulties clearly and to overcome them*" (GS 21)

Rejecting reality to follow only one's personal spirituality is to reject the communitarian dimension of faith. Life lived in love of the other, is to live in solidarity with the world; attempting to understand reality in the light of the Gospels and this provides reasons for hope. People who live in this way can explain their attitudes based on the salvation already present in Christ but so far incomplete, as we journey in the patience of hope, towards the peace, joy, freedom and love of the Reign of God.

### 6.2.8 *Hope that endures*

Christians try to understand each other within all our complexity, revealing our own specific selves. We try to overcome prejudices and we welcome diversity as a value to be protected and developed. Thus we rediscover others in all their richness, because they have been formed from the convergence of numerous cultural, historic, economic and social factors. They cease to be seen as people who simply desire to be different. Each person and every culture is of value, and we discover and promote the significance of that value as a resource for all humankind. The joyful acceptance of differences expresses the harmony derived from mutual understanding.

Such mutual understanding moves us all towards a better future. Our efforts to understand the dynamic interweaving of events and history help us, in line with God's plan, to understand the horizon towards which history is moving. Farsighted ideals, which fulfil the hopes of the present, can act as horizons of the future and so help us understand history's obstacles and potentialities. It is a mind opened towards future ideals which enables us to move beyond a simple wish to a desired and intended outcome. The patient and effective will to achieve the outcome manifests itself in the faithfulness of hope.

## 6.3 *References*

<sup>1</sup> The Vatican II document, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Gaudium et Spes (GS), 1965. Link for i and iii: [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/index.htm](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/index.htm)

<sup>2</sup> John Paul II, Sollicitudo Rei Socialis (SRS), 1987. [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_30121987\\_sollicitudo-rei-socialis\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis_en.html)

<sup>3</sup> The Vatican II document, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Lumen Gentium (LG), 1964.

<sup>4</sup> JB Metz Poverty of Spirit (Trans) Newman Press New York, N.Y. 1968

<sup>5</sup> **Acts 2, 42-48** They joined with the other believers and devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, sharing in the Lord's Supper and in prayer. A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. And all the believers met together constantly and shared everything they had. They sold their possessions and shared the proceeds with those in need. They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity, all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved.

<sup>6</sup> **Luke 10, 25-37** One day an expert in religious law stood up to test Jesus by asking him this question: "Teacher, what must I do to receive eternal life?" Jesus replied, "What does the law of Moses say? How do you read it?" The man answered, "'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.' And, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" "Right!" Jesus told him. "Do this and you will live!" The man wanted to justify his actions, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied with an illustration: "A Jewish man was traveling on a trip from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he was attacked by bandits. They stripped him of his clothes and money, beat him up, and left him half dead beside the road. "By chance a Jewish priest came along; but when he saw the man lying there, he crossed to the other side of the road and passed him by. A Temple assistant walked over and looked at him lying there, but he also passed by on the other side. "Then a despised Samaritan came along, and when he saw the man, he felt deep pity. Kneeling beside him, the Samaritan soothed his wounds with medicine and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. The next day he handed the innkeeper two pieces of silver and told him to take care of the man. 'If his bill runs higher than that,' he said, 'I'll pay the difference the next time I am here.' "Now which of these three would you say was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by bandits?" Jesus asked. The man replied, "The one who showed him mercy." Then Jesus said, "Yes, now go and do the same."

<sup>7</sup> **Matt 5:1-12.** Jesus taught them, saying:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

"Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven.