

Solidarity and fraternity: utopia or fundamental social dimensions?

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The market sphere and the 'solidarity sphere' belong to two profoundly different traditions that have evolved over the last few centuries.

The *Fable of the Bees* of Bernard Mandeville (1705) offers a clarifying analogy that helps us to understand the **market sphere**. In this fable, Mandeville speaks about a hive. When the bees try to behave properly among themselves, the hive languishes and declines. On the contrary, it thrives spectacularly when each one of the bees looks only for her own interest. The book where the fable appeared had a meaningful subtitle: "private vices, public benefits". Our consumerist societies believe in this statement, taking it for granted: if we only look for our own interest, it will best for all, because we will struggle and compete and we will benefit from the wealth we create for ourselves.

The market is the source of two assets of extraordinary importance for building a society based on solidarity: it produces commodities and goods that improve the quality of life of people, giving them new capacities; and it generates jobs for people too, something crucial, because work is necessary for human dignity and the integral development of persons.

Solidarity, however, is seen as a threat by the tradition that inspires market dynamics; the word itself disturbs the ear as it seems antithetical to personal autonomy and discussion, in words of Michael Novak.

The tradition of solidarity drinks from different philosophical springs. It is related to one of the French Revolution's crucial values – fraternity.¹ Solidarity grew as the daughter of fraternity in opposition to two realities. First, in opposition to Christian charity, understood then as a way to alleviate the wounds inflicted by injustice without trying to transform the causes of that injustice. Second, in opposition to liberal individualism, one of the expressions of which is the market.

Solidarity has had three important historical expressions:

¹ Alberto Moncada says that "solidarity, in its European version, is a minor daughter of the expectation of solidarity that was raised by the French Revolution", A. MONCADA, *La cultura de la solidaridad*, Verbo Divino, Estella, 1989, 14.

- 1) The labour movement that tried to improve the living conditions of workers, especially during the first phase of industrialization. It achieved its goals thanks to the struggle in solidarity of groups of workers who knew that they were sharing their fight and their destiny. As Juan Carmelo García says, “solidarity is effective and practical; it solves the problems of injustice and opens space for the large majorities”. In the words of Fernández Martos, “solidarity is an active attitude that leads us not only to understand people in their sufferings and empathize with them, but also to struggle together with those people to eliminate their suffering”.
- 2) The welfare state that redistributes the wealth of society through fiscal policies. These policies have been progressively modified during the last 30 years, prompting increasing inequalities in most of the countries in the world. These two historical achievements have linked solidarity to justice in such a way that solidarity today can only be understood including a demand for justice. Solidarity demands justice, or it becomes superficial philanthropy.
- 3) The birth of an international civil society that aspires to universal justice, going beyond the national boundaries of welfare states. This international civil society finds one of its expressions in global NGOs that defend the interests of the poor before international bodies. Gioconda Belli expresses it poetically when she says, “solidarity is tenderness among countries”.

Which is more prevalent today: the tradition of the market, or the tradition of solidarity? The market is the dynamic that prevails as the guiding force of our present world. As Victoria Camps, a Spanish philosopher, has said, “...in fact, the three values of the French Revolution are not the ones that posterity has received, but liberty, equality and *property*”.²

The Catholic Church has included – slowly but steadily – solidarity in her doctrinal body, despite her initial opposition to it. Jon Sobrino notes that, “solidarity is a way of being human. It is not only a collective alliance to defend interests. Solidarity is something that involves the whole person, and involves her forever. Solidarity is a way of relating among human beings, referring to one another as a principle, giving to, and receiving the best from one another”.³ García Roca says that solidarity is the new name of the eternal Christian charity “updated in the era of rights”. But the most important defender of the concept of solidarity in the Catholic world is, undoubtedly, John Paul II. Cardinal Martini remarked that by 1997, the word ‘solidarity’ was mentioned several thousands of times “ in

² V. CAMPS, “Por la solidaridad hacia la justicia”, in: THIEBAUT, C. (ed.), *La herencia ética de la ilustración*, Crítica, Barcelona, 1991, 140. Author’s italics...

³ J. SOBRINO, *Descubrirnos como hermanos: la necesaria solidaridad*: Sal Terrae 79 (1991), 641—656, 656.

the writings and discourses of the Pope”.⁴His most complete definitions of solidarity might possibly be found in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*(n. 38): “When interdependence becomes recognized in this way, the correlative response as a moral and social attitude, as a “virtue,” is solidarity;” and “(solidarity) is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say, to the good of all and to the good of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all.”

As we have seen, these two traditions, that of the market and that of solidarity, have different anthropological bases, social perspectives, goals and strategies. We can see this in the Gospel. In the episode of feeding the five thousand, Jesus told his disciples: “You give them something to eat” (Mark 6, 37). The disciples responded that they would need two hundred denarii worth of bread to feed that crowd. They could not understand. Jesus was speaking about generosity from a perspective of solidarity; while the disciples were speaking about buying from a commercial perspective. Two logics apparently in opposition.

Both these dynamics, of the market on the one hand, and of solidarity on the other, are required to build up a prosperous and just society. In order to achieve this goal a balance is required between the market (that produces wealth), the State (that redistributes wealth and guarantees human rights), and the civil society (the space for solidarity and the defender of the poor). Of the three, civil society is the weakest and needs stronger support because it lacks the numerous resources that the others have. In plural and democratic societies Churches are part of that diverse civil society.

How can the market contribute today to build up a society based on solidarity?

- 1) Companies require persons committed to solidarity in their governing bodies. These must be people who truly believe in working for the common good, who are involved in causes for solidarity and find ways to insert the value of solidarity in their organizations. These persons can be the bridge between the traditions (apparently opposed) of solidarity and the market.
- 2) Companies have to comply with the demands of corporate social responsibility, introducing policies that guarantee equity, reconciliation of family and professional life, right salaries, ways of internal participation in decision making processes, and respect for human rights and environmental regulations.
- 3) Companies should make alliances with civil society’s organizations at both national and international levels, with the aim of multiplying the capacities of persons, increasing the production of socially useful goods and creating decent jobs.
- 4) Governments can establish regulations that compel companies to foster the common good.

⁴ M. CACCIARI and C. M. MARTINI, *Diálogo sobre la solidaridad*, Herder, Barcelona, 1997, 19.

Nevertheless, the utopia of solidarity – or fraternity – will not be possible until “we create a large coalition with the biggest possible number of strong people, working for the good of the weak ones and against their own interests” (Peter Glotz). There is a necessary dynamic – essential we could say – of kenosis or relinquishment in order to give birth to a world of compassion, justice and inclusiveness, that is, a world of solidarity and fraternity.