

Solidarity as spiritual exercise: a contribution to the development of solidarity in the Catholic social tradition

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Boston College

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SOLIDARITY AS SPIRITUAL EXERCISE:
A CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOLIDARITY
IN THE CATHOLIC SOCIAL TRADITION

a dissertation

by

MARK WILLIAM POTTER

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Solidarity as Spiritual Exercise: A Contribution to the Development of Solidarity in the Catholic Social Tradition

By Mark William Potter

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ABSTRACT

The encyclicals and speeches of Pope John Paul II placed solidarity at the very center of the Catholic social tradition and contemporary Christian ethics. This dissertation analyzes the historical development of solidarity in the Church's encyclical tradition, and then offers an examination and comparison of the unique contributions of John Paul II and the Jesuit theologian Jon Sobrino to contemporary understandings of solidarity. Ultimately, I argue that understanding solidarity as spiritual exercise integrates the wisdom of John Paul II's conception of solidarity as the virtue for an interdependent world with Sobrino's insights on the ethical implications of Christian spirituality, orthopraxis, and a commitment to communal liberation. The dissertation probes the relationship between spirituality and ethics in general, and Ignatian spirituality and Catholic social teaching, in particular.

My analysis of solidarity in the encyclical tradition (Chapter 1) provides an historical overview of the incremental development of solidarity in the writings of successive popes and ecclesial councils from Pius XII through Paul VI. In considering the unique contributions of John Paul II, I turn first to the theological and philosophical formation of Karol Wojtyła and the sociopolitical context of Poland (Ch. 2). My analysis then turns to a consideration of John Paul's social encyclicals (Ch. 3), with the goal of offering a definition of solidarity that integrates his intellectual formation and social con-

text with the development of solidarity in the official social tradition. Next, I examine the development of solidarity in the writings of Jon Sobrino, first through an analysis of his intellectual and spiritual formation in the revolutionary context of El Salvador (Ch. 4), and then through an analysis of his unique theological contributions to the topic (Ch. 5). Based on Sobrino, I offer an articulation of solidarity as spiritual exercise as an original contribution to the development of solidarity in the Catholic social tradition (Ch. 6).

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INTRODUCTION

Two approaches to Solidarity

The social encyclicals and addresses of Pope John Paul II placed solidarity, a concept relatively new to the Church having first appeared in the writings of Pius XII just forty years earlier, at the very center of Catholic social thought.¹ By the sheer number of times he used the term and the qualitatively “thick” philosophical and theological language he employed in its explication, even casual observers realized that the Polish pope clearly placed great moral significance in solidarity – even more so because Solidarity was the name of the Polish labor union that initiated the bloodless revolution that eventually toppled communism in his homeland. John Paul’s advocacy for Christian solidarity seemed boundless—on the one hand, he claims that solidarity is the virtue of interdependence that corresponds to the fact that “we are all really responsible for all,” and on another, in a moment of high theology, John Paul states that solidarity is inspired and prefigured by the supreme model of unity, the interrelationship of the three persons in the divine Trinity.² The Trinitarian *communio* may indeed be a wonderful model for human solidarity, but as a guide for Christian ethics this theologically thick description may be a bit too abstract to be of help in living the life of discipleship.

The first purpose of the following study, then, is to explore the rapid development of solidarity in the Catholic social tradition, with an eye toward articulating a clear under-

¹ Cf. John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987), *Ecclesia in America* (1999), *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (2001). Each is accessible at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/index.htm.

² *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, §39-40

standing of the philosophical and theological foundations for solidarity in the writings of John Paul II, and its implications for Christian ethics. To that end, we will examine the moral status of solidarity in the social teaching of John Paul, who has at various times identified solidarity as a principle, attitude, determination, and virtue. Our analysis of John Paul II will culminate in a definition of solidarity that is consistent with the theological and philosophical worldview and the official social teaching of the pope who has been the most significant catalyst behind the development of solidarity in the Catholic social tradition.

If the first task of this dissertation is to examine the development of solidarity in the official canon of the Catholic social tradition—from the top down, as it were—then the second task of the dissertation is to examine solidarity as the concept has developed from the ground up – outside of the encyclical tradition, in a particular context. The latter half of the dissertation is focused primarily on solidarity as it has developed as a key ethical category in Latin American liberation theology, specifically in the historical context of El Salvador and concrete experiences, spirituality, and writings of the Jesuit theologian Jon Sobrino. A European Jesuit sent to El Salvador as a traditional “missionary priest,” Sobrino’s experiences in a country where the vast majority of the people live very close to death had a transformative effect on his worldview, spirituality, and theology; compounded by the fact that many of his friends and colleagues, including Archbishop Oscar Romero, were killed for living out their personal and institutional commitments to Christian solidarity.

Interestingly, despite their different starting points, contexts, and methodologies, both John Paul II and Jon Sobrino have developed thick conceptions of solidarity as a Christian praxis that is poignantly appropriate to the contemporary moment in history. Both articulations of solidarity are deeply theological and even mystical in their aspiration to unite ethics with a spiritual experience of divine grace. Ultimately, this dissertation will put the two conceptions of solidarity in dialogue with one another, to explore the ways that the living Catholic social tradition can be made stronger through a synthesis of the official canon with the non-official, creative development of solidarity in context. The key to understanding the major contribution of Jon Sobrino to the development solidarity in the Catholic social tradition, I will argue, is to understand solidarity as *spiritual exercise*.

- *Methodology*

Methodologically, our analysis begins with the idea that theology is critical reflection on praxis, which is properly understood as meaningful activity that flows from faithful contemplation. In order to understand the theology of Christian solidarity articulated most abstractly in the writings of John Paul II and Jon Sobrino, we must understand solidarity as praxis—ethical activity inspired by and performed in faith. In the contexts of Poland and El Salvador, there is a chronological truth to this methodology in that solidarity emerged at moments when great numbers of people were suffering the dehumanizing effects of direct victimization or oppression, or the indirect but equally dehumanizing de-

nial of participation in the larger social structures that affected their daily reality. Historically, the development of solidarity has been accelerated by revolutionary contexts.

Accordingly, our study will take pains to emphasize and describe (to the extent possible) the social and practical contexts of Poland and El Salvador, and the experience of the Christian communities within which solidarity emerged as an important theological and ethical category. What were the economic, political, and spiritual environments for each of these contexts? Why did solidarity emerge, in these two very different nations, as the key Christian praxis that served as the appropriately Christian response to the harsh realities of oppression, poverty, and other forms of suffering?

Overall, the methodology for this dissertation is somewhat fluid, as our analysis will shift frequently between the historical, the philosophical and theological, and also the spiritual. Ultimately, the overriding methodology is synthetic – identifying key moments and influences in the development of a concept through the historical contexts and writings of two very intelligent, educated, and prolific thinkers. The goal of the project is to demonstrate how two vastly different approaches to solidarity are more compatible and complementary than one might initially suspect. And, ultimately, I will argue that *solidarity as spiritual exercise* makes a concrete contribution to the conception of solidarity advanced in the official Catholic social tradition that has culminated in the solidarity of John Paul II.

- *An overview of the study*

The dissertation itself can generally be divided into two major parts, with a concluding chapter in which we synthesize what we have learned and explore the implications of our conclusions. The first part of our study, consisting of Chapters 1 - 3, focuses on the development of solidarity in the official documents of the Catholic social tradition, and particularly in the philosophical and theological formation of Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II. In this portion of the dissertation, the method is relatively historical and synthetic as we trace and analyze the use of the term solidarity in the documents of the social tradition prior to John Paul II. The goal of this analysis is to elucidate the meaning of solidarity in contemporary Catholic social teaching and to explicate the particular philosophical, theological, and ethical significance of solidarity as it has been developed in the proclamations of the popes. Ultimately, we will probe the adequacy of John Paul II's account of solidarity, particularly in terms of its relevance to contemporary Christian ethical praxis.

In Chapter 1, we examine the chronological development of solidarity in the official documents of the Catholic social tradition from Pius XII through Paul VI. In order to understand solidarity in the social teachings of John Paul II, we must first engage in a brief but critical evaluation of the term's use in the official Catholic social tradition beginning with its first appearance in the writings and speeches of Pope Pius XII. In this section, we will also trace the development of the term through the social encyclicals of John XXIII, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church (*Gaudium et Spes*) promulgated by

the Second Vatican Council, Paul VI, and the document produced by the World Synod of Bishops in 1971, *Justitia in Mundo*. Collectively, these documents demonstrate that the concept of solidarity gained increasing moral significance in the writings of each successive pope and gathering of bishops.

If solidarity's relevance to Catholic social ethics was developing incrementally with each social document since the papacy of Pius XII, then John Paul II has accelerated its rise to prominence quite dramatically. In order to understand how solidarity has been brought to the very center of John Paul's social teaching, in Chapter 2 we will examine several key influences in his intellectual and spiritual formation, including the articulation of the concept in the revolutionary context of Poland's *Solidarność* labor union. Because several comprehensive accounts of Karol Wojtyła's philosophical and theological formation already exist, we will turn in our second section to three key aspects of Wojtyła's formation and context that provide foundational insights into his articulation of solidarity as John Paul II: his theological and philosophical roots in Thomism and phenomenology; his commitment to a personalist philosophy; and finally the emergence of *Solidarność*, the Polish labor union that ultimately triumphed in a bloodless revolution over the communist government, and which contributed the enduring significance of *work* in the Polish pope's social teaching.

In Chapter 3, we will turn to the social encyclicals of Pope John Paul II with an eye as to how he not only builds upon the various meanings of solidarity promulgated by his predecessors in the Catholic social tradition, but also makes a unique contribution by defining solidarity as the virtue for the interdependent world. Accordingly, this section

includes an examination of the theological and moral significance of solidarity explicitly described in the pope's most comprehensive treatment of solidarity—the 1987 encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*. In this encyclical and elsewhere, John Paul II defines the “virtue of solidarity” as “a firm and persevering commitment to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all.”³ As we examine John Paul's treatment of solidarity in this encyclical and in other key documents, we examine the various ways that the pope defines solidarity as a moral concept—alternately as principle, attitude, duty, and virtue. Further, we will examine the philosophical and theological methods by which he justifies the moral normativity of solidarity, and prescribes it as a moral virtue most relevant to contemporary social ethics. In order to do this, we will examine the relationship of solidarity to other moral concepts already present in the Catholic social tradition: such as human dignity, human development, participation and collaboration in the human community, and a commitment to the common good. Finally, we will examine the various ways in which the pope applies solidarity to concrete social and ethical dilemmas in the contemporary world, seeking to discern the concrete relevance of solidarity to Christian ethics.

The second part of our study, consisting of Chapters 4 & 5, turns to a consideration of the development of solidarity as spiritual exercise based on the theology of Jesuit theologian Jon Sobrino. In Chapter 4, we explore the social context and spiritual influences that directly impacted Sobrino's theological writings during the bloodiest, revolu-

³ *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, §35. The pope uses the same formulation in numerous talks and addresses given in the years after the promulgation of this encyclical.

Cf. Kevin P. Doran, *Solidarity: A Synthesis of Personalism and Communalism in the Thought of Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 1996) 203.

tionary years of Salvadoran history. In this chapter, we will briefly examine the concept of spiritual exercise in the history of philosophy and theology, culminating in a particularly robust way in the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola, which happens to be the major spiritual influence on the formation of Jesuits. Further, we will follow the methodological advice of J. Matthew Ashley on making a case for the intersection of spirituality and theology in the works of Jon Sobrino. In order to do that, we examine several key aspects of the spiritual context and influences that directly shaped Sobrino at the time of his development of the notion of solidarity. In turn, we consider Sobrino's biographical context and formation as a Jesuit, the socio-historical context of revolutionary El Salvador which Sobrino himself has cited as a major influence on his theological thinking, and the undeniable influences of the "men with spirit" who were martyred for living out a praxis of solidarity based on their spiritual encounter with the God of love: Archbishop Romero and the UCA martyrs.

In Chapter 5, we will turn to an analysis of the Sobrino's theological method and content that provides the foundation for a proper understanding of solidarity as spiritual exercise. Specifically, we examine the influence of Ignacio Ellacuría on the primary importance of *reality* in Sobrino's theological project—an emphasis that resonates with Ignatian spirituality and Sobrino's commitment to the historical Jesus, the privileged place of the poor, and the commitment to discipleship as praxis. Our consideration of Sobrino culminates in a constructive phenomenology of the spiritual exercise of solidarity, which is adumbrated in Sobrino's work on mercy but is never explicated in a form such as this. Properly understood, a praxis of solidarity as a spiritual exercise for contemporary Chris-

tian ethics makes a vital contribution to contemporary Catholic social teaching that provides a necessary complement and corrective to the conception of solidarity proffered by the encyclical canon of the Catholic social tradition and the particular contributions of John Paul II.

In the conclusion, we consider several major points of contact and contrast between the conceptions of solidarity proffered by John Paul II and Jon Sobrino and explore several implications of the positive contributions of *solidarity as spiritual exercise* in detail:

- *Solidarity as a distinctive unity of spirituality and ethics:* Both John Paul II and Sobrino emphasize that the source and the summit of the ethical praxis of solidarity is an intimate and direct experience of God.
- *Solidarity transcends individualistic tendencies of personalism and virtue ethics:* John Paul II develops an understanding of solidarity that places the human person made in *imago Dei* at the center of the Catholic social tradition, and emphasizes solidarity as a personal virtue. Accordingly, John Paul's conception of solidarity can be criticized as being overly individualistic and falling short in its account of the dynamic of mutual reciprocity that is more adequately described by Sobrino.
- *Solidarity entails a primary concern for the poor, suffering, and marginalized:* While this theme is elaborated well in the writings of many liberation theologians, John Paul's writing on solidarity also affirms the priority of the suffering poor, and the obligation of the non-poor to "be ready to share with them all they pos-

sess.”⁴ Understanding solidarity as spiritual exercise, however, cultivates within Christians an obligation not only to give generously (which is a one-way dynamic), but also to physically place themselves in the context of suffering, to accompany those who suffer, and to foster relationships indicative of God’s Kingdom.

- *Solidarity as orthopraxis*: Engaging in solidarity as spiritual exercise yields practical, experiential knowledge about God and Christian discipleship that simply is not possible by the intellectual study of doctrine alone.
- *Solidarity as participation*: The praxis of solidarity culminates in grace for all, and not just those who are most recognizably suffering the consequences of sin.

⁴ *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, §39.

CHAPTER ONE

Solidarity in the Catholic Social Tradition prior to John Paul II

More than any other theologian or church figure, Pope John Paul II has placed solidarity at the very center of the Catholic social tradition. In this chapter, we examine the place of solidarity within the official social teaching of the Catholic Church, and its particular development in the encyclicals and major addresses of the Polish pontiff, John Paul II.

In order to understand solidarity in the social teachings of John Paul II, however, we must first engage in a brief but critical evaluation of the term's use in the official Catholic social tradition prior to the papacy of John Paul II, beginning with its first appearance in the writings and speeches of Pope Pius XII. In this section, we will also trace the development of the term through the social encyclicals of John XXIII, Paul VI, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church (*Gaudium et Spes*) promulgated by the Second Vatican Council, and the document produced by the World Synod of Bishops in 1971, *Justitia in Mundo*. Collectively, these documents demonstrate that the concept of solidarity gained increasing moral significance in the writings of each successive pope and gathering of bishops.

- *Pius XII*

The earliest reference to *solidarity* in any official ecclesiastical document is found in Pius XII's first encyclical, *Summi Pontificatus*, "On the Unity of Human Society."¹ Written on the eve of the most violent war in the history of humanity, this encyclical marks the entry of solidarity into papal rhetoric. Released just six months after his election as pope, Pius XII employs the term "Catholic solidarity" primarily to describe the sense of unity and cooperation experienced within the Church during the difficult days that included the death of Pius XI and the task of choosing a successor to the Chair of Peter.² In its first ecclesiastical use, then, solidarity is a sense of human togetherness—a sense of fraternity—experienced more poignantly in times of common difficulty, anxiety and adversity.

Later in the document, Pius indicates a theological and philosophical foundation for human solidarity, invoking an argument based on traditional, Catholic natural law anthropology:

[One of the] pernicious errors, widespread today, is the forgetfulness of that law of human solidarity and charity which is dictated and imposed by our common origin and by the equality of rational nature in all men, to whatever people they belong, and by the redeeming Sacrifice offered by Jesus Christ on the Altar of the Cross to His Heavenly Father on behalf of sinful mankind."³

Notably, Pius provides philosophical and theological grounds for a "law of human solidarity." Philosophically, Pius asserts a law of solidarity and charity inherent to the common rational nature of all humanity—a "humanist" argument that dates back to the earli-

¹ Kevin P. Doran, *Solidarity: A Synthesis of Personalism and Communalism in the Thought of Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 1996) 81.

² Pius XII, *Summi Pontificatus*, October 20, 1939.
http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xii/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_20101939_summi-pontificatus_en.html (Accessed June 15, 2009) §11, 12, 15.

³ *Ibid.* §35.

est philosophers and endures through Kant and modern philosophy. Theologically, Pius grounds a law of solidarity in humanity's common origins (a common Creator) as well as Christ's redemptive crucifixion for all of humanity. Explicitly, Pius XII invokes an *imago Dei* argument for the common dignity of humankind,⁴ as well as an affirmation of the universal significance of Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection. "In light of this unity of all mankind," Pius continues, "which exists in law and in fact, individuals do not feel themselves isolated units, like grains of sand, but united by the very force of their nature and by their internal destiny, into an organic, harmonious mutual relationship which varies with the changing of times."⁵

The horrors of the Second World War vitiated Pius XII's idealized vision of universal human solidarity, which is perhaps why solidarity does not surface again until his Christmas Message of 1950. In this speech, Pius used the term again to describe the experience of unity in the common adversity and mutual dependence after World War II:

Why should this solidarity with so many people, who find themselves dispossessed of their peace and in danger, not become for all, a sure way from which salvation may come? Why should this spirit of solidarity not be like a support for the natural social order in its three essential forms: family, property, state, to lead them to an organic collaboration?⁶

In this case Pius XII suggests that a spirit of solidarity with those who have suffered the ravages of World War II might lead to salvation for all people. A spirit of solidarity with those who suffer, Pius indicates, may lead persons and social institutions to the kind of

⁴ *Ibid.* §36.

⁵ *Ibid.* §42.

⁶ Pius XII, "Christmas Message, December 23, 1950." Quoted in Doran, *Solidarity*, 82.

organic cooperation and collaboration characteristic of a society that is properly ordered by the natural law.

In sum, Pius XII introduced two senses of solidarity into the Catholic social tradition. First, solidarity served *descriptively* to indicate an inherent social cohesion that exists between humans. Solidarity in this sense refers to the recognition of common humanity and mutual dependence and is made more poignant by shared experiences of adversity or suffering. This first sense of solidarity, grounded as it might be in a natural law conception of Christian charity, is fully compatible with modern, secular political philosophy. The second, more explicitly theological sense of the term employed solidarity as *an expression or manifestation of the divine law* that serves the fullness of human society:

The divine law of harmony in the world imposes firmly on all the governments of peoples the obligation of preventing war through international institutions suited to placing armaments under effective surveillance; to deter, through the solidarity between those nations which sincerely seek peace, those who would disturb it.⁷

In either case, Pius clearly conceived *solidarity* as a means toward achieving and maintaining peace. Implicit in the two senses in which Pius XII uses the term, solidarity is a phenomenon that works on three levels: *interpersonally*, as the organic links that bind men and women into an organic whole with a common end; *internationally*, as the recognition of fraternal bonds between peoples and nations historically divided and set at odds against one another; and, though less explicit, *vertically* in the moral sense that by recognizing and acting in solidarity, humans participate in the divine law of Christ.

⁷ Pius XII, "Christmas Message, December 22, 1957." Quoted in Doran, *Solidarity*, 84.

- *John XXIII*

Whereas Pius XII appealed to solidarity primarily for the ends of restoring interpersonal harmony and international peace, Pope John XXIII applied the term to the increasing fact of economic interdependence—interpersonally and internationally. Extending the Church’s social concern for the working class first articulated by Leo XIII in *Rerum Novarum*, John’s encyclical *Mater et Magistra* appeals to a “principle of human solidarity and Christian brotherhood” between workers and employers.⁸ John clearly indicates that the principle of human solidarity can serve as a corrective to the exploitative relationships between employers and workers in industrialized nations—both at the level of relationship between individual workers and employers as well as between labor unions and groups of owners.

At the local level, solidarity is best cultivated in interpersonal associations among individuals who engage in common ends, such as farmworkers and labor unions.⁹ At the international level, John argues that the demands of solidarity bear directly on relationships between wealthy and developing countries, particularly when human rights are neglected or violated:

Probably the most difficult problem today concerns the relationship between political communities that are economically advanced and those in the process of development... The solidarity which binds all men together as members of a common family makes it impossible for wealthy nations to look with indifference upon the hunger, misery and poverty of other nations whose citizens are unable to enjoy even elementary human rights. The nations of the world are becoming more and more dependent on one another and it will not be possible to preserve a lasting peace so long as glaring economic and social imbalances persist.¹⁰

⁸ John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_xxiii/encyclicals/ (Accessed June 15, 2009). §23.

⁹ *Ibid.* §146.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* §157.

Like Pius XII before him, John XXIII acknowledges that human solidarity serves the common good of peace. Going further, however, John acknowledges that in a world of increasing economic interdependence, the principle of human solidarity also serves the common good of preserving basic human rights—interpersonally and internationally. In short, John explicitly extends the principle of solidarity to the economic dimension of the common good, concerned especially as he is with concrete issues of economic justice and human rights, such as international aid, the problem of global hunger and malnourishment, the plight of migrant peoples, and the realities of economic alienation.¹¹

By defining solidarity as a characteristic of relationships between persons or groups of persons, John XXIII emphasizes the fundamental principle of Catholic social teaching: “individual human beings are the foundation, the cause, and the end of every social institution.”¹² Solidarity is not just a characteristic of an economic system, but a principle that properly orders human associations. Solidarity does not pertain only to relationships between unequal partners—between one who is wealthy and one who is poor; or between a nation with a production surplus and a nation that is economically underdeveloped. Rather, the responsibility of solidarity applies to all human associations—among and between the poor as well as among and between those who are wealthy.¹³ All human relationships should be marked by an active concern for the full human dignity of each participant—interpersonally and internationally. But while John XXIII retained an

¹¹ *Ibid.* §157-165.

¹² *Ibid.* §219-220.

¹³ *Ibid.* §190.

emphasis on the social principle of subsidiarity,¹⁴ he pushed the Catholic social tradition further by affirming the positive role of the state and other voluntary associations to *humanize* the growing network of relationships that accompanied the phenomenon of socialization. *Mater et Magistra* acknowledges that human interdependence extends far beyond the local community, and that therefore the state and public authorities have a positive responsibility to be directly involved in directing and controlling the economic and social life of the people. John's thick vision of the common good therefore includes specific, concrete recommendations for state regulation of large business, agricultural production and distribution, tax assessment, insurance, social security, price regulation, and even rural development.¹⁵

Similar to his predecessor, John XXIII grounds human solidarity in both secular and theological terms. John does not differ from Pius XII when he appeals to the secular fact of human interdependence—which, by the papacy of John XXIII, has led to an international articulation of basic human rights. Further, this universally-knowable value of human dignity is complemented by the natural law anthropology common to both Pius XII and John XXIII. One new ecclesiological image offered by John XXIII, it should be noted, is that the Catholic Church, as the Mystical Body of Christ, bears a particular responsibility to minister those in misery and want—as Christ's crucifixion and death made

¹⁴ *Ibid.* §53, 117, 152.

¹⁵ Donal Dorr, *Option for the Poor: a Hundred Years of Vatican Social Teaching* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1992) 137. Regarding John XXIII's contribution to the Catholic Social Teaching, Dorr remarks on *Mater et Magistra*: "Even when a nation keeps State involvement as low as possible by respecting the principle of subsidiarity (as Pope John asked), [John recognized that] still the common good nowadays requires far more State 'interference' than was required in the past."

God's love known to man, so must the Church's own actions be a living sacrament of that same love to those in need.¹⁶

- *Second Vatican Council*

Briefly, we should note that solidarity is invoked several times in the Second Vatican Council's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*.¹⁷ The activity of the Council itself—its dialogue with the modern world—is considered to be a sign of the solidarity between the Church and the entire human family.¹⁸ Further, solidarity describes relationships within “the new brotherly community” that is the Church, in which “everyone, as members of one another, render mutual service according to the different gifts bestowed on each.”¹⁹ Perhaps the most notable aspect of *Gaudium et Spes* in relation to the place of solidarity in the social tradition is that it provides several explicitly theological and Scriptural grounds for solidarity—effectively complementing the natural law arguments already at work in the social tradition. Drawing on biblical references to the Exodus story and Jesus' presence to his disciples and followers, the document describes how “God did not create man for life in isolation, but for the formation of social unity.”²⁰ The Christian church, as the community inaugurated by Jesus, is the prototypical community of solidarity. That is not to say that the natural law

¹⁶ *Mater et Magistra*. §159.

¹⁷ Cf. Christine Firer Hinze “Straining toward Solidarity in a Suffering World: *Gaudium et Spes* After Forty Years” in *Vatican II Forty Years Later*. Annual Volume 51 (2005) of the College Theology Society (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006) 165-195. Hinze argues that the recognition of “incarnational solidarity” as an essential key for authentically Christian and human living in the world today is one of *Gaudium et Spes*' most important, yet still undeveloped legacies.

¹⁸ *Gaudium et Spes*, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/index.htm (Accessed June 15, 2009) §3; Solidarity is also implied as the perfection of “brotherly dialogue” in §23.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* §32

²⁰ *Ibid.* §32.

understanding of solidarity has disappeared. Even as the Eucharistic meal is described in terms of “brotherly solidarity;”²¹ the natural law approach to human solidarity is evidenced by the document’s claim that the natural order of the human family is marked by mutual love, “solidarity and faithfulness;”²² and individual political vocation is determined between the poles of “personal initiative and the solidarity of the whole social organism.”²³

Another contribution of *Gaudium et Spes* that is closely related to solidarity is the articulation of the notion of interdependence between person and society, “that the betterment of the person and the improvement of society depend upon each other.”²⁴ In an increasingly socialized world—one in which mutual relationships and interdependence multiply through increased contact, communication, and dialogue—the role of the common good takes on more significance.²⁵ Being attentive to the rights and responsibilities attendant to a commitment to the common good requires individuals and social groups to “take into account the needs and legitimate aspirations of every other group, and even those of the human family as a whole.”²⁶ In short, an awareness of the fact of increased

²¹ *Ibid.* §38.

²² *Ibid.* §48.

²³ *Ibid.* §75.

²⁴ *Ibid.* §25. Christine Firer Hinze argues:

The linchpin of *Gaudium et Spes*’s interpretive schema is a social anthropology focused on the God-given dignity of the human person. Human dignity, uniquely personal while grounded and realized in community, is the juncture at which the Christian message meets the world, and the world connects with the church. *Gaudium et Spes* depicts the human person and its inviolable dignity as socially embedded: my good and the common good—and conversely, my harm and the “common harm”—are inextricably meshed. This deep communal understanding of human nature and flourishing is distinctly Catholic; its significance cannot be overestimated. Hinze, 170.

²⁵ *Ibid.* §26: “...we are today witnessing an extension of the role of the common good, which is the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily.”

²⁶ *Ibid.*

interdependence leads to a greater consciousness of and commitment to social obligations—such as the equality of all persons and social justice—that the flourishing of all persons depends upon:

All must consider it their sacred duty to count social obligations among their chief duties today and to observe them as such. For the more closely the world comes together, the more widely do people's obligations transcend particular groups and extend to the whole world.²⁷

Just as *Gaudium et Spes* urges that people transcend individual morality by acknowledging the duties of social responsibilities and participation, it also offers a communitarian theology of salvation, reminding people of faith that God has always called people not as individuals, but as members of a community – God's chosen people. Jesus Christ, through the gift of the Spirit,

...established...a new communion of sisters and brothers among all who received him in faith and love...in which all as members one of the other would render mutual service in the measure of the different gifts bestowed on each. This solidarity must be constantly increased until that day when it will be brought to fulfillment; on that day humanity, saved by grace, will offer perfect glory to God as the family beloved of God and of Christ their brother.²⁸

In other words, solidarity is key to the salvation of all Christians – not as individuals, but as members of the people of God.

In terms of practical ethics, the Council does not offer many concrete examples of solidarity in action. The document certainly appeals to a sense of “international solidarity” in the context of international economics and the positive values of the day.²⁹ In this

²⁷ *Ibid* §30.

²⁸ *Ibid.* §32.

²⁹ *Ibid.* §85:

“The present solidarity of mankind also calls for a revival of greater international cooperation in the economic field. Although nearly all peoples have become autonomous, they are far from being free of every form of undue dependence, and far from escaping all danger of serious internal diffi-

case, the Council's use of the term continues to use *solidarity* in the sense of John XXIII, as the moral norm of economic cooperation. Unlike John XXIII's *Mater et Magistra*, however, *Gaudium et Spes* does not advocate for anything more specific than international aid, social cooperation in the form of international mediating institutions and associations, and education that leads to development.³⁰

- *Paul VI*

The next major contribution made to the concept of solidarity in the Catholic social tradition came in Pope Paul VI's 1967 encyclical *Populorum Progressio*. More than anything else, this document deepens the status of solidarity as a particularly urgent *moral responsibility*, the "duty of solidarity." In the opening section of the encyclical, Paul writes that Vatican II's renewed consciousness of the demands of the Gospel makes it the Church's *duty* "to put herself at the service of all, to help them grasp their serious problem in all its dimensions, and to convince them that solidarity in action at this turning point in human history is a matter of urgency."³¹ In this document, Paul VI introduces the notion of "authentic human development" into the Catholic social tradition, and by so doing transcends the traditional Catholic social emphasis on primarily economic devel-

culties... The citizens of each country must be prepared by education and professional training to discharge the various tasks of economic and social life. But this in turn requires the aid of foreign specialists who, when they give aid, will not act as overlords, but as helpers and fellow-workers. Developing nations will not be able to procure material assistance unless radical changes are made in the established procedures of modern world commerce. Other aid should be provided as well by advanced nations in the form of gifts, loans or financial investments. Such help should be accorded with generosity and without greed on the one side, and received with complete honesty on the other side."

³⁰ *Ibid.* §85 & 90.

³¹ Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, 1967. Available at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/encyclicals/index.htm, (Accessed June 15, 2009) §1.

opment to include the development of the whole person. “Authentic human development” entails the integral growth and flourishing of the human person in all of its dimensions—not only economic development but cultural, psychological, political, ecological, and religious development, as well.³² At its most basic, this development consists in “transformation from less human conditions to those which are more human.”³³ Solidarity, according to Paul, is a moral duty to participate in the integral development of others, not just economically, but in the full sense of what it means to be human. Paul emphasized, far more than his predecessor popes or the Second Vatican Council, that the obstacles to human peace could not be reduced to economic disparities between people and nations—as troubling and destructive as those disparities are. Instead, personal morality and social structures should be ordered to the full development of the human person, in all of its dimensions.

Accordingly, Paul VI notes that human developments in science, technology, economics, and even politics are not sufficient without the moral development of solidarity: “There can be no progress towards the complete development of man without the simultaneous development of all humanity in the spirit of solidarity.”³⁴ Rooted as it is in a common humanity, solidarity entails the recognition of oneself in the larger context of human history: past, present, and future. As such, humans are morally bound to acknowledge that which they have inherited from their ancestors and to remain ever cognizant of the generations to come:

³² Dorr notes “At the heart of *Populorum Progressio* lies a notion of integral development which Paul VI took from Père Lebreton, the Dominican scholar and activist who died sometime before the encyclical appeared.” *Option for the Poor*, 180.

³³ *Populorum Progressio*, §20.

³⁴ *Ibid.* §43.

... As the waves of the sea gradually creep farther and farther in along the shoreline, so the human race inches its way forward through history. We are the heirs of earlier generations, and we reap benefits from the efforts of our contemporaries; we are under obligation to all men. Therefore we cannot disregard the welfare of those who will come after us to increase the human family. The reality of human solidarity brings us not only benefits but also obligations.³⁵

To be human, according to Paul, is to be radically interdependent—not just economically, but culturally and historically. The fact of this interdependence—which enables the growth, education and integral development of each person—implies a corresponding duty that each person contribute to and collaborate in the development of others—both proximally and historically.

While integral human development entails self-fulfillment and development, it also includes social development by participation in the common good of the human community through social associations, the family, the local community, the church, and political structures. In his later Apostolic letter *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971), Paul VI endorses the full range of human rights, but warns of the danger of an overemphasis on equality, writing: “Without a renewed education in solidarity, an overemphasis of equality can give rise to an individualism in which each one claims his own rights without wishing to be answerable for the common good.”³⁶ The duty of solidarity requires people to be concerned with those who suffer from material poverty, social oppression, political and economic exploitation.³⁷

Similarly, for Paul VI the moral duty of solidarity serves the international common good, as wealthier nations are obligated to provide aid to developing countries and

³⁵ *Ibid.* §17.

³⁶ Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens*, 1971. Available at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/apost_letters/index.htm (Accessed June 15, 2009) §23.

³⁷ *Populorum Progressio*, §20-21.

participate in the creation of structures that will serve social justice.³⁸ In Paul's terms, international solidarity is not an isolated gift of charitable economic aid, but instead a recognition of common humanity and common destiny. International solidarity will enable *all* countries—wealthy or developing—to become “artisans of their destiny.”³⁹

It is worth noting that Paul's use of solidarity is distinct from his predecessors because he writes with a teleological goal in mind: the full development of the human person. In other words, Paul VI asks “How must society be ordered to provide the conditions for the fullest development of all human persons?” His answer is that the global society must be ordered so that it corresponds to the duty of human solidarity. The teleological goal for human society must not be simply the elimination of poverty, “It is a question, rather, of building a world where every man, no matter what his race, religion or nationality, can live a fully human life, freed from servitude imposed on him by other men or by natural forces over which he has not control.”⁴⁰

Writing in a time of extraordinary scientific, economic, and cultural development, Paul recognizes that every nation has a moral obligation to produce more and better quality goods to give all of its own inhabitants a truly human standard of living. However, each country must also contribute to the common development of the entire human

³⁸ *Ibid.* §44.

³⁹ *Ibid.* §65:

May the day come when international relationships will be characterized by respect and friendship, when mutual cooperation will be the hallmark of collaborative efforts, and when concerted effort for the betterment of all nations will be regarded as a duty by every nation. The developing nations now emerging are asking that they be allowed to take part in the construction of a better world, a world which would provide better protection for every man's rights and duties. It is certainly a legitimate demand, so everyone must heed and fulfill it.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* §47.

race.⁴¹ And though wealthy nations have a heavier burden to bear in contributing economic and material resources to the development of the entire human race, poor nations must likewise participate in a system of mutual cooperation, “an effective and mutual sharing, carried out with equal dignity on either side, for the construction of a more human world.”⁴² The development of solidarity as a fully moral obligation, which had been implied in the writings of Pius XII and John XXIII, is a lasting contribution that Paul VI makes to Catholic social tradition. Insofar as authentic human development entails a moral obligation to personal, communal, and international solidarity, Paul asserts that development is “the new name for peace.”⁴³

Although *Octogesima Adveniens* does not radically alter the sense of solidarity that Paul articulated in *Populorum Progressio*, it serves well to emphasize the concrete relevance of the moral duty of solidarity in post-industrial society:

. . . [T]he more fortunate should renounce some of their rights so as to place their goods more generously at the service of others. If, beyond legal rules, there is really no deeper feeling of respect for and service to others, then even equality before the law can serve as an alibi for flagrant discrimination, continued exploitation and actual contempt. Without a renewed education in solidarity, an overemphasis of equality can give rise to an individualism in which each one claims his own rights without wishing to be answerable for the common good.⁴⁴

As he did in *Populorum Progressio*, Paul VI continues to question the notion of progress by examining it through the lens of an authentically human development: “Is not genuine progress to be found in the development of moral consciousness, which will lead man to

⁴¹ *Ibid.* §48.

⁴² *Ibid.* §54.

⁴³ *Ibid.* §76-83.

⁴⁴ *Octogesima Adveniens*, §23.

exercise a wider solidarity and to open himself freely to others and to God?”⁴⁵ Echoing the Vatican II message of *Dignitatis Humanae*, Paul insists that the moral consciousness can only develop under the condition of genuine human freedom; free from any spirit of economic or political domination. Such freedom allows each individual to “develop in its deepest human reality: to involve itself and to spend itself in building up active and lived solidarity.”⁴⁶

To summarize the contributions of Pope Paul VI, then, is to mark a dramatic change in the development of solidarity in the Catholic social tradition. Like Pius XII, John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council, Paul recognizes the fact of human interdependence. However, as Pius XII implied, solidarity is not merely a descriptive fact of human nature, but a moral obligation for all humanity as it strives for fulfillment. Paul argues that the duty of human solidarity is the moral corollary to human progress. *Populorum Progressio* is a key document in the development of solidarity in the Catholic social tradition, a fact that will be emphasized when John Paul II revisits the encyclical twenty years later, transforming the moral duty of solidarity into the “virtue for the interdependent world.”

- *The 1971 World Synod of Bishops*

Before we turn our analysis to John Paul II, however, it is important to briefly note the relevance of a document produced by the Synod of Bishops in 1971. In *Justitia in Mundo*, the world’s bishops present their argument that “Action on behalf of justice

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* §41.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* §47.

and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel.”⁴⁷ Self-reflective and self-critical of the church, the bishops’ emphasis is similar to that of Paul VI insofar as they recognize a challenge for the church to “show in its own life greater cooperation between the churches of rich and poor regions through spiritual communion and division of human and natural resources” so that the church may “be the sign of that solidarity which the family of nations desires.”⁴⁸

Methodologically, *Justitia in Mundo* is important because of its genuine attempt to confront the real situation in the world, with a particular emphasis on structural injustice. Most importantly, the document indicates that personal conversion is conditioned by structural injustice and reform, citing the “objective obstacles which social structures place in the way of conversion of hearts.”⁴⁹ The synod then offered critical analyses of several areas that entail obstacles to full human development: technology, arms proliferation, nationalism, racism, education, and the disproportionate concentration of global wealth. The synod grounded its analysis in an incarnational theology “which affirms that the relation of individuals with their neighbors is intimately bound up with their relation to God.”⁵⁰

As we have seen through our examination of several key documents within the Catholic social tradition, solidarity was certainly a relevant, if developing, moral category guiding the Church’s social teaching prior to the papacy of John Paul II. Minimally,

⁴⁷ Synod of Bishops, “Justitia in Mundo,” in David J. O’Brien and Thomas A. Shannon, eds *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 289.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 297.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 290. Cf. Dorr, *Option for the Poor*, 229.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 287.

solidarity was considered to be a social bond of common humanity that contributed to the common good of peace—interpersonally and internationally. This “thin” description of solidarity, which runs throughout the Catholic social tradition, is universally knowable by the fact of human interdependence as well as an expression of the philosophical insight that humans are to respect one another by virtue of a common reason.

However, in reflecting on the moral relevance of human solidarity to the social challenges of the developing world, each pope and church council pushed the theological and ethical scope of solidarity considerably further than its minimal and somewhat idealized conception. As we have seen, John XXIII expanded the ethical scope of solidarity in the service of peace by bringing it to bear on the economic order of human relationships, applying it to concrete socioeconomic issues such as the distribution of wealth, food, and other economic products as cause for interpersonal and international discord, resentment and violence. Moreover, the Second Vatican Council provided a broader theological account for an understanding of solidarity rooted in both Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, and augmenting this with an incarnational anthropology and ecclesiology. Finally, Paul VI expanded an otherwise descriptive notion of solidarity by acknowledging it as a *moral duty* that applied not only to the economic life of the human person, but to the authentic development of the entire human person and all human associations, from the family all the way to the international order. In rather prophetic terms, Paul declared that the “world is sick”⁵¹—economically, culturally, and spiritually. His “call to action” required

⁵¹ *Populorum et Progressio*, §66.

a concrete commitment to the duty of moral solidarity in every aspect of interpersonal life.

If Pius XII's conception of solidarity can be charged with being too vague and idealized to be of concrete ethical significance, then perhaps Paul VI makes it too inclusive, with similar result. After all, if the duty of solidarity applies to every aspect of authentic human development, how is it related or distinct from other Christian moral duties that contribute to the common good, such as charity, subsidiarity, the commitment to social justice? Even as solidarity developed through four decades of reflection, its moral significance and ethical relevance was still uncertain at Karol Wojtyła's ascendancy to the chair of Peter. The Polish philosopher, actor and moral theologian would have much to clarify in bringing solidarity to the very center of the Catholic social tradition.

CHAPTER TWO

The Development of Solidarity in the Thought of Karol Wojtyła

If solidarity's relevance to Catholic social ethics was developing incrementally with each social document since the papacy of Pius XII, then John Paul II has accelerated its rise to prominence quite dramatically. In order to understand how solidarity has been brought to the very center of John Paul's social teaching, we will examine several key influences in the intellectual and spiritual formation of Karol Wojtyła. In this chapter, we consider Karol Wojtyła's theological and philosophical formation prior to his papacy, and in the next, we will move on to a consideration of solidarity as he employs it in his social teaching as Pope John Paul II.

In this chapter, we will examine three of the major aspects of the development of solidarity in the formation of Wojtyła: his theological and philosophical roots in Thomism and phenomenology; his development of solidarity in his major philosophical work in *The Acting Person*; and finally, the revolutionary spirit of the *Solidarność* labor union—particularly as represented by the thought of Józef Tischner, chaplain to the Solidarity movement—that became a concrete symbol of the philosophy and ethics of solidarity. For the purposes of the present analysis, however, we will remain rather tightly focused on these influences as they relate to the social thought of the man who would become Pope John Paul II.

- *The Theological and Philosophical Roots of Wojtyła's Thought*

Before analyzing the social encyclicals themselves, we would do well to understand a bit of John Paul II's philosophical background, particularly with an eye toward the influence that both Thomistic philosophy and the phenomenological ethics of Max Scheler made on Karol Wojtyła's understanding of solidarity as it was developed in Wojtyła's major philosophical work *The Acting Person*. Charles Curran argues that a close reading of the encyclicals of Pope John Paul II demonstrates an enduring commitment to the incomparable and unique dignity of the human person¹ that is grounded in the pope's philosophical roots in Thomism and phenomenology. Sidestepping the debate among philosophers over whether Wojtyła is best understood as primarily a Thomist or primarily a phenomenologist,² the present analysis will focus on the key aspects of each that shape *The Acting Person* and enable readers to understand the pope's development and articulation of *solidarity* in his encyclicals and major addresses.

After having been introduced to Thomistic theology and then been ordained a priest in the underground seminary in Kraków, Poland in November 1946, Karol Wojtyła departed for Rome to study for a doctorate in theology at the Dominican Pontifical Athe-

¹ Charles Curran, *The Moral theology of Pope John Paul II* (Washington, DC: Georgetown UP, 2005).

² Cf. John McDermott, ed. *The Thought of John Paul II: A collection of essays and studies*. (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1993). This volume collects a series of papers written and presented by Jesuits at two conferences on John Paul II's thought. The argument regarding Wojtyła's primary philosophical disposition as Thomist or phenomenologist is contested in several of the essays, see especially those by Harvarnek, Conley, McCool, McDermott, and Murphy. It should be pointed out, however, that in the Preface to *The Acting Person*, Wojtyła himself acknowledges his philosophical debt both to Thomism and phenomenology, and admits that the work of Max Scheler has been the major influence on his writings on the human person (*Acting Person*, viii).

naeum of St. Thomas Aquinas (“the Angelicum”).³ During his two years in Rome, Wojtyła studied under Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, the leading figure on the Angelicum faculty at the time, and an incontrovertible authority on philosophical and theological Thomism.⁴ According to intellectual biographers, Garrigou-Lagrange provided Wojtyła with rigorous training in the most traditional form of Thomism, though Wojtyła’s work as a student demonstrated that he favored a variety of different interpretations of Thomism. In his theological dissertation on the “The Doctrine of Faith According to St. John of the Cross,” Wojtyła explored “the personal nature of the human encounter with God, in which believers transcend the boundaries of their creaturely existence in such a way that they become more truly and completely themselves.”⁵

Wojtyła’s theological dissertation “reinforced his convictions about the inalienable dignity of the human person” due to the intensely personal nature of the encounter with God, which depends on freedom, self-gift, and the certainty of the mystical experience.⁶ Wojtyła demonstrated an intellectual foundation that resonated with the metaphysical realism at the center of Thomistic philosophy – “that the human mind could grasp the truth of things through a disciplined reflection on the world.”⁷ For Charles Curran and other commentators on the encyclicals of John Paul II, the primacy of truth is one of the most consistent characteristics of this pope’s magisterial contributions. From the point of view of his later studies in phenomenology, it is reasonable to say that in his

³ George Weigel. *Witness to Hope* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999) 79. Cf. Rocco Buttiglione, *Karol Wojtyła: The Thought of the Man who Became Pope John Paul II*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997) 44-53.

⁴ Buttiglione, 34; and Weigel, 85.

⁵ Weigel, 85.

⁶ *Ibid.* and Buttiglione, 46.

⁷ Weigel, 87.

theological dissertation Wojtyła attempted to provide a phenomenological account of the personal knowledge of God experienced in mystical communion, what John of the Cross calls the goal of Christian life: “God by participation.”⁸ Although his theological dissertation was not explicitly a work of phenomenological philosophy, the inherent tension between a commitment to rigid Thomism and a more creative exploration and analysis of the mystical experience would surface again in the moral theology advanced in the encyclicals of Pope John Paul II.⁹

In Wojtyła’s doctoral dissertation in philosophy, he engaged in an extended analysis of the ethics of Max Scheler, one of the foremost thinkers in phenomenology.¹⁰ At the turn of the twentieth century, Edmund Husserl defined *phenomenology* as “the reflective study of the essence of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view.”¹¹ In other words, phenomenology takes as its starting point the structures of conscious human experience of phenomena—not formal ideas or principles from which to deduce, but affective sensory perceptions, intuitions, emotions, volition, desires, action and the meaning that is communicated or experienced through these. Both in his philosophical dissertation as well as in his academic career as a university professor at the Catholic University of Lublin, Karol Wojtyła clearly situated himself in the ongoing con-

⁸ *Ibid.* 86.

⁹ See Curran, *The Moral Theology of Pope John Paul II*, especially Chapter 3 “Ethical Foundations and Method,” 91-124. Curran argues that the pope’s Thomistic commitments are most obvious in his writings on personal and sexual morality, as well as in the encyclical *Veritatis splendor*. The more creative and less classicist phenomenological work, according to Curran, can be found in his writings on social ethics, particularly on *solidarity*.

¹⁰ George Hunston Williams, *The Mind of John Paul II: Origins of His Thought and Action* (New York, NY: Seabury Press, 1981) 115-140. Cf. Peter Hebblethwaite, “Husserl, Scheler, and Wojtyła: A Tale of Three Philosophers,” *Heythrop Journal*, 27 (1986): 441-2. Wojtyła’s second dissertation was titled “An Evaluation of the Possibility of Constructing a Christian Ethics on the Basis of the System of Max Scheler.”

¹¹ David Woodruff Smith, *Husserl* (London-New York: Routledge, 2007) 10.

versation regarding phenomenology and its implications, complete with its characteristic starting point in personal experience rather than the contemplation of particular principles (Kant) or ultimate ends (Aristotelian/Thomistic). This is most evident in Wojtyła's most complete philosophical work, *The Acting Person*.¹²

At first blush, it might seem that Thomism and phenomenology could not converge in a single coherent philosophical stance. According to Buttiglione, for example, even though Wojtyła took Thomistic ethics and anthropology as his primary point of departure,

...he nonetheless continually refers to [Thomas Aquinas'] metaphysics... [which is] usually considered as a variant of a more general philosophy of being, ...a philosophy of the good... The affirmation that God is the summit and source of the order of the good and of that of being is the heart not only of Thomism but of all Christian philosophy. What is more: the Thomistic investigation of being is wholly animated by a movement which leads to a personal encounter with God.¹³

From a methodological point of view, to begin with a teleological consideration of *being*, as characteristic of a Thomistic approach, would be incompatible with the phenomenological starting point of a consideration of personal experience—of consciousness or action. And yet for both Max Scheler and the Polish phenomenologist Roman Ingarden – whom Karol Wojtyła knew personally – “phenomenology is not a philosophical system but a method of philosophical inquiry which can be applied in diverse ways and which can work together with the most diverse philosophies.”¹⁴ Wojtyła, like Scheler and Ingar-

¹² Karol Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, *Analecta Husserliana* vol. 10 (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel, 1979). There has been a considerable debate regarding the English translation of this work originally titled *Osoba i Czyn* (literally, *Person and Act*). The controversy stems from the extent to which the editor may have changed Wojtyła's original text in a way that downplayed the Thomistic elements and emphasized the phenomenological influences.

¹³ Buttiglione, 72-73.

¹⁴ Buttiglione, 55.

den before him, maintained a “fundamentally realistic direction, and a marked interest in the problems of ethical life.”¹⁵ Rather than starting with a philosophy of “being,” Wojtyła’s approach started with an analysis of the person-in-action (or ethics) that led him—inductively—to an experience and ultimate affirmation of Thomistic metaphysics.

Although a detailed discussion of Scheler’s place in the history of phenomenology—the points of contact and divergence between his thought and that of the more well-known Husserl and Heidegger, for example—falls outside of the scope of the present analysis, it is important to understand “the Principle of Solidarity” that is a recurring theme in Scheler’s writings and which had a direct influence on Karol Wojtyła’s articulation of solidarity in *The Acting Person*.¹⁶ Simply expressed, Scheler’s principle of solidarity holds “that persons are essentially social, and that all morally relevant personal acts have an essentially collective or communal dimension.”¹⁷ In other words:

The structure of social acts is such that in performing or in abstaining from performing them I assume a responsibility which cannot be limited to my own person and which necessarily extends to the presence or absence of reactions in others corresponding to my attitude towards them: that is the simplest statement of moral solidarity.¹⁸

According to Scheler, true solidarity participates in the highest form of love between persons—“a strictly moral love between persons. Personal love. . . and the knowledge of common salvation is the bond of unity in the *person-community*.”¹⁹ Members in a true community of persons “relate to each other on the basis of transcendence, co-responsibility, and irreducibility. Social acts are inter-linked and moral acts affect the

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Doran, 27.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Maurice Dupuy, quoted in Doran, 28.

¹⁹ Ernest W. Ranly, quoted in Doran, 41.

community of persons surrounding the acting person.”²⁰ Clearly, Scheler’s concept of “person” is of fundamental importance. This is so because Scheler ascribes personhood to the highest form of social group, and not just to individuals. In Scheler’s system, the individual is connected to the community in a reciprocal relationship such that individual members of a community are co-responsible for the life of the community, just as the collective whole of the community is co-responsible for each of its members.

Similarly, solidarity needs to exist *between* communities (or, on a larger level, nations): “Every social group has its ethos; its own values-to-be-realized, and this is no less true of the *collective person*. . . No one ethos is complete or supra-historical.”²¹ Indeed, according to another Scheler scholar, “The necessary one-sidedness and incompleteness of one nation’s ethos needs to be complemented by the ethoses of other nations. Pluralism is necessary for the whole, since the cultural individuality of one nation is irreplaceable.”²² Despite Wojtyła’s eventual rejection of Scheler’s ethics, scholars note that he preserved portions of Scheler’s sociological insights for later use.²³ As Wojtyła’s intellectual biographer George Williams notes, “He had been stimulated by Scheler to reconceive the human person in terms of his actions, particularly ethical ones, and he would make increasing use of the phenomenological method in reworking his Tho-

²⁰ Doran, 42.

²¹ Doran, 45.

²² Edward Vacek, quoted in Doran, 45.

²³ Williams, 140.

mism.”²⁴ Perhaps nowhere do the thought of Scheler and that of Thomas Aquinas converge so significantly and so originally as in Karol Wojtyła’s *The Acting Person*.²⁵

- *The Acting Person*

First published in Poland in 1969, *The Acting Person* constitutes Wojtyła’s effort to articulate a dynamic understanding of the person through an analysis of the experience of personal, intentional, and free action. In this sense, the work is more concerned with anthropology than ethics. Wojtyła argued that “the dynamic aspect of being, and of the Person in particular, while not in any sense denied, is not given its full weight in the thought of St. Thomas.”²⁶ Employing the phenomenological method, Wojtyła proceeds to provide a more adequate account of the dynamic person as revealed through one’s free actions. “The thesis,” according to philosopher Josef Seifert, “clearly seems to be that in acting as it involves free self-possession, self-determination, and self-governance, the person qua person realizes and shows himself most profoundly, especially in the morally good action.”²⁷

The first section of the book focuses on what is meant by “action.” According to Buttiglione:

The Acting Person is neither an attempt to demonstrate that man is a person nor an attempt to classify human acts from the point of view of their personalistic

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ In light of the aforementioned controversy surrounding the English edition of the text, my summary relies mainly on the careful work of Josef Seifert, Rocco Buttiglione, and Kevin Doran. See Seifert, Josef. “Karol Cardinal Wojtyła (Pope John Paul II) as Philosopher and the Cracow/Lublin School of Philosophy.” *Aletheia* vol. II, 1981. Web download on March 30, 2008, pp. 1-41, see URL: http://www.iap.li/oldversion/site/research/Aletheia/Aletheia_II/Aletheia2.pdf

²⁶ Doran, 124. Cf. *The Acting Person*, 27-28.

²⁷ Seifert, 3.

value. It is a question, rather, of understanding how a human being is a person, in which way the *person reveals himself in action*, and how the action can serve to interpret the person who dynamically manifests himself only in his acting.²⁸

The very term “action” is grounded in the Thomistic understanding of the “*actus humanus*,” which is properly understood as an act of intelligence and freedom, and therefore entails moral responsibility. In Wojtyła’s phenomenological analysis, the person is first known as a subject of actions, and then—and at the same time, and because persons are self-determining—simultaneously as an object of the actions.²⁹

In the second part of *The Acting Person*, Wojtyła argues that ultimately a person becomes oneself most fully through *moral* action—which he painstakingly characterizes as conscious, intentional, self-possessing and self-governing (through the activity of the will), self-determining, and free. Dissatisfied with the scholastic characterization of the will as a “rational appetite,” Wojtyła presents the will as the free expression of the personal dynamism of man.³⁰ The act of the will involves the entire structure of the person and manifests a person’s transcendence in action.³¹

²⁸ Buttiglione, 125.

²⁹ Buttiglione aptly describes this: “A large part of the philosophical tradition has correctly linked the will to the object, because willing is always willing something. However, this fact should not lead us to forget that the first object toward which an act of will turns is the subject itself, and that it is only by passing through the subject that it is able to reach the object. This contradicts Scheler’s view, for he does not want to consider the person as an object; especially in the case of moral action he assumes the subject to be completely disinterested, so that the improvement and perfection of the subject who acts never appears as an object of the action.” Buttiglione, 143.

³⁰ Doran, 133.

³¹ Buttiglione, 143. A note from Doran about transcendence: “It is in the exercise of the freedom of his will, or self-determination, that the person transcends himself in the action. . . . When Wojtyła uses the term transcendence, he uses it in a double sense. Man transcends himself in knowledge by possessing objects which are outside of himself, and this is what Wojtyła refers to as *horizontal* transcendence. When Wojtyła refers to the transcendence of the person in the action, however, he means that the person, as it were, steps beyond the boundaries of his fixed nature. This transcendence is what Wojtyła calls *vertical* [also *immanent*] transcendence because it involves the person’s possession of himself as object.” Doran, 131-132.

For Wojtyła, the twin structure of human willing and acting “serves as the basis of morality...and it is only because of the structures of self-determination and self-fulfillment that man’s willing of objects external to himself has any lasting personal significance.”³² Moreover by doing good, a person becomes good; and by doing evil, one becomes evil.³³ According to Wojtyła, the activity of the conscience is not merely cognitive; conscience has an active role in distinguishing the element of moral good in the action, forming a sense of duty with respect to the good, and subordinating one’s freedom to the moral truth of that good.³⁴ As Buttiglione explains, only in freedom can a person acknowledge and submit oneself to the sense of duty which is the manifestation of the fact that the person’s self-realization depends on the truth.³⁵ A person’s free response to a good is what constitutes moral value, and a person’s willing submission to the truth is a moment of (vertical) self-transcendence of the person in the action—the subject becomes an object in the sense that it is the first to sustain the effects of its own action. In effect this is a description of virtue ethics: the person becomes more fully a person by engaging in the act most proper to persons. In other words, person and action are not two separate and self-sufficient entities, but rather “a single deeply cohesive reality.”³⁶

In the third section of *The Acting Person*, Wojtyła considers the integration of the person in action, specifically in regard to how psycho-physical dynamisms (such as feel-

³² Doran, 135.

³³ In Wojtyła’s own words, “Existentially, every action is some kind of fulfillment of the person. Axiologically, however, this fulfillment is reached only through the good, while moral evil leads...to non-fulfillment.” *Acting Person*, 153. Seifert identifies the “*will to truth*” as the key to authentic vertical transcendence: “Only in the good action, which is based on the *will to truth*, the authentic transcendence of man in freedom is found.” Seifert, 26.

³⁴ Doran, 135.

³⁵ Buttiglione, 150.

³⁶ Doran 134-136. See also *Acting Person*, 149.

ings, sentiments, emotions, and instincts) “play an active role in self-determination, ...in making the human person’s freedom emerge.”³⁷ In other words, the most appropriate actualization of human potentiality must involve the “various elements that constitute the persons as a single dynamic ontological whole.”³⁸ Just as a person can be said to be a *free* and self-governing self in one’s will and action, here Wojtyła—the good phenomenologist—acknowledges that humans are also *governed* by their own material bodies and psychological dynamics. Integration is the term that designates when a person achieves the appropriate relation between the various dynamisms of the (non-free) *soma* and the *psyche* – in action, psychic and somatic events are at once subordinated to the control of the will, and at the same time take on an active role in the person’s transcendence. If integration does not happen, one’s activities may not rise to the level of personhood – in this sense, one might be described as living as an “animal” inasmuch as one’s activities are entirely dominated by nature or sensitive appetites that are independent of one’s self-governing will.³⁹ The psychic and somatic dynamisms are not entirely independent of one another—feelings and emotions are often reactions to physical sensations of the body. There are some psychic phenomena that are not rooted in the body at all, however, and these include aesthetic, religious, and moral feelings, which provide the evidence that “the emotive element in [man] somehow corresponds to what is spiritual and not merely sensual.”⁴⁰

³⁷ *Acting Person*, 199.

³⁸ Doran, 137.

³⁹ Seifert, 29.

⁴⁰ Doran, 139, quoting *Acting Person*, 231.

Through integration, according to Wojtyła, a person's self-transcending will (expressed outwardly in action) is both reconciled and united with what happens involuntarily inside oneself (expressed inwardly in feelings, emotions, and affect). The somatic and the psychic dynamisms can be integrated into the will and its action through self-discipline, training, and the cultivation of virtue. The essential feature of integration, however, is that moral proficiency or virtue does not suppress the emotions, just as the cultivation of motor-skills do not suppress involuntary bodily reactions.⁴¹ Ideally—as with the repetition of virtuous acts over time—in integration the energies of the body and the emotions will begin to resonate with the will seeking transcendence and fulfillment through moral action. As Wojtyła argues, the fundamental good which the person must realize is one's fulfillment or realization as a person; for the person who is well-integrated, self-realization will bring happiness:

As the process of integration progresses there develops a greater correspondence between the active and the affective dimensions in man with the “result that the will—guided by the light of reason—learns how by spontaneous reference to emotion...to choose and to adopt the real good.”⁴²

In the fourth part (the final chapter) of *The Acting Person*, Wojtyła considers the topics of intersubjectivity and community—existentially and phenomenologically speaking, the person is never an isolated subject. Accordingly, integration refers not only to the inner unity within a person, but also to the unity achieved between persons in community.⁴³ This final chapter of *The Acting Person* is the only place in which Wojtyła develops the concept of *solidarity* in his philosophical writings prior to becoming Pope

⁴¹ Doran 140.

⁴² Doran 141, quoting *Acting Person*, 253.

⁴³ Seifert, 32.

John Paul II. In this chapter, Wojtyła introduces the concept of solidarity as an authentic attitude that allows the realization of the person through participation in community.⁴⁴

The attitude of solidarity is...the natural consequence of the fact that human beings live and act together; it is the attitude of a community in which the common good properly conditions and initiates participation, and participation in turn properly serves the common good, fosters it and furthers its realization. Solidarity means a constant readiness to accept and to realize one's share in the community because of one's membership within that particular community.⁴⁵

When Wojtyła refers to solidarity as the “attitude of a community,” one must wonder whether he would consider a community to be a “collective person,” in the sense that Max Scheler would, as “not simply a community made up of persons, in which the whole is no more than the sum of its parts... [But] as fulfilling all the requirements... of person as a ‘unity of all spiritual acts directed to a world in and for itself, including the entire range of values.’”⁴⁶ According to Doran, however, the community is not a subject, so it only makes sense to speak of “the attitude of a community” understood as “the holding in common, or together of personal attitudes by a plurality of persons, in respect of one or more other persons.”⁴⁷ Solidarity, therefore, entails a spirit of reciprocity between the community and each of the subjects who participate within it, a “constant readiness to accept and to realize one's share in the community because of one's membership within that particular community.”⁴⁸ It is the function of solidarity both to promote the common good through the participation of individual persons, and to promote also the good of the individual personal subjects.

⁴⁴ Buttiglione, 172.

⁴⁵ *Acting Person*, 288.

⁴⁶ Doran, 41, quoting Vacek.

⁴⁷ Doran, 151.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

The common good upon which the community of persons depends is the set of conditions that enable persons to achieve transcendent and integrated self-realization through action. One who participates in community must be careful not to infringe upon the obligations and duties of others, but also be ready to go beyond the limits of one's own normal responsibilities on behalf of the good of others when they are incapacitated or unable to do so themselves. If a member of the community is ill, for example, and unable to fulfill her responsibilities toward herself and the common good, then one must be prepared to intervene:

In such a situation, to keep strictly to one's own share would mean, in fact, lack of solidarity. Such a possibility indicates that in the attitude of solidarity, the reference to the common good must always remain alive; it must dominate to the extent that it allows one to know when it is necessary to take over more than one's usual share in acting and responsibility.⁴⁹

Each community (and each subject usually participates in many communities) is united by a particular participation of persons "together with others." The common good for each community, therefore, is a limited and particular expression of the universal common good.

Membership in particular communities is often an accident – by birth, one participates in a particular family rather than another, for example. At the most specific level of family or village, the attitude of solidarity is intimately bound to one's sense of one's personal nature and shared responsibility. However, the attitude of solidarity is not grounded in an emotional attachment. Rather, solidarity is an ontological reality that at its most universal level corresponds to the common good of all human persons. The pri-

⁴⁹ Doran 152.

mary experience of a particular community such as family or tribe “also limits and, in some respects removes to a more distant plane or even overshadows the broader concept of neighbor.”⁵⁰ In this sense, Wojtyła defines “neighbors” as all human persons—united in the community of those who participate in the universal common good. Wojtyła notes that the challenge is to broaden the scope of each person so that they see beyond the particular responsibilities of family and local community to include all human “neighbors” in the exercise of solidarity. Wojtyła defines *alienation* as “the disregard for, or neglect of, that depth of participation which is indicated in the term neighbor and by the neglect of the interrelations...of men in their humanness expressed by this term which indicates the most fundamental principle of any real community.”⁵¹ Although Wojtyła does not refer to solidarity as a virtue in *The Acting Person*, an analogy can be made here when one considers that the proper integration of the person in community will require the appropriate unity of subjective freedom along with a commitment to act together with others on behalf of a common good. Practicing the virtue of solidarity would be analogous to exercising the virtues that integrate the psychic and somatic energies into the free self-realization of the will in action.

Wojtyła identifies *opposition* as another authentic attitude that is consistent with solidarity and the common good of persons acting together with others. In this context, opposition is not directed toward the common good, or to other members in the community, but instead opposition is a constructive disposition regarding the manner in which

⁵⁰ *Acting Person*, 293.

⁵¹ *Acting Person*, 297.

participation is oriented toward the common good.⁵² The attitude of opposition is a manifestation of the reality that “self-fulfillment depends not only on freedom, but also on truth.”⁵³

The person who engages in constructive opposition subjects his participation in the community to the reference to truth. In this way he ensures that his participation will not take a form which conflicts either with the common good, or with the true good of any person in the community, including himself.⁵⁴

If solidarity is the attitude “that ensures appropriate participation,” then opposition is the attitude “that excludes inappropriate participation.”⁵⁵ In light of the authentic attitudes of solidarity and opposition, Wojtyła clearly conceives of the common good “dynamically and not statically,” in that the common good “must liberate and support the attitude of solidarity but never to such a degree such as to stifle opposition.”⁵⁶ Wojtyła identifies the principle of *dialogue* as the process whereby the community refers opposition to the judgment of truth.⁵⁷ Through dialogue, participants engaging in opposition and solidarity are able to evaluate the motives of the community and to reassess the creative collaboration toward the common good.

Wojtyła argues that the practice and interpretation of both solidarity and opposition have to be constantly tested “inasmuch as each respects the personalistic value of the action.” The touchstone for such discernment, according to Wojtyła, is the “dynamic subordination of action to truth that is so essential for the person’s transcendence in the ac-

⁵² Doran, 157. See also *Acting Person*, 287.

⁵³ Doran, 157.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Acting Person*, 287.

⁵⁷ Although Wojtyła’s section on *dialogue* is woefully short, the concept seems to correspond well both to David Hollenbach’s notion of “intellectual solidarity” as well as David Tracy’s dialogical notion of solidarity.

tion.”⁵⁸ The proper subordination of action to truth is reflected in “the righteous conscience, the ultimate judge of the authenticity of human attitudes.”⁵⁹ Without a commitment to such discernment, a community risks the nonauthentic attitudes of conformism and non-involvement.⁶⁰

Conformism is an inauthentic attitude that represents a corruption of solidarity and an evasion of opposition. Conformism is “a specific form of submission to the existing situation with which one cannot consent according to one’s own conscience, but which one does not have the courage to oppose.”⁶¹ In short, conformism results in the utter subordination of one’s will to the will of the others in the community. The person remains unfulfilled, even if the appearance is that the person is actively participating in the common good—which is also impoverished by that one’s lack of a properly oriented participation.⁶²

Non-involvement (also called avoidance or disengagement) refers to the attitude of those who refuse even to engage in a pretense of participation (as the conformist would).⁶³ Rather than engaging in constructive opposition, the disengaged individual is disinterested in the end of the community and openly declares oneself an outsider.⁶⁴ At times, non-involvement merges with conformism to foment mistrust, disinterest and criticism while avoiding any responsibility to elaborate alternatives. However, both the indi-

⁵⁸ *Acting Person*, 288.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Acting Person*, 289. Buttiglione refers “disengagement” rather than “non-involvement.” Buttiglione, 174-6.

⁶¹ Buttiglione, 174.

⁶² Doran, 159.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Buttiglione, 174.

vidual and community suffer by these attitudes – the individual abandons the striving for fulfillment in acting “together with others,” and the community from the lack of participation of persons oriented to authentic fulfillment in the context of the truth of the common good.

At the close of his book on the ontology of the person, Wojtyła engages in a brief analysis of the love commandment, not so much in terms of its ethical value as in terms of its anthropological meaning.⁶⁵ All particular communities of persons arise on the basis of a common humanity; the notion of *neighbor* is prior to, and sustains, the notion of *membership in a community*. In other words, at the base of every authentic human community is the recognition of the human person, which is what the Christian commandment to love one’s neighbor as oneself emphasizes. Wojtyła considers the love commandment to be the answer to the problem of human alienation – both for self and others:

In the light of the hierarchy of the systems outlined here and of the personalistic implications of the evangelical commandment of love we must remember in actual-life conduct the necessity of so coordinating acting and being ‘together with others’ as to protect the fundamental and privileged position of the ‘neighbor.’ This will afford us the best protection from the dangers of alienation; in order to avoid this latter our concern must be to make the system of reference to the neighbor the ultimate criterion in the development of the coexistence and cooperation of men in the communities and the societies that are established at different levels and according to different intracommunal bonds.⁶⁶

Wojtyła is particularly interested in establishing broad, fundamental social protections that prevent the alienation of any individual, both for the fundamental preservation of those individuals, but also for the preservation of the common good of the entire human community. “The commandment of love is also the measure of the tasks and demands

⁶⁵ Buttiglione, 175.

⁶⁶ *Acting Person*, 298.

that have to be faced by all men – all persons and all communities – if the whole good contained in the acting and being “together with others” is to become a reality.”⁶⁷

- *The Context of revolutionary Poland: Solidarność and Józef Tischner*

Now that we have examined Karol Wojtyła’s philosophical roots and considered the development of the concept of solidarity in his own philosophical writing, we would do well to consider the revolutionary context of Poland at the time that Wojtyła became Pope John Paul II, as the uprising in Poland most certainly captured his attention, as well as that of the wider world. After decades under a socialist system that was forced upon the countries of the Soviet bloc, by the mid-1970s the crisis of work in Poland had reached a tipping point.⁶⁸ Although the economic crisis was decades in the making, the proximate cause of the 1980 strikes was a government decision to raise the prices of goods (to help pay off foreign debt) while slowing the growth of wages and firing workers.

In August 1980, incensed by the firing of workers at the Lenin Shipyards in the Polish port of Gdańsk, laborers united behind the leadership of the electrician Lech Wałęsa (who himself had been fired four years earlier) to stage a strike to protest not only the labor conditions of the day, but the decades of oppression and alienation that workers experienced under the socialist system. The union staged a massive, nonviolent strike that halted production in the shipyards, making demands including the protection of basic

⁶⁷ *Acting Person*, 298-299.

⁶⁸ For a detailed account of the historical context leading up to the birth of the *Solidarność* labor union, see Timothy Garton Ash’s *The Polish Revolution: Solidarity* (Yale UP, 2002).

workers' rights and the legalization of independent trade and labor unions. Emboldened by the Gdańsk workers, nascent labor unions and organizing efforts at other factories in cities across the country soon followed the lead by engaging work stoppages of their own, and making increased demands such as an end to government censorship of information, new freedoms for the Church, and improvements to the health and other social systems. With work stoppages at all of the ports along the coast, the workers effectively shut down the Polish economy. By the end of August, after several weeks of strikes and facing economic ruin, the government handed the workers their first major victory, giving in to many of their demands, including the rights of workers to organize independently and to strike when necessary.

Emboldened by their success, in September 1980 Wałęsa and strike leaders from around the country formally established *Solidarność* (Solidarity), the first non-communist labor union ever to form in a communist country. By consolidating the various worker movements into a national organization with an independent and democratically-based governing structure, the *Solidarność* union soon had eighty percent of the country's workforce signed up as members. By employing nonviolent strategies of protest and resistance, the union advocated for political change without giving the government an excuse to use military force. Very quickly, the organization transcended its role as a labor union, and came to represent a revolutionary social movement, utterly incompatible and at odds with the ruling communist party. In late 1981, the Polish government declared martial law and began to actively suppress the *Solidarność* union, jailing the union's leaders and thousands of union supporters, and effectively forcing the movement

underground until 1989, when it would reemerge and become the catalyst for the collapse of the failing soviet system.

Our interest in the *Solidarność* union vis-à-vis the development of solidarity in the Catholic social tradition lies not as much in the historical details of its emergence, success, suppression and triumph—details, incidentally, that captured the attention and engendered the support of the entire non-communist world—but rather in a consideration of the philosophical and religious foundations of this social phenomenon, and to consider the points of contact and contrast with the thinking and writings of Karol Wojtyła/Pope John Paul II. To do this, we will consider the work of the priest and philosopher Józef Tischner, the first chaplain of the *Solidarność* union whose homilies and writings provided the philosophical and moral foundations for the revolutionary movement.

- *Tischner's contribution to Solidarity*

By way of background, Józef Stanisław Tischner was a Polish priest and philosopher. Born in 1931, he was a contemporary of Karol Wojtyła who was ten years his senior. Like Wojtyła, he entered the priesthood through the seminary in the archdiocese of Kraków, where at one point Wojtyła was his teacher. Like Wojtyła, Tischner was drawn to phenomenology. He received his doctorate in philosophy in 1963, working under Roman Ingarden, the Polish phenomenologist who had been one of Husserl's best students. Because Tischner is not very well known in the United States, it's difficult for Americans to come to terms with the extent of his influence and popularity in Poland, particularly in

and around the city of Kraków, where he taught philosophy in the Pontifical Theological Academy and lectured in the department of philosophy at the Jagiellonian University.

Academically, Tischner was known as a philosopher of value and dialogue. He was a leading figure in the Christian-Marxist dialogue that took place in the two decades prior to the Polish revolution of 1989. His most influential writings in the decade prior to the revolution focused on ethics, anthropology, and the practical and moral problems of work. For the purposes of this investigation, we shall focus on Tischner's influence and leadership as the philosophical advisor and chaplain to the *Solidarność* movement, which became the main instrument of Poland's nonviolent triumph over communist socialism.

In 1980, Tischner collected a series of essays—several of which were originally composed as homilies for liturgies with striking workers—into a little book called *The Ethics of Solidarity*, in which he laid out, in very straightforward and accessible language, several foundational ideas that provided the philosophical and moral framework for the *Solidarność* revolution.⁶⁹ Taken together, Tischner's ideas provide a compelling window into the philosophical dimension of solidarity as it was understood and practiced by the Polish workers who were resisting communist rule. While these ideas may seem obvious to those in the West, they had been all but vitiated by Marxist ideology and the philosophical assumptions of communist socialism. For the purpose of illuminating the understanding of solidarity operative in the Polish context from which Karol Wojtyła emerged as John Paul II, we shall emphasize three aspects of solidarity represented by Tischner's

⁶⁹ Józef Tischner. *Etyka Solidarności*, (Krakow: Znak, 1981). Translated into English as *The Spirit of Solidarity*, Marek B. Zaleski and Benjamin Fiore, S.J., trans. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984).

work: first, the inherent dignity and value of the human person, a dignity rooted particularly in the human conscience; second, Tischner's ideas on human sociality particularly expressed in the fact of human interdependence and a person's encounter with the other; and finally, because it featured so largely both in Tischner's writings and in the Polish revolution, the role of work, and its relationship to human solidarity and justice.

Over and against the materialist view of history and humanity, the foundational philosophical insight to Tischner's philosophical account of solidarity is that there is an inherent dignity and value to the human person in and of itself. Certainly this is not a new idea; it is at least as old as the Judeo-Christian tradition. However, Tischner articulated this idea in the context of communist-controlled Poland. According to Tischner,

Both Marxists and Christians proclaim the human as highest value, but with different meanings. To Marxists, the human is the highest value exclusively on the horizon of work in society and because of such work. The socialist hero exists and is fulfilled on the human-world axis (the material axis). The Christian hero's axis [is person-person, and, implicitly, person-God].⁷⁰

In a Christian anthropology, human dignity is more deeply rooted than solely in a person's actual or potential work, or in the individual's link to the collective. A human person is valuable in oneself, principally by creation and even more so in light of the incarnation and crucifixion.

Because of the Polish context, Tischner's apology for Christian personalism bears more contemporary relevance than some of the more classical arguments for human dignity. Tischner—like the philosopher Karol Wojtyła—used the philosophical method of phenomenology to describe the value of the human person, and thereby re-presented tra-

⁷⁰ Helena Czosnyka, *The Polish Challenge: Foundations for Dialogue in the Works of Adam Schaff and Józef Tischner* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995) 73.

ditional Catholic anthropology with a modern interpretation. The existential cornerstone of human dignity, of course, is the human conscience. Tischner writes, “The ethic of solidarity intends to be an ethic of conscience. It assumes that human beings are endowed with conscience... Authentic solidarity,” he continues, “is a solidarity of consciences. This is clear because to be in solidarity with a person means to rely on that person, and to rely on a person means to believe that there is something permanent in a person, something that does not fail.”⁷¹ What does not fail is the inherent dignity of all persons endowed with the ability to apprehend and choose truth. Tischner emphasized this classic appreciation of human personhood into a cultural context where human value was considered in material terms, external to the very “being” of the human person.

The second aspect of Tischner’s philosophical account of solidarity is the acknowledgment of human sociality—specifically, human interdependence. For Tischner, this was a point of overlap between Christianity and Marxism, a starting point for dialogue. As valuable as each human person is in and of itself, to be human means to be inextricably bound to others. What does it mean to be in solidarity? Tischner writes,

It means to carry the burden of another person. No one is an island all alone. We are bound to each other even if we do not know it. The landscape binds us, flesh and blood bind us, work and speech bind us. However, we are not always conscious of these bonds. When solidarity is born, this consciousness is awakened, and then speech and word appear, and at that point something that was hidden becomes manifest. All our bonds become visible. Then one person shoulders the burden of another. Solidarity speaks, calls, cries, undertakes sacrifice. Then the burden of one’s fellow human often becomes greater than one’s own.⁷²

⁷¹ *Spirit of Solidarity*, 7.

⁷² *Ibid.*

As a philosopher of dialogue, Tischner studied and debated the ideas of Husserl, Habermas, and Levinas, and he therefore took the problem “the other” seriously. “Encountering another brings me face to face with what is beyond me,” Tischner writes, “The other person is transcendence for me. The other’s presence brings me an intuition of existence and self—not ‘neutral’ or ‘pure’ existence, but existence played out in a human drama.” The experience of another person, according to Tischner, persuades as no object can:

The other is. The other comes, goes, speaks, stares, obligates, commits, and elicits a response from me. The possibility for dialogue on the level of human existence unfolds as together we participate in the same drama and in the same choices for or against truth and freedom. We form a horizon for each other for authentic human action.⁷³

The fact that humans are able to recognize the inherent value and dignity of other persons draws humans into relationships of interdependence and self-transcendence.

According to Tischner the encounter with another who is suffering elicits a distinctively personal reaction, inasmuch as it is an opportunity for one to stop and to consider that which is problematic in human existence. In short, the encounter with another is an opportunity for a person to assume one’s freedom in thinking and considering possibilities in the face of the tragic.⁷⁴ The encounter with another who is particularly vul-

⁷³ Tischner, “Fenomenologia spotkania”, 75. Quoted in Czosnyka, p. 76.

⁷⁴ Józef Tischner, “Thinking and Creativity” in *The Philosophy of Person: Solidarity and Cultural Creativity* (Washington, D.C.: Paideia Press & The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1994). Tischner writes,

“Nothing can give us as much to think of as a meeting with another’s existential tragedy... Thinking is not a forced response, but a choice from among many possibilities. Thoughtlessness may take the form of fear and manifest itself in turning away from the tragic and escape into forgetfulness, dissipation and self-deception. It may also manifest itself in acquiescence to defeat, a resignation in the face of brute force, as a sacrifice of oneself without any hope of victory. But thinking is neither one nor the other, for to think is again to look straight into the eyes of negativity and to stop there. To think is to ask, and to ask is to see the problem of that which itself is problematic in human existence. To ask questions in a situation that leaves open various possible courses is equivalent to assuming one’s own freedom. Thus, thinking is instituting freedom in the face of the

nerable, or whose dignity has been compromised presents an opportunity for a person to be more human, to exercise freedom and to be more cognizant of the interdependence and self-transcendence that are key to human solidarity.

The final aspect of Tischner's account of solidarity is his understanding of work, and how work is a component of a just society when work springs from human conscience. In Tischner's analysis, the crisis in Polish society that preceded the *Solidarność* revolution stemmed largely from an existential crisis of work—the *Solidarność* movement was, after all, a confederation of labor unions. According to Tischner, human work is a type of social dialogue in which persons communicate what is true and therefore valuable. For a person to choose to work is to express the value that life is worth serving—both one's own life and the life of those with whom one works. "By working," Tischner writes, "I am joining in the conversation that was already in progress before I was born. I am a link between the past and the future."⁷⁵

In this manner, to work is to join in and to be engaged by a community in conversation about what it values. Under the structure of socialist Poland, however, work was stripped of this dialogical nature. Everyone in Poland had a job, but the jobs were often meaningless—the production of parts, of example, that were not compatible with any machines. The socialist economic system in Poland did not consider work to be a dialogical conversation about authentic human values. The result was injustice—the failure

tragic. Thinking attains freedom, and does so by simply assuming it." (*Thinking and Creativity* 17)

⁷⁵ *Spirit of Solidarity*, 14-15; Cf. Józef Tischner, *Polska jest ojczyzną* (Krakow: Znak, 1985), 184-5.

of the socialist system to acknowledge and respect the dignity of human persons and human sociality expressed in work.

In an authentic work situation, humans become increasingly human not despite work but because of it. “Our basic problem is not an economic one;” Tischner wrote, “neither is it political. Economics and politics are only derivative problems. Our basic problem is a problem of conscience. At issue is for conscience to begin to govern our entire work.”⁷⁶ By engaging in labor one is cooperating in history’s creation, since work is a particular form of interpersonal conversation in life’s service. One’s life is a basic value—for without it one cannot choose values that give life meaning. Thanks to the value of life that is served by work, work acquires its own value and dignity. Therefore, human activity that brings death instead of serving life is not work.⁷⁷ Work’s internal logic strives toward a communion of people in such a way that solidarity does not supplement work but is its natural outcome. As the political work of a community, justice cannot but begin with an authentic dialogue about the values that are to be expressed and served by work.

Although Tischner’s writings do not constitute official Catholic social teaching on solidarity, his contributions certainly represent the kind of non-official reflection and praxis that fills out Catholic social thought beyond the encyclicals.⁷⁸ Grounded in the

⁷⁶ *Spirit of Solidarity*, 130.

⁷⁷ *Spirit of Solidarity*, 16.

⁷⁸ For more on the distinction between official Catholic social thought (typically presented by papal encyclicals, the Catechism, and other official documents of the magisterium) and the non-official contributions of philosophers, theologians, and the praxis of other members of the faithful, see the fine collection of essays edited by J.S. Boswell, F.P. McHugh, and J. Verstraeten. *Catholic Social Thought: Twilight or Renaissance?* (Leuven UP, 2000). One of the driving themes of this collection of essays is to consider Catholic social thought beyond the encyclicals.

dignity of the human conscience and the fact of human interdependence, Tischner presents a compelling account of solidarity as the praxis of a community engaged in work, in conversation about what it values.⁷⁹ A commitment to solidarity, therefore, entails not only an intellectual commitment to the dignity of the human conscience and the fact of human interdependence, but also to the work of dialogical engagement about common values. From Tischner, we learn that solidarity entails a personalist understanding of work, an acknowledgement of human sociality and intersubjectivity, and a particular commitment to the praxis of dialogue.

Did the writings of Józef Tischner have a direct influence on the development of solidarity in the thought of Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II? After decades as friends, brother priests, and philosophical colleagues there is little doubt.⁸⁰ Having departed Kraków two years earlier as the surprising choice to succeed the month-long papacy of John Paul I, Wojtyła was undoubtedly very concerned about the revolutionary changes brewing in his home country—so much so that he sent a letter to Leonid Brezhnev, General Secretary of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union, arguing on behalf of Polish sovereignty in the hope of discouraging a Soviet invasion in response to the bold and independent *Solidarność* union. Moreover, the dramatic succession of *Solidarność* labor strikes, victories, and new challenges between August 1980 and March 1981 had captured the

⁷⁹ Tischner's account of solidarity is quite similar to what David Hollenbach has described as "intellectual solidarity" in chapter six of *The Common Good & Christian Ethics* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2002), pp. 137-8 [Hollenbach's discussion concerns dialogue in a pluralistic context]: "This common pursuit of a shared vision of the good life can be called intellectual solidarity. It is an intellectual endeavor, for it calls for serious thinking by citizens about what their distinctive understandings of the good imply for the life of a society made up by people with many different traditions. It is a form of solidarity because it can only occur in an active dialogue of mutual listening and speaking across the boundaries of religion and culture. Indeed, a dialogue that seeks to understand those with different visions of the good life is already a form of solidarity even when disagreement continues to exist."

⁸⁰ Weigel, 419; Czosnyka, 68.

world's attention, and the pope's good friend Józef Tischner occupied a high-profile role both as chaplain and as philosopher. Tischner's leadership was all the more important because it demonstrated the common cause and newfound unity between workers, the Church, and the nation's intelligentsia.⁸¹

Although the pope had been preparing his first major social encyclical for release on May 15, 1981 – to commemorate the ninetieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum* – the encyclical was delayed for four months due to the failed assassination attempt in which John Paul was shot in the abdomen at point-blank range. However, the pope continued to revise and improve upon the encyclical during his convalescence, and the final product, *Laborem Exercens* (On Human Work), published on September 14, 1981, demonstrates several points of contact between the thought of the Polish pope and the ethics of solidarity and work playing out in his home country.⁸²

⁸¹ In 1982, Tischner was involved in the launching of the Institute for Human Sciences in Vienna, a small community of scholars with the common goal of fostering dialogue between the thinkers of Eastern and Western Europe. Tischner was its first president. In 1983, Pope John Paul II invited the small community of scholars to the first of many biennial summer institutes at Castel Gandolfo, which the pope himself—ever interested in intellectual exchange—would attend and participate in up through 1999. George Weigel remarks, “The Castel Gandolfo seminars were a Roman variant on the discussions with academics that Father Józef Tischner organized and Cardinal Wojtyła hosted at his residence in Kraków.” (Weigel 466) See also Leszek Kołakowski. “Józef Tischner.” *Dialogue and Universalism*, vol. X, no. 9-10, 2000. pp. 127-129. (Reprinted from *The Independent*, 7 July 2000.)

⁸² Many commentators see the most overlap between Tischner and the thought of Pope John Paul II in *Laborem Exercens*. Cf. Weigel, 419; Czosnyka, 68.

CHAPTER THREE

Solidarity in the Social Encyclicals of John Paul II

With three major social encyclicals,¹ Pope John Paul II has contributed more to the official canon of Catholic social teaching than any other recent pope. Of particular interest to the present analysis, *solidarity* has a prominent place in each of the social encyclicals (and it should be noted that the word “solidarity” appears in eleven of his fourteen encyclicals). In this section, we will examine Pope John Paul II’s use of the term solidarity in each of the social encyclicals, making reference as well as to relevant papal addresses and letters that provide additional insight into the meaning of solidarity in the pope’s social teaching.

- *Laborem Exercens*

As we have already seen, Pope John Paul II’s first social encyclical is *Laborem Exercens* (“On Human Work”), originally prepared for promulgation on the ninetieth anniversary of Leo XIII’s *Rerum Novarum*, but delayed by the assassination attempt on the pope and his subsequent convalescence. In *Laborem Exercens*, the pope sets out to extend and update Leo’s critique of the condition of labor practices to the contemporary

¹ I am referring here to *Laborem Exercens*, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, and *Centesimus Annus*; though some moral theologians and ethicists may also add *Familiaris Consortio*—which deals with the family as the basic social unit of society—to the count of social encyclicals. In either case, John Paul II has contributed more to the canon of Catholic social thought than any other. All of John Paul II’s encyclicals are preserved online at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/index.htm. (Accessed June 15, 2009.)

situation. Looking back over the ninety years of concern for laborers expressed in the documents of the Catholic social tradition, the pope sees a history of commitment to solidarity; in John Paul's words, even *Rerum Novarum* consisted of a "call to solidarity and common action addressed to the workers."²

Like Józef Tischner, Pope John Paul II presents a rather "thick" understanding of work in *Laborem Exercens*. In the prologue to the document, the pope provides a broad definition of work that includes not only the activity by which one earns one's daily bread, but all activity through which humans "contribute to the continual advance of science and technology and, above all, to elevating unceasingly the cultural and moral level of the society within which he lives in community with those who belong to the same family."³ According to the pope, work is a distinctively human activity, and work is "the mark of a person operating within a community of persons. And this mark decides its interior characteristics; in a sense it constitutes its very nature."⁴ Just as Tischner argued that work could best be understood as one's participation in a conversation about what one values, so too does John Paul II regard work as human action that is fundamentally social and is therefore "a key, probably the essential key"⁵ to the entire question of justice in human society.

In *Laborem Exercens*, John Paul II elaborates a personalist understanding of work⁶ that "grounds the fundamental rights of the worker, does away with the distinction of peoples according to classes, provides the basis for worker solidarity, and emphasizes

² John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, 1981, §8.

³ *Laborem Exercens*, prologue.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, §3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, §6.

the primacy of labor over capital.”⁷ John Paul II grounds the subjective understanding of work in the theological context of persons made in the *imago Dei*, and the extent to which work is an opportunity for self-expression and realization in community.⁸

To put it briefly, “The primary basis of the value of work is man himself.”⁹ This important insight stands in stark contradistinction to the errors of both Marxism and capitalism, which both tend to treat workers as objects and commodities rather than as subjects. Both economic systems treat workers as instruments of production.¹⁰ By exploiting workers as instruments of production, industrialization created “a great burst of solidarity among workers,”¹¹ including the formation of labor unions that do not strive for class struggle, but instead for social justice.¹²

It is hard to read the section of *Laborem Exercens* on unions without considering the simultaneous context of Poland—and the writings of Józef Tischner—at the time of this encyclical’s promulgation. In particular, John Paul II echoes Tischner’s characterization of solidarity when he argues that unions are united *for* the just good; and not *against* a particular enemy or opponent.¹³ According to John Paul II, “It is characteristic of work

⁷ Curran, *The Moral Theology of John Paul II*, 207.

⁸ Patricia Lamoureux, “Commentary on *Laborem Exercens*” in *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations* (Washington, DC: Georgetown UP, 2005) 389-414.

⁹ *Laborem Exercens*, §6.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, §7.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, §8: “The call to solidarity and common action addressed to the workers – especially to those engaged in narrowly specialized, monotonous and depersonalized work in industrial plants, when the machine tends to dominate man – was important and eloquent from the point of view of social ethics. It was the reaction *against the degradation of man as the subject of work*, and against the unheard-of accompanying exploitation in the field of wages, working conditions and social security for the worker. This reaction united the working world in a community marked by great solidarity.

¹² *Ibid.*, §20.

¹³ *Laborem Exercens*, §20. A common theme of Tischner’s homilies for the labor movement in Poland is that solidarity “does not need an enemy or opponent to strengthen itself and grow. It turns toward all and not against anyone. The foundation and the source of solidarity lies in whatever constitutes a true goal in the life of each person.” *Spirit of Solidarity*, 3.

that it first and foremost unites people. In this consists its social power: the power to build a community.”¹⁴ As such, workers should be considered not merely as employees or resources, but “as agents who should be fully respected as partners in a cooperative enterprise.”¹⁵ The task at hand for the *Solidarność* movement in 1981 was to persuade the Communist party that there ought to be an inherent unity between the interests of laborers and the owners of the means of production—and such a unity would not be well-served by a violent revolution that would vanquish one at the hands of the others. Instead, the Communist party had to acknowledge the fundamental human dignity and corresponding rights of workers—and that by treating workers as subjects, they might engage in an intersubjective conversation on what the nation ought to value in its economic system.

Besides the claim that “there is a need for ever new movements of solidarity of the workers and with the workers,”¹⁶ John Paul II does not articulate a new understanding of solidarity when compared to the tradition of solidarity in previous papal encyclicals. For the most part, when he uses the term in *Laborem Exercens*, solidarity refers to the recognition and appreciation of the bonds of mutual interdependence between subjects united by a common end. Further, John Paul II does not seem to be speaking to international or global concerns in this encyclical, rather his statements about labor are to be understood intra-nationally, specifically in reference to the stratification and “proletarianization” of social groups within nations.¹⁷ In this regard, then, John Paul II’s document is

¹⁴ *Laborem Exercens*, §20.

¹⁵ Lamoureaux, 408.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

consistent with Leo XIII's in its scope, and not as expansive as the scope of solidarity in the writings of John XXIII or Paul VI. The great contributions of John Paul II in this encyclical, however, are both his personalist/subjective characterization human work, as well as the anthropological understanding that work is both a fundamental aspect of human persons and a constitutive element of human communities.

- *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*

John Paul's second encyclical, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* ("On Social Concern"),¹⁸ is perhaps most helpful to the present examination of solidarity because it offers the most explicitly theological description of solidarity in the encyclicals of the Catholic social tradition—but not before it traces clear lines of continuity and development to the concept of solidarity in the encyclicals of previous popes. Promulgated in 1987 to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio*, the encyclical is another effort by John Paul II to revisit and update a previous social encyclical to make it relevant to the contemporary situation. Whereas Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum*—and John Paul II's response in *Laborem Exercens*—had been narrowly focused on the internal economic order of nations, Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio* was international in scope and

¹⁸ From the outset, we should note that this encyclical has engendered some controversy due to the process through which it was written: a process of consultations, discussions, and revisions between the pope and the Roman curia. Despite assertions that the encyclical is no less authoritative than others—due to the signature and promulgation of the pope—papal biographer George Weigel notes that "it cannot be denied" that the encyclical shows the influence of certain members of the Curia at odds with the pope regarding the global socio-political dynamic, "curial thinking may have had more influence on the encyclical than the encyclical's original ideas had on the Curia." See Weigel, 557-560. To this reader, however, it appears that Weigel is trying to champion simply those aspects of the encyclical that correspond to his own worldview, a practice that he particularly criticizes in those who disagree with him. That Weigel gives less than two pages of his book to a discussion of the content of *Sollicitudo*, yet devotes more than six to *Centesimus Annus* demonstrates his priorities to his readers.

entailed a rather significant development in the understanding of *solidarity* up until that time; whereas solidarity had previously been construed primarily descriptively, Paul VI construes solidarity as an urgent moral responsibility, referring to the “duty of solidarity” in the context of authentic human development. Appropriately, John Paul II’s *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* is global in scope and, like Paul’s document, entails a significant development of the social doctrine of *solidarity*, again in the context of authentic and integral human development. Because solidarity is the centerpiece of this encyclical (the term is mentioned twenty-eight times), we will engage in a close reading of the entire document so as to fully appreciate the implications doctrine that is being defined.

John Paul begins *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* with high praise for *Populorum Progressio*, and in particular for its originality on three counts: for offering a moral analysis of development, which is typically considered simply in terms of economics;¹⁹ for the breadth of its scope in emphasizing the implications of interdependence for development on an international and global scale;²⁰ and for the originality that Paul VI showed in expanding the very notion of development itself, particularly in light of the link between development and peace.²¹

For all the positive things that John Paul II says about *Populorum Progressio*, however, his analysis of the twenty years since is decidedly negative from the point of view of development, which he discusses in the section titled “Survey of the Contemporary World.”²² The pope identifies the widening economic gap in development between

¹⁹ *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, §8.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, §9.

²¹ *Ibid.*, §10.

²² *Ibid.*, §13. This section of the encyclical is found in sections §11-26.

the North and the South.²³ Beyond economics, there is a dangerous prevalence of “cultural, political and simply human” underdevelopment in the world, as evidenced by racism, illiteracy, and political disenfranchisement both in the North, and more insidiously in the South.²⁴ Despite efforts by developed nations, the conditions of underdevelopment have become worse in no small part due to social and economic mechanisms that “accentuat[e] the situation of wealth for some and poverty for the rest.”²⁵

Despite the reality of increasing human interdependence, there is also increasing fragmentation between nations and within nations. The pope argues that when “interdependence is separated from its ethical requirements, it has disastrous consequences for the weakest.”²⁶ Such consequences include fragmentation between nations and among communities of people within them; the global housing crisis; the crises of unemployment and underemployment; and the crisis of crippling international debt owed by developing nations to the developed.²⁷ John Paul argues that the failure of development over the past twenty years is based in the geopolitical dynamics of East-West bloc politics.²⁸

In the following section of the document, titled “Authentic Human Development,” John Paul II discusses false notions of development such as the Enlightenment idea of unmitigated economic or social progress and *superdevelopment* (when certain societies accumulate an excessive surplus of material goods for the benefit of certain social groups

²³ *Ibid.*, §14.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, §15.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, §16.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, §17.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, §17-19.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, §20. It is precisely the pope’s critique of *both* the East and West that neoconservative American critics argue that *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* fails in its social analysis—they cannot stomach the suggestion that liberal capitalism and Marxist collectivism might be judged to be morally equivalent.

rather than for all).²⁹ The task for the Church is to overcome the false notions of development by teaching the appropriate distinction between *having* and *being*, a distinction that Paul VI made in *Populorum Progressio*, hearkening back to Vatican II's *Gaudium et Spes*.³⁰ Authentic development depends not on the quantity of goods, but their quality (that they enable persons to realize their basic fulfillment), and their value according to the properly ordered hierarchy of goods (goods ordered and valued according to their contribution to human "being").³¹

John Paul II casts his discussion of authentic human development in theological terms, and by so doing confirms (as he did in both *Laborem Exercens* and in *The Acting Person*) that the foundational principles of his social thought are the inherent value and dignity of the human being made in *imago Dei*: at once fundamentally *social* in nature, each person seeks fulfillment through transcendence (via the assent of the will in freedom to the truth of the Divine).³² Using Scripture, the pope grounds his arguments on the proper subordination of goods toward the good of the human community in Genesis and the Gospels, to make good use of the gifts of the earth to make them fruitful, and to work for the full development of others – not just ourselves.³³

²⁹ *Ibid.*, §28.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, §28-31.

Populorum Progressio, §19: "Increased possession is not the ultimate goal of nations or of individuals. All growth is ambivalent.... The exclusive pursuit of possessions thus becomes an obstacle to individual fulfillment and to man's true greatness...both for nations and for individual men, avarice is the most evident form of moral underdevelopment."

Also *Gaudium et Spes* §35: "For when a man works he not only alters things and society, he develops himself as well. He learns much, he cultivates his resources, he goes outside of himself and beyond himself. Rightly understood this kind of growth is of greater value than any external riches which can be garnered. A man is more precious for what he is than for what he has."

³¹ *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* §28.

³² *Ibid.* §29.

³³ *Ibid.* §30-31.

The obligation to commit oneself to the development of peoples is not just an individual duty, and still less an individualistic one, as if it were possible to achieve this development through the isolated efforts of each individual. It is an imperative which obliges each and every man and woman, as well as societies and nations... Collaboration in the development of the whole person and of every human being is in fact a duty of all towards all...³⁴

In short, John Paul II argues that true development has a moral character and necessarily entails the recognition of the value of the rights of all and for each person – and that this recognition is required not only of individuals and within nations, but also between them:

In order to be genuine, development must be achieved within the framework of solidarity and freedom, without ever sacrificing either of them under whatever pretext. The moral character of development and its necessary promotion are emphasized when the most rigorous respect is given to all the demands deriving from the order of truth and good proper to the human person. Furthermore the Christian who is taught to see that man is the image of God, called to share in the truth and the good which is God himself, does not understand a commitment to development and its application which excludes regard and respect for the unique dignity of this “image.” In other words, true development must be based on the love of God and neighbor, and must help to promote the relationships between individuals and society. This is the “civilization of love” of which Paul VI often spoke.³⁵

Recalling that for Karol Wojtyła /John Paul II, freedom refers to the acknowledgment of truth and the choice to submit of one’s will to truth that results in self-transcendence, we can understand why human development necessarily entails the recognition and commitment to the rights and fulfillment of each and every person—including the self—whose truth is that they are made in God’s image. What, then, is the *solidarity* that is necessary for authentic human development?

This question is answered in the next section of the document, titled “A Theological Reading of Modern Problems.” In this section, John Paul II’s diagnosis for the obstacles to authentic human development moves beyond the descriptively sociopolitical

³⁴ *Ibid.* §32.

³⁵ *Ibid.* §33.

analysis of blocs, to a theological consideration of sin, and more specifically “structures of sin” that are “are rooted in personal sin, and thus always linked to the concrete acts of individuals who introduce these structures, consolidate them and make them difficult to remove... And thus they grow stronger, spread, and become the source of other sins, and so influence people's behavior.”³⁶ These sins—which are invariably rooted in the idolatry of profit and power—constitute the moral evil that prevents the authentic development of peoples.³⁷ The key to overcoming the evil of human sin, argues John Paul, is *conversion*, which “specifically entails a relationship to God, to the sin committed, to its consequences and hence to one’s neighbor, either an individual or a community.”³⁸

The sins that prevent human development on individual, community, and international levels (the idolatries of profit and power over others) are sins that contradict human interdependence, which—morally considered—consists of the systems and relationships that are conducive to the realization of the common good, and the preservation of the

³⁶ *Ibid.* §36. Whereas Scheler confers “personhood” on communities of persons, John Paul II does not. Therefore, for John Paul II, it would be incorrect to ascribe moral agency on a community or a nation except as analogously referring to the collected individual actions of members (the leaders, for example) of that community or nation. See John Paul II’s Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* (December 2, 1984), n. 16:

“Whenever the Church speaks of situations of sin, or when she condemns as social sins certain situations or the collective behavior of certain social groups, big or small, or even of whole nations and blocs of nations, she knows and she proclaims that such cases of social sin are the result of the accumulation and concentration of many personal sins. It is a case of the very personal sins of those who cause or support evil or who exploit it; of those who are in a position to avoid, eliminate or at least limit certain social evils but who fail to do so out of laziness, fear or the conspiracy of silence, through secret complicity or indifference; of those who take refuge in the supposed impossibility of changing the world, and also of those who sidestep the effort and sacrifice required, producing specious reasons of a higher order. The real responsibility, then, lies with individuals. A situation - or likewise an institution, a structure, society itself - is not in itself the subject of moral acts. Hence a situation cannot in itself be good or bad.”

For a discussion of John Paul II’s use of “structures of sin” and “social sin” and whether this constitutes a doctrinal development, see Margaret Pfeil’s “Doctrinal Implications of Magisterial Use of the Language of Social Sin.” *Louvain Studies* 27 (2002) 132-152.

³⁷ *Ibid.* §37.

³⁸ *Ibid.* §38.

rights and dignity of each human person. The pope acknowledges that human interdependence is already being acknowledged as a moral category throughout the world:

The fact that men and women in various parts of the world feel personally affected by the injustices and violations of human rights committed in distant countries, countries which perhaps they will never visit, is a further sign of a reality transformed into awareness, thus acquiring a moral connotation.³⁹

When the truth of interdependence is known as a moral category, John Paul II argues,

the correlative response as a moral and social attitude, as a “virtue,” is solidarity. This then is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all.⁴⁰

In the personalistic and phenomenological terms of Wojtyła the philosopher, solidarity is best understood as the action of the person who apprehends the truth of human interdependence and freely chooses to act for the realization of the common good.

In the context of bloc politics and vast disparities in global development, solidarity is the activity required of individuals, communities and nations to reverse the “sum total of negative factors working against a true awareness of the universal *common good*.”⁴¹ Citing the gospels, John Paul states that the structures of sin “are only conquered—presupposing the divine help of grace—by a diametrically opposed attitude: a commitment to the good of one's neighbor with the readiness, in the gospel sense, to ‘lose oneself’ for the sake of the other instead of exploiting him, and to ‘serve him’ instead of oppressing him for one's own advantage.”⁴²

³⁹ *Ibid.*, §38.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, §36.

⁴² *Ibid.*, §38.

Consistent with the understanding that solidarity is required of all who wish to participate in the common good, John Paul states that the exercise of solidarity enables members of society to recognize one another as persons—and not as instruments to be manipulated or means to some other end.⁴³ Moreover, solidarity is a duty incumbent upon all who participate in the community—certainly the more influential should feel responsible for and share their goods with the weaker, but so too should the weaker members adopt an active attitude of solidarity to “do what they can for the good of all.” A positive sign of this, the pope notes, is the prevalence of solidarity among poor around the globe, their nonviolent efforts to advocate for their own needs and rights “in the face of the inefficiency or corruption of public authorities.”⁴⁴ Whereas previous popes had made a point of emphasizing that the greater burden of solidarity lay on the shoulders of the individuals and nations who enjoyed a greater share of the resources and opportunities, John Paul II goes to lengths to emphasize the significant role of the poor and the commitment that the Church makes to the poor:

By virtue of her own evangelical duty the Church feels called to take her stand beside the poor, to discern the justice of their requests, and to help satisfy them, without losing sight of the good of groups in the context of the common good.⁴⁵

Just as is possible to speak of “structures of sin” in an analogous way to personal sin, so too does the virtue of solidarity as the action appropriate to the moral challenge of interdependence apply analogously to nations;

the stronger and richer must have a sense of moral responsibility for the other nations, so that a real international system may be established which will rest on the

⁴³ *Ibid.*, §39.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, §39. Written in 1987, the pope is certainly referencing the revolutionary contexts of both Poland and, to some extent, Latin American.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, §39.

foundation of the equality of all peoples and on the necessary respect for their legitimate differences. The economically weaker countries, or those still at subsistence level, must be enabled, with the assistance of other peoples and of the international community, to make a contribution of their own to the common good with their treasures of humanity and culture, which otherwise would be lost for ever.⁴⁶

No longer is the mere fact of international interdependence synonymous with solidarity—as it may have been for Pius XII and John XXIII—for John Paul II’s commitment to the inviolable dignity of each person requires that interdependence be considered morally: “Interdependence must be transformed into *solidarity*, based upon the principle that the goods of creation *are meant for all*.”⁴⁷ For John Paul II, solidarity is a personal virtue; “Structures cannot have or offer solidarity. Communities and nations are in solidarity because they are made up of persons.”⁴⁸ Committed to the common good of one’s community (and, so also, committed to one’s own good), a person transcends individualistic concerns in activity that is self-transcendence and self-gift. In solidarity with others, each person “recognizes that there is no conflict between the good of the person and the good of the community, but that these goods can really only be achieved together.”⁴⁹

The key category for John Paul II, as it was for Paul VI, is that solidarity entails a *moral responsibility* regarding interdependence – among and between individuals, communities, institutions, and nations. Such moral responsibility entails seeing the “other”-- whether a person, people, or nation—as “neighbor,” “helper,” and “sharer.”⁵⁰ Echoing Paul VI, the pope insists that solidarity is both “the path to peace and at the same time to

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Doran, 237.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, §39.

development.”⁵¹ For Pope John Paul II, interpersonally, internationally, and before God, solidarity demands action;

[Solidarity] demands the abandonment of the politics of blocs, the sacrifice of all economic, military, or political imperialism, and the transformation of mutual distrust into collaboration. This is precisely the act proper to solidarity among individuals and nations. . . Peace is the fruit of solidarity.⁵²

At the close of this section, John Paul II provides his most compelling, and intimate, theological description of solidarity in terms of the trinitarian communion. As a virtue, John Paul II writes, solidarity has many points of contact with Christian charity: “solidarity seeks to go beyond itself, to take on the specifically Christian dimension of total gratuity, forgiveness and reconciliation.”⁵³ In so doing, one who engages in solidarity comes to recognize one’s neighbor not only as a human being with fundamental rights and equality, but as the *imago Dei*, redeemed by Christ and placed under the action of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁴ With this awareness, love for neighbor – even if an enemy – becomes “the same love with which the Lord loves him or her; and for that person's sake one must be ready for sacrifice, even the ultimate one: to lay down one's life for the brethren.”⁵⁵

At that point, awareness of the common fatherhood of God, of the brotherhood of all in Christ – “children in the Son” – and of the presence and life-giving action of the Holy Spirit will bring to our vision of the world a new criterion for interpreting it. Beyond human and natural bonds, already so close and strong, there is discerned in the light of faith a new model of the unity of the human race, which must ultimately inspire our solidarity. This supreme model of unity, which is a reflection of the intimate life of God, one God in three Persons, is what we Christians mean by the word “communion.”⁵⁶

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.* §40

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

If solidarity is indeed to be understood as a virtue, as the pope describes in his fullest exposition of the topic in this document, then the practice of the virtue will have an affect on the practitioner—the practice of virtues, after all, makes one good. As indicated in this passage, John Paul is describing that the practice of solidarity will cultivate in the practitioner an almost mystical awareness of Godself and the divine activity of communion, providing a new context for pursuing human solidarity.

In the final section of the encyclical, titled “Guidelines for Development,” the pope lays out how the Church might contribute to authentic human development (particularly within the context of a global sociopolitical reality dominated by blocs) in light of this commitment to interdependence through the virtue of solidarity.⁵⁷ Aspects that John Paul cites as a unique contribution of the Church are the “*option or love of preference for the poor*,”⁵⁸ as well as a commitment to authentic human liberation.⁵⁹ In terms of concrete reforms that persons and nations can engage with in the pursuit of solidarity and development are a reform of international trade, the freedom of the international monetary and financial structures, sharing of technologies, and a framework for international juridical order.⁶⁰

Finally, in the conclusion to this encyclical, John Paul II articulates a positive understanding of liberation as constitutive to human development. False notions of development, which the pope addressed early in the encyclical, “are not conducive to authentic liberation. Human beings are totally free only when they are completely themselves, in

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* §41.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* §41-42.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* §46.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* §43.

the fullness of their rights and duties, the same can be said about society as a whole.”⁶¹

The role of the Church is to support humanity in securing human dignity through peaceful means, and providing a fuller sense of God’s kingdom that is discovered in the celebration of the Eucharist.⁶²

- *Centesimus Annus*

Because the exposition and development of the doctrine of solidarity is the centerpiece of *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, we will not be providing as close a reading of the pope’s final social encyclical, *Centesimus Annus* (“On the Hundredth Anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*”), but rather analyzing the key portions related to John Paul II’s understanding of solidarity.⁶³ Promulgated in 1991 on the centenary anniversary of Leo XIII’s *Rerum Novarum*, the preparation of the document took place simultaneously to the collapse of Communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Given John Paul II’s personal, historic significance in the country of Poland, the encyclical can be considered “an unprecedented opportunity for a constructive contribution to the ongoing debate and struggle” over how to order economic and political society, not only – but especially – in the wake of Communism’s collapse.⁶⁴ Two contributions to John Paul II’s development

⁶¹ *Ibid.* §46.

⁶² *Ibid.* §48.

⁶³ The term *solidarity* appears fifteen times in this encyclical. For the most part, its use is congruent to the description that John Paul II laid out most explicitly in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*. As we will see, even the two senses in which *Centesimus Annus* provides new understanding regarding solidarity are actually qualifications or amplifications of what John Paul II has already laid out in magisterial teaching.

⁶⁴ Daniel Finn, “Commentary on *Centesimus Annus*” in *Modern Catholic Social Teaching*. (Washington, DC: Georgetown UP, 2005), 436-466 at 438.

Finn also argues rightly that the encyclical must also be understood in the context of three major theological developments within the ecclesial context post-Vatican II: the rise of liberation theology, the

of solidarity in *Centesimus Annus* consist in the direct linking of solidarity with the companion principle of subsidiarity, and the pope's description of the subordination of private property—including intellectual property—to the service of solidarity in the universal destination of goods.

The principle of subsidiarity first surfaces in the Catholic social encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* by Pius XI in 1931. In short, the principle of subsidiarity aims to preserve the right relationship between individuals or local communities and larger organizations such as state or national governments that have the ability to intervene in local affairs.⁶⁵ Subsidiarity aims to preserve whenever possible the initiative, industry, and responsibilities of the individual or local community from interference or usurpation by a larger government. In other words, state or national government should only intervene in local affairs when the common good demands it. Otherwise, individuals and local communities are empowered to act upon their own capacities to seek and fulfill the common good according to their own judgment and choices. As John Paul II summarizes it in *Centesimus Annus*:

a community of a higher order should not interfere in the internal life of a community of a lower order, depriving the latter of its functions, but rather should support it in case of need and help to coordinate its activity with the activities of the rest of society, always with a view to the common good.⁶⁶

Like solidarity, subsidiarity is always exercised for the purpose of fulfilling the common good. Both provide for a virtuous ordering of society that encourages the full, free, and creative participation of all persons who are participating in a community ordered toward

neoconservative defense of capitalism, and the publication of documents regarding social and economic issues by episcopal conferences around the world.

⁶⁵ *Quadragesimo Anno* §49.

⁶⁶ *Centesimus Annus* §43.

specific common goods. In this manner, the two principles are meant to complement and balance one another.⁶⁷

Referring to the overarching concern for workers rights that Leo XIII demonstrated in *Rerum Novarum*, John Paul argues that the State has both indirect and direct responsibilities in preserving and protecting the fundamental rights of workers:

Indirectly and according to the *principle of subsidiarity*, by creating favorable conditions for the free exercise of economic activity, which will lead to abundant opportunities for employment and sources of wealth. Directly and according to the *principle of solidarity*, by defending the weakest, by placing certain limits on the autonomy of the parties who determine working conditions, and by ensuring in every case the necessary minimum support for the unemployed worker.⁶⁸

From this description, there is a distinction to be made between the types of moral activity that the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity require. The principle of subsidiarity is a moral principles that limits the actions of a community or state from interfering in the free and responsible exercise of individual moral activity; subsidiarity restrains immoral activity, similarly to the virtue of temperance or moderation. The principle of solidarity, on the other hand, entails an active commitment to moral action that preserves the common good, particularly through concrete actions on behalf of the weakest, most vulnerable members of society.

The second interesting aspect of solidarity that surfaces in *Centesimus Annus* consists in John Paul II's re-reading of "the relationship between individual or private property and the universal destination of material wealth" initially set out by Leo XIII in *Re-*

⁶⁷ I am a bit cautious about overplaying the significance of subsidiarity in the Catholic social tradition. After all, the term appears only twice in *Centesimus Annus* (as compared to solidarity's recurrence fifteen times). Nevertheless, the social principle of subsidiarity certainly preserves and amplifies John Paul II's fundamental anthropological concern for the person, whose free and creative self-transcendence is central to the Catholic social tradition.

⁶⁸ *Centesimus Annus* §15.

rum Novarum.⁶⁹ In the first of the Catholic social encyclicals, Leo explicates the human right to private ownership of property, but specifies this is not an absolute right. Reading *Rerum Novarum* and subsequent Catholic social teaching, John Paul II argues that “the use of goods is subordinated to their original common destination as created goods.”⁷⁰ Building upon a Thomistic understanding of God’s intention in creating goods to meet human needs, John Paul II recounts that goods owned privately are not simply intended for individual owners to consume—they also have a social function to the extent that they were created by God and intended to satisfy the needs of humanity. God gave the earth to humanity to subdue so that the whole human race might be sustained by it.⁷¹ Through work, humans have appropriated the goods of creation—work with others and for others. In the context of 1991, work is increasingly interdependent.

Interestingly, John Paul II includes “the possession of know-how, technology and skill” as an aspect of private ownership of property. According to the principle of the common destination of all goods, then, education and skills are also conditioned by the requirement that they serve the needs of all of humanity, and their moral use consists in their contribution to “ever more extensive working communities” bound together “by a progressively expanding chain of solidarity.”⁷² Private property, education, and technological know-how should be used in such a way to increase the solidarity that morally ought to exist in communities of persons. In economic terms, this will mean putting

⁶⁹ *Centesimus Annus* §15.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* §30.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* §31.

⁷² *Ibid.* See David Hollenbach, “Christian Social Ethics after the Cold War” *Theological Studies* 53, no. 1 (1992). Hollenbach discusses the implications of including education and skills as property that according to the universal destination of goods requires that they be shared in solidarity with the members of the community.

property, education, and skills to work to increase the participation of those who are otherwise marginalized and excluded from participating in the market.⁷³

- ***Conclusion: John Paul II's Contributions to the Development of Solidarity***

In this chapter, we have examined the development of solidarity in the encyclicals of the Catholic social tradition, with a particular interest in the development and promulgation of the term as the centerpiece of the Catholic social teaching of Pope John Paul II. In this final section, we will synthesize the key aspects of solidarity to emerge from this investigation, which included an examination of the philosophical thought of Karol Wojtyła and the influence of Józef Tischner and the *Solidarność* revolution on the development of solidarity in the writings of John Paul II.

As we have seen in the brief review of the papal magisterium, the concept of solidarity makes its first appearance in the letters of Pius XII, recurs frequently in the encyclicals of subsequent popes, but is only fully explicated in the second social encyclical of John Paul II. By John Paul's own admission, compared to other major doctrines of the Catholic social tradition, solidarity is a very recent arrival. Nonetheless, in John Paul II's re-reading of the social encyclicals, he finds many points of contact and resonance with other terms that were employed by his predecessors:

...[W]hat we nowadays call the principle of solidarity... is clearly seen to be one of the fundamental principles of the Christian view of social and political organization. This principle is frequently stated by Pope Leo XIII, who uses the term "friendship," a concept already found in Greek philosophy. Pope Pius XI refers to it with the equally meaningful term "social charity." Pope Paul VI, expanding the

⁷³ Hollenbach, "Christian Social Ethics after the Cold War," 85-86.

concept to cover the many modern aspects of the social question, speaks of a “civilization of love.”⁷⁴

While friendship, social charity and the civilization of love are each terms that were precursors to the doctrine of solidarity that John Paul would introduce, the pope downplays the development of this doctrine in favor of emphasizing his continuity with his predecessors.⁷⁵

Solidarity was a relevant, if developing, moral category guiding the Church’s social teaching prior to the papacy of John Paul II. Minimally, in the writings of Pius XII for example, solidarity was considered to be a social bond of common humanity that contributed to the common good of peace—interpersonally and internationally. In this regard, solidarity was universally knowable by the fact of human interdependence as well as an expression of the philosophical insight that humans are to respect one another by virtue of a common reason. Reflecting on the moral relevance of human solidarity to the social challenges of the developing world, each pope and church council pushed the theological and ethical scope of solidarity considerably further than its minimal conception. In the service of peace, John XXIII expanded the ethical scope of solidarity by bringing it to bear on the economic order of human relationships, applying it to concrete socioeconomic issues such as the distribution of wealth, food, and other economic products as cause for interpersonal and international discord, resentment and violence. Moreover, the Second Vatican Council provided a broader theological account for an understanding of solidarity rooted in both Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, and augmenting this with an

⁷⁴ *Centesimus Annus*, §10.

⁷⁵ Curran, *The Moral Theology of Pope John Paul II*, 207. Curran argues that a characteristic of John Paul II’s social encyclicals is his emphasis on the continuity of the tradition while downplaying the discontinuity.

incarnational anthropology and ecclesiology. Finally, Paul VI expanded an otherwise descriptive notion of solidarity by acknowledging it as a *moral duty* that applied not only to the economic life of the human person, but to the authentic development of the entire human person and all human associations, from the family all the way to the international order.

In many respects, John Paul II provides a thick description of solidarity that is very much consistent with his predecessors. Like the popes before him, John Paul II clearly believes that solidarity is a virtue knowable to all of humanity through the moral acknowledgement of human interdependence and a fundamental commitment to the common good. And yet, the fullness of the virtue of solidarity consists in a proper Christian understanding of humanity as *imago Dei*, redeemed by Christ, and sustained in the Spirit – any secular or philosophical understanding of the concept is ultimately subsumed by the theological need for conversion away from sin and toward theological truth.

Like John XXIII and Paul VI before him, John Paul II places the human person at the center of the Catholic social tradition. Social institutions, economies, and policies should exist to serve the person, rather than the reverse. That John Paul II would articulate a personalist exposition of solidarity is not surprising. What is unique about John Paul II's development of solidarity in the Catholic social tradition is the methodology with which he articulates the concept, by employing a phenomenological analysis to arrive at a unique description of a moral action appropriate to counter the effects of structures of sin.

Methodologically speaking, it should be noted that John Paul II's most explicit discourse on solidarity in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* proceeds in a manner appropriate to a philosopher of phenomenology.⁷⁶ In other words, the pope does not initiate his discourse on solidarity with a contemplation of the divine communion, and then deduce principles for human action based upon that teleological goal. Rather, John Paul II's consideration of solidarity in this encyclical begins with the negative experience of personal and structural sin and the effects of sin on persons and societies – albeit broadly construed because of the global audience for this encyclical. He then moves from the effects of sin to a consideration of what was violated in those sinful acts – certainly, the inherent rights and dignity of persons made in the *imago Dei*, but also violated was the social corollary to human dignity: the moral responsibility to human interdependence. Most theologically, the violation of the person and the relationships of human community is analogously a violation of the prototypical personal relationship: the divine communion.

Solidarity has a comprehensive quality in the social teaching of John Paul II – it applies to every instance of human intersubjectivity, from the most intimate of personal relationships, to economic transactions, to the relationship of state to citizen, and even between states. All human interaction demonstrates interdependence, and all interdependence ought to be governed by solidarity, which will manifest itself in a commitment

⁷⁶ See Doran, 124: “In the phenomenological method of Wojtyła, the approach to the person is made through an analysis of the experience of personal action. The validity of this approach is explained by Wojtyła in some of his writings using the terminology of theory and praxis. Praxis follows from theory (*operari sequitur esse*), especially on the ethical level, but Wojtyła points out that, from the perspective of epistemology, it is the praxis which reveals the theory, and therefore theory (person) is approached through praxis (action).”

to the poor, in justice, and in peace. So long as it is tempered by subsidiarity, there does not seem to be a situation between persons where solidarity does not apply.

Regardless of the philosophical methodology with which John Paul articulated solidarity, there is a disconnect between John Paul II's *application* of solidarity and that of Paul VI and John XXIII before him. In *Populorum Progressio* and *Octogesima Adveniens*, Paul advocated a historically-conscious "see, judge, act" model of pastoral activity that encouraged an active process in local communities to identify the problems of the day and to discern the appropriate moral response to them. Critics of John Paul II note that in his social encyclicals, "There is a return to a pre-Vatican II method of the development of universal principles that are then applied to concrete particular solutions."⁷⁷

However, this critique does not fully apply to solidarity, which the pope repeatedly refers to in terms of *virtue ethics*. With solidarity, John Paul II brings virtue ethics to the heart of the Catholic social tradition – quite different from the predominance of a natural law approach common both to his predecessors and in his own non-social encyclicals.

- *A definition of solidarity for John Paul II*

For John Paul II, solidarity is best understood *as the action of the person who, apprehending the fundamental dignity and rights of the human person as imago Dei and the moral truth of human interdependence, chooses in freedom to act for the realization of*

⁷⁷ See Charles Curran, Kenneth Himes, and Thomas Shannon, "Commentary on *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*" in *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations* (Washington, DC: Georgetown UP, 2005) 425. See also, Curran, *The Moral Theology of John Paul II* 207.

the common good over time. By so doing, the acting person contributes to the development of all people, and the development of one's self. Solidarity is ultimately oriented to the activity of the divine communion, which is mutual, dynamic, and unified.

Solidarity applies to all dimensions of interpersonal sociality—family, community, nation, and even with God. Solidarity is often expressed in a particular commitment to include the poor, the marginalized, and the victimized in the human community and the realization of the common good, though such activity needs always be tempered by the principle of subsidiarity. Though solidarity is properly regarded as interpersonal action, by analogy solidarity is action that is also appropriate for communities of persons – such as institutions and nations. Solidarity is the appropriate moral response to sinful structures that idolize profit at the expense of persons and objectify persons through domination.

Similar to Józef Tischner, John Paul II argues that human work provides a ready context for solidarity because work discloses the reality of interdependence and unites persons in community. Through work, persons creatively express themselves and engage one another in a conversation about the common good.

At times, John Paul II refers to solidarity as a duty, a principle, an attitude, and a virtue. I follow Kevin Doran's analysis that the terms do not necessarily contradict one another but express different ways of considering the moral obligation to solidarity.⁷⁸ Solidarity is described as a duty when interdependence is recognized as a moral category, and the person is obliged by duty to act accordingly, to act in solidarity with those with

⁷⁸ Doran, 192-193.

whom one is interdependent. When referred to as a principle, solidarity is considered as a general norm for social action, the value of which is known and validated by engaging in that action.

The most adequate description of solidarity in the thought of John Paul II is as *virtue* because “in solidarity, the person, as well as completing an external action, fulfills himself in action.”⁷⁹ Understood as virtue, solidarity is never realized in a single act, but instead in a commitment to such action over time. The person and the action form a single cohesive reality with an internal aspect and an external aspect. Descriptively, solidarity is called a virtue when referring to the personalistic aspect of that action, “the effect of solidarity on the person himself, his moral growth.”⁸⁰ John Paul II describes the *attitude* of solidarity when referring primarily to the outward direction of the virtuous act “on other persons, their needs, and the structures of society within which they are called to be and act.”⁸¹

- *Looking beyond John Paul II:*

Because of Pope John Paul II’s clear and consistent commitment to a particular anthropology of human subjectivity, solidarity is explicated almost exclusively in terms of a person’s action – in terms of personal agency. The person is always subject, the actor who is responsible for one’s own actions. The person makes oneself known through action, and finds fulfillment in self-transcendence. And yet solidarity is not an action that

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Doran, 193.

can be done alone – it is an action within the context of relations between persons. John Paul’s description of solidarity, as a constant movement out from oneself towards others or toward the common good, does not adequately describe the experience of the person who is object of such solidaristic action. Despite the emphasis on interdependence and the common good, John Paul II’s description of solidarity seems not to transcend the realm of one person’s action, as if solidarity were a virtue that one could practice on one’s own, without ever being the recipient or object of someone else’s solidaristic activity. It seems to me that John Paul’s description of solidarity is one-sided.

How, then, to understand the reciprocal dynamic of solidarity – i.e. the experience of gift when another reaches out to one in a spirit of solidarity? It does not seem to me that solidarity is well described as merely a movement out from oneself on behalf of another. John Paul II’s description does not fully account for the dual agency, the dynamic reflexivity, that consists between two or more persons actively engaging in solidarity *with* one another—disclosing themselves to each other, but also learning something about themselves from the other. Missing from John Paul’s description of solidarity is a more adequate description of mutuality and reciprocity—the sense that those engaged in solidarity need one another, not just as mutual contributors to a common good through which they might each be sustained and fulfilled, but rather they need to experience each other as subjects and to allow the subjectivity of the other to make a claim on them. Attentiveness to the responsibility of interdependence seems to require consciousness of the profound ways in which the ongoing presence and participation of others in one’s life provides an opportunity for fulfillment that could never be realized in their absence.

In the next chapter, we will turn to Jon Sobrino and the development of solidarity in the context of Latin American liberation theology. As such, we will explore solidarity as a praxis of mutuality between those who need each other, those who are “bearing with one another” in hope for the Reign of God. In contrast to John Paul II, the starting point for Sobrino is not a commitment to a particular anthropology or philosophical methodology, but rather the experience of the crucified ones – the victims of history.

CHAPTER FOUR

Jon Sobrino's Context and Influences

Understandably, both the encyclical tradition and the writings of Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II approach solidarity conceptually – as an understanding or attitude of human interdependence, as a virtue, or as human action that flows out of a particular theological anthropology. In short, the documents of the official Catholic social tradition provide a necessarily *theoretical* account of solidarity. In the next two chapters, then, we will approach solidarity *practically*, and consider how this approach might provide us with an understanding of solidarity as a contemporary praxis of Christian discipleship – as ongoing, committed activity of those who hope for the Reign of God that was preached by Jesus. The consideration of a practical account of solidarity will supplement the more theoretical account that pervades the official documents of the Catholic social tradition and to a certain extent the writings of John Paul II, providing us with a fuller account of solidarity and its implications for Christian ethics.

According to a popular Brazilian proverb, “The head thinks from where the feet are planted”; and our consideration of solidarity in this chapter will be planted in the reality of Latin America, and the theology of liberation that has emerged from this context. Specifically, we will examine the works of Jon Sobrino, the Jesuit theologian at the Universidad Centroamericana “José Simeón Cañas” (the UCA) in San Salvador, El Salvador. With his feet planted firmly in a context marked by extreme poverty, marginalization, oppression, civil war and the persecution of those who dare to criticize the structures of

injustice, Jon Sobrino has developed a theology committed to *reality*, and to an encounter with Jesus within this reality that leads to a praxis of discipleship that is appropriate to contemporary reality. At the heart of this praxis of discipleship according to Sobrino is a particular experience of and commitment to Jesus Christ. Based on Sobrino's christology and his articulation of a spirituality of discipleship, I will argue that Sobrino provides a compelling framework for understanding solidarity as a *spiritual exercise*.

In this chapter, we will consider the immediate context of Jon Sobrino's theological writings in the hope that they will provide the necessary points of reference for understanding how solidarity as spiritual exercise will develop out of his life experiences and theological project. Before we do that, however, we will consider a brief summary of the concept of "spiritual exercises" in the history of philosophy and theology, with an eye toward the unique understanding of spiritual exercise that has flourished in Ignatian and Jesuit spirituality. In this prefatory section, we will also integrate the methodological guidance of theologian J. Matthew Ashley on how to make a case for the link between spirituality and theology when considering a particular theologian.

In order to demonstrate how the spiritual exercise of solidarity is central to a full appreciation of the link between Sobrino's christology and ethics, we will need to be attentive to at least three aspects of his historical and spiritual contexts. First, we will consider the biographical evidence for the influence of Sobrino's Ignatian spiritual formation. Second, we will consider the historical context of revolutionary El Salvador to suggest ways in which Sobrino's spirituality may have been impacted by the historico-social situation. Finally, we will consider the spiritual influences of people who were in direct

conversation and contact with Jon Sobrino during the revolutionary years in which his mature theology was taking shape: Archbishop Romero, his brother Jesuits at the university, and countless men and women of spirit who were killed in the struggle for liberation.

- *Preface: Spiritual Exercise, Spirituality & Theology*

By identifying solidarity as spiritual exercise, we are drawing upon the understanding of spiritual exercise laid out by the French philosopher Pierre Hadot, particularly as that notion relates to the foundational text and methods of Ignatian spirituality.¹ In *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, Hadot claims the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola are a Christian continuation of a classical Greek understanding of philosophy as *askesis*²—the practice of particular mental and physical exercises of self-discipline. The goal of these exercises is the transformation of one’s spirit, or vision of the world.³ Classical philosophy, Hadot insists, is most adequately understood as “a way of life” or “the art of living” rather than merely “a way of thinking.” The integrated notion of philosophy as *askesis* that was operative in Stoic or Epicurean exercises of self-discipline was preserved in the Christian monasteries; *ascetic* discipline, after all, does not focus exclusively on the discipline of the body, but through the practice of spiritual exercises such as prayer,

¹ Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

² Hadot, 82: “...Ignatius’ *Exercitia spiritualia* are nothing but a Christian version of a Greco-Roman tradition, the extent of which we hope to demonstrate in what follows. In the first place, both the idea and the terminology of *exercitium spirituale* are attested in early Latin Christianity, well before Ignatius of Loyola, and they correspond to the Greek Christian term *askesis*...”

³ Hadot, 82. Moreover, Hadot credits Paul Rabbow for demonstrating that Ignatius of Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises* “were deeply rooted in the spiritual exercises of ancient philosophy,” 126.

meditation, and the development of attentive self-awareness, ascetics is aimed at the transformation of the soul.⁴

Most important to the “Christianization” of the spiritual exercises of classical philosophy, according to Hadot, “is the overall spirit in which Christian and monastic spiritual exercises were practiced. They always presupposed the assistance of God’s grace, and they made *humility* the most important of the virtues.”⁵ Through the spiritual exercises of attentive self-awareness, meditation on death, and the examination of conscience, the classical philosophers had long cultivated humility; using Scripture as a starting point for their meditations, Christians practiced these same spiritual exercises to cultivate humility before God. It bears repeating that the Christian spiritual exercises aim at creating a disposition that is open to the reception of God’s grace; it is the activity of *grace* that transforms one’s spirit.

Like so many of the Christian ascetics before him, Ignatius of Loyola wrote his *Spiritual Exercises* to enable the Christian disciple “to conquer oneself,” and by so doing, to order oneself to God.⁶ Ignatius’ *Spiritual Exercises* center on the scriptural narrative of Jesus as presented in the synoptic gospels. According to J. Matthew Ashley, the goal of the *Spiritual Exercises* is “not a description or analysis of God and God’s work, but an encounter that gives a person an active participatory understanding of God’s presence

⁴ Hadot, 131. Hadot argues that the development of *prosoche* (attentiveness or self-awareness), the fundamental virtue of Stoic philosophy, became the fundamental attitude of the monk.

⁵ Hadot, 139.

⁶ Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, no. 21, in George Ganss, S.J. *Ignatius of Loyola: Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works* (New York: Paulist, 1991), 50-54.

‘from the inside.’”⁷ Ignatius’ *Spiritual Exercises* provide fertile ground for spiritual reflection because there exist within them several built-in dialectical tensions and ambiguities that are enacted “so as to draw the person into the mystery of God’s love.”⁸ Because the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises* contain multiple inherent tensions and dialectics, it is improper to speak of any one Ignatian theology or spirituality as normative for all others. Rather, Ignatian spirituality is perhaps best identified as the *doing* of the *Spiritual Exercises*—giving of oneself to the discipline of the exercises, and allowing oneself to be transformed by that experience. In general terms, Ignatian spirituality might best be defined as a method for conversion, for an encounter with the ultimate.

Following the lead of Ashley’s work on the link between spirituality and theology, the remainder of this essay considers Jon Sobrino’s theology as an expression of his context and spirituality.⁹ Acknowledging that spirituality and theology interact with one another “in complex but extremely important ways,”¹⁰ the task for us in considering the work of Jon Sobrino is to grapple with the particular spirituality expressed theologically in his writings on christology and the ethics of Christian discipleship.

⁷ J. Matthew Ashley, “Ignacio Ellacuría and the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola” *Theological Studies* 61 (March 2000), 19.

⁸ Ashley, “Ignacio Ellacuría and the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola,” 19. Ashley identifies Avery Dulles as one theologian who has demonstrated how the irreconcilable tensions inherent in the Exercises have led to a multiplicity of theologies and spiritual interpretations, 18.

⁹ J. Matthew Ashley, *Interruptions: Mysticism, Politics, and Theology in the works of Johann Baptist Metz* (South Bend, IN: Notre Dame UP, 1998) and “Ignacio Ellacuría and the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola” *Theological Studies* 61 (March 2000).

Ashley defines spirituality in the following terms reminiscent of Gutierrez’s description of the first and second order acts of theology: “...a spirituality is a classic constellation of practices which forms a mystagogy into a life of Christian discipleship... The second and complementary aspect of a spirituality is the particular way of speaking and thinking... about God, about the ultimate meaning of life, and so on, which both nurtures but is also nurtured by the set of practices which make up the spirituality,” *Interruptions*, 15.

¹⁰ Ashley, *Interruptions*, 16-26.

Ashley lays out a two-step approach for discerning a spirituality's influence on a particular theology. The first step is to examine the biographical case by looking at the explicit spiritual formation and influences that have shaped a theologian's life. This first step consists in identifying biographical and circumstantial information such as the formation of religious orders, the influence of spiritual masters in the life of the theologian, as well as any explicit references in the theologian's work that indicate the theologian's spiritual commitments.

The second, and perhaps more difficult, step is to identify certain theological choices or key moments in the theologian's writings that demonstrate the author's appeal to particular spiritual commitments.¹¹ In other words, we search for aspects of the theologian's work that are indicative of a worldview that has been transformed by a particular spirituality. The structure of this chapter will follow Ashley's approach, with the first section focusing on the context and method of Sobrino's theology, and the second section focusing on the key theological moments wherein Sobrino's writings demonstrate his spiritual commitments. In the final section of the chapter, I will present my argument for what emerges at the intersection of praxis, theology, and spirituality in Sobrino's work: an understanding of *solidarity as a spiritual exercise*.

- *The Context of Sobrino's Theology*

¹¹ Ashley, *Interruptions*, 24: "...[W]e can look for those stages or choices in a theologian's thinking which are underdetermined by the conceptual structure of his or her thought or the logical sequence of the arguments that justify the choices he or she makes."

As Gustavo Gutiérrez famously described theology in the watershed book *A Theology of Liberation*, theology is always “second act.” If, as Gutiérrez describes, theology is defined as “critical reflection on praxis in light of the Word of God,” then the primary source of theological reflection is the faith commitment experienced and expressed in the daily activities and lived practices of the vast majority of the people of faith – the “poor.”¹² Ever since the European conquistadors “evangelized” Latin America, the majority of Christians in this region of the world experience and live out their faith commitments as ones who suffer the consequences of abject poverty, social and political marginalization, and active oppression. The starting point, in short, for Latin American liberation theology is the lived experience and faith commitment of the poor. In Latin American liberation theology, methodological priority is given to the reality of the poor and their struggle for liberation from the sinful and material structures of poverty that perpetuate suffering.¹³

- *Sobrinó's background*

Born into a Basque family in Barcelona, Spain in 1938, Jon Sobrinó entered the Society of Jesus as the age of eighteen. As a Jesuit novice, Sobrinó was sent to El Salvador for a few years prior to beginning his graduate work, which he undertook in the U.S. and in Germany during the 1960s. In 1974, just prior to the completion of his doctorate

¹² Gutiérrez, Gustavo. *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*. ed. and trans. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1973). See, especially the introduction to the second edition.

¹³ See e.g. Dean Brackley, “Theology and Solidarity: Learning from Sobrinó’s Method,” in Stephen J. Pope, ed., *Hope & Solidarity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 3-15.

in theology, Sobrino was sent back to El Salvador to serve as a professor of theology at the Jesuit-run Universidad Centroamericana. In his own words, Sobrino writes

...[U]ntil 1974, when I returned to El Salvador, the world of the poor—that is, the real world—did not exist for me... My vision of my task as a priest was a traditional one: I would help the Salvadorans replace their popular, “superstitious” reality with a more sophisticated kind, and I would help the Latin American branches of the church (the European church) to grow. I was the typical “missionary,” full of good will and Eurocentricity—and blind to reality.¹⁴

Sobrino recounts that his first impression of El Salvador in the late fifties and early sixties took place behind the rose-colored lenses of European idealism, heavily influenced by the Enlightenment’s emphasis on the subject, particularly “the problem of the meaning of faith.”¹⁵ At that point in his life he understood theology to be an ongoing dialogue about a certain set of ideas. And while his doctoral studies in Germany—particularly his studies of Rahner, Moltmann, and Pannenberg—made an indelible mark on his theological perspective, his very method of doing theology was to be challenged and transformed in response to his experiences in El Salvador when he returned to work at the UCA in 1974.

In the time lapsed since his first assignment to El Salvador, Latin American theology had broken forth as if a dam had burst. Inspired by the documents of the Second Vatican Council and the Medellín conference of the Latin American bishops in 1968,

¹⁴ Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy*, 2.

¹⁵ Jon Sobrino, *The True Church and the Poor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1984), 13. This particular essay “Theological Understanding in European and Latin American Theology” was first published in 1975, the first in a series of essays Sobrino would write in order to make clear the distinctions between Latin American liberation theology and mainstream European theology, although he would certainly indicate liberation theology’s indebtedness to certain European political and praxis theologians. Sobrino is also explicit about his indebtedness to Karl Rahner.

several (and most notably, Gutiérrez) Latin American theologians had published important books describing a new way of doing theology in Latin America. The conference at Medellín had tremendous impact on the life of the church in Latin America because the bishops acknowledged formally and institutionally that the widespread conditions of poverty and oppression are both a scandal and a sin. The bishops at Medellín promised that the church was to play an active role in the transformation of the sinful reality of Latin America. By directly addressing the topics of poverty, violence, corruption, and injustice, the Latin American church dedicated itself to creating a reality within which the people of God could be liberated from the dehumanizing structures of the status quo.¹⁶

Sobrino appreciated this newly-expressed commitment to *reality* and cites it as one of the fundamental distinctions between European and Latin American theology, writing, “The aim of theological understanding in Latin America is to ‘confront reality’ in the most realistic and un-ideological way possible.”¹⁷ This commitment to reality, which was a recurring theme in the works of the rector of the UCA and fellow Jesuit Ignacio Ellacuría,¹⁸ would become the starting point for Sobrino’s theological method.

¹⁶ Alfred Hennelly, ed. “Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops: The Church in the Present-Day Transformation of Latin America in Light of the Council.” *Liberation Theology: a documentary history* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990), 96.

¹⁷ Sobrino, *The True Church and the Poor*, 15.

¹⁸ Ignacio Ellacuría, the Basque Jesuit who spent much of his career living and working in El Salvador, is perhaps the prototypical representative of the transformation that results from the confluence of an Ignatian spiritual formation, an awakening to the sinful social reality of El Salvador, and an integral appetite for Christian philosophical and theological truth. According to J. Matthew Ashley, “Ellacuría is an important figure in the Ignatian theological tradition because his philosophical and theological work gave systematic conceptual elaboration to a stance toward history and being-in-history that is located in the depth-structure of Ignatius’ *Spiritual Exercises*.” Ashley, “Ignacio Ellacuría and the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola.” *Theological Studies* 61 (March 2000). For the purposes of the present paper, we will examine the *theological* influence that Ellacuría’s writings had on Sobrino, though as close friends, colleagues, and brother Jesuits, they undoubtedly shared moments of profound spiritual influence and illumination, as well.

In the years following his return to El Salvador, Sobrino experienced a transformation, or, as he calls it, “an awakening from the sleep of inhumanity.” He was converted to a new way of conceiving and doing theology such that he became convinced that theology ought to aim for the *liberation* of the real world from its wretched state, since it is this objective situation that has obscured the meaning of Christian faith. As Sobrino writes in *True Church and the Poor*, liberation theology’s task is not primarily to restore *meaning* to a faith that has been rendered meaningless amidst the wretched conditions of the real world; rather, liberation theology ought to *transform* this real world and in the process, recover the meaning of the Christian faith. The task, therefore, is not to understand faith differently, but to allow a new faith to spring forth from a new practice.¹⁹

- *The context of El Salvador*

The socioeconomic reality of El Salvador prior to and during the civil war that lasted roughly from 1979 through 1992 has been well-documented.²⁰ Prior to the 1970s, El Salvador’s economy was largely controlled by the so-called “fourteen families,” the relatively small oligarchy who owned the vast majority of arable land. In the 1970s the economic concerns of these elites set the agenda for the nation’s economic policies, and

¹⁹ Sobrino, *The True Church and the Poor*, 20-1.

²⁰ This account of the social, political, and economic context of revolutionary El Salvador is culled largely from two resources: Tommy Sue Montgomery’s *Revolution in El Salvador: From Civil Strife to Civil Peace*, 2nd ed. (Westview, 1995) and William Stanley’s *The Protection Racket State: Elite Politics, Military Extortion, and Civil War in El Salvador* (Temple UP, 1996). The description of the Salvadoran Church at this time draws from Montgomery’s work as well as Jeffrey Klaiber’s *The Church, Dictatorships, and Democracy in Latin America* (Orbis, 1998) and Anna Peterson’s *Martyrdom and the Politics of Religion: Progressive Catholicism in El Salvador’s Civil War* (SUNY, 1997).

their incomparable wealth relative to the rest of the country's citizens allowed them unparalleled political influence. A democracy in name only, through a complex system of patronage and corruption, public officials and military personnel were kept in power and promoted to the extent that they remained loyal to the interest of their benefactors. By contrast, the vast majority of Salvadorans were *campesinos*, landless peasants (some of whom had lost their farms and homesteads to pro-oligarchy policies aimed at the "nationalization" of private lands) who worked the farms and coffee plantations owned by the fourteen families. Because of their vast number and severe economic need, *campesinos* constituted a cheap and nearly disposable labor market that worked to the advantage of the oligarchy. Naturally, having a strong and well-maintained army in the case of unrest served the interests of the oligarchy, and for this reason the military had an extraordinary amount of political influence--the president of the country appointed the head of the national police and military.

Throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, several small opposition groups began to surface, often at the universities, where students were able to read about alternative social and political realities ranging from Marxism to Christian democracy. Further, local military and political leaders who did not wish to serve the interests of the oligarchy banded together in the hope of winning an electoral coup during the elections of 1972. The blatant corruption and destruction of votes made a legitimate transfer of power impossible, and the result was a series of coups and military juntas that eroded the stability of the political system by the late 1970s. The conflict between rival political parties and military groups vying for power heightened to the point that political leaders on all sides began to

“disappear” as political factions began using military force and violence to intimidate and eliminate their opposition. As military factions participated in violent repression of the opposition in cities (where upstart political rivals would be taken prisoner, or worse they would simply “disappear”), radical opposition leaders began to move out into the countryside. In the countryside, they met the *campesinos*, who were often quickly emboldened by hopes for agrarian reform that would allow individuals and families to own their own farms and plots of land again. Having nothing, many thousands of *campesinos* were willing to risk their lives in the hope for a social and political revolution.

In the late 1970s, teams of men from local military posts were routinely organized into “death squads” with the express purpose of eliminating political opposition through intimidation, violence, and murder. While officially “extra-curricular,” operating beyond the scope of the formal military and political hierarchy, the death squads became the most frequent weapon wielded by the established political and military order.²¹ Hundreds of leaders of peaceful opposition groups were murdered, and those who survived often went into hiding or joined up with guerilla revolutionaries in the countryside. When the guerilla groups struck back through urban terrorism or political assassination, they would set off a chain of death squad retaliations. In short, the death squads struck fear into the hearts of Salvadorans throughout the country, as they targeted revolutionaries and potential revolutionaries alike. The death squads often inspired moderates to become extremists; and since extremists were considered threats to the military and political establishment, they became targets.

²¹ Stanley describes the activities of the death squads most graphically in *The Protection Racket State*, 1-15.

Generally speaking, the Salvadoran Catholic Church had enjoyed a non-confrontational relationship with the landowning oligarchy that controlled El Salvador in the several decades leading up to the revolution. In the sixties and seventies—encouraged by the Latin American bishops conference (CELAM) at Medellín in 1968—base ecclesial communities and other local-empowerment groups typical of the Latin American church emerged in El Salvador. In 1965, the Jesuits opened the José Simeón Cañas Central American University (the UCA) in San Salvador as an alternative to the state-sponsored national university. Intended by the Jesuits to be a place where the upper- and middle-class children could learn about the social and economic reality in which the majority of their fellow Salvadorans lived, the UCA later became a center for lay catechesis and training that extended to peasants throughout the country. In rural areas under-served by priests, lay catechists and “delegates of the Word” were trained as leaders of local Christian communities. Because they were literate and comparatively well-spoken, these newly-trained catechists and delegates often were (or became) leaders of the local peasant unions.

For the most part, these base Christian communities employed the “see, judge, and act” model of spiritual reflection – wherein they would analyze and reflect upon their contemporary context in light of Scripture and act in a way that sought to integrate faith with experience. This method of spiritual reflection was very empowering to *campesinos* who for the first time began to consider the possibility that God’s will for them was liberation from suffering and the structures of injustice, while they came to understand themselves as agents capable of participating in that liberation. The lay leaders of the

base communities, as well as the priests and religious women and men who trained them, often became targets of state-ordered intimidation, violence, and murder because they were perceived as a threat to the established order of the Salvadoran social system. As a result, priests and nuns were actively persecuted, frequently kidnapped, and sometimes murdered; in the late 1970s flyers were circulated in San Salvador urging readers to “Be a Patriot, Kill a Priest.”

Institutionally, Archbishop Luis Chávez y González presided over the Salvadoran church from 1938 to 1977. While not openly hostile to the oligarchy, his leadership of the Salvadoran church was very much influenced by the two watershed events of his archiepiscopacy: Vatican II and the Latin American bishops’ conference at Medellín in 1968.²² In the late sixties and early seventies, the Salvadoran church was taking steps to institutionalize the “option for the poor” called for by the conference at Medellín. At this time, prior to 1977, the church was still refraining from any direct or official political involvement. Rather, agents of the church—priests, religious women, and diocesan leaders—were encouraged to accompany members of the church without endorsing any specific political agenda or policies. As we have already seen, however, the emergence of the death squads had a drastically radicalizing effect on even the most moderate of El Salvador’s people—the church was no exception.

Upon his return to El Salvador in 1974, Sobrino was impressed to find that many of his fellow Jesuits, students, and even some bishops, were acting on behalf of the poor

²² Vatican II’s *Gaudium et Spes* had asserted that the church is in and of this world—with concerns that are not strictly limited to the spiritual. The Latin American bishops’ conference at Medellín in 1968 shattered the centuries-old alliance of the church with the military and political elite of the Latin American countries by calling on the church to face up to and speak out against the reality of poverty and oppression suffered by the vast majority of the “people of God” in Latin America. Klaiber, 173-5.

and getting into serious difficulties as a consequence.²³ While he was not prepared for the Salvadoran reality of persecution—a persecution that extended to the Church—he quickly recognized that which he had long been contemplating in his spiritual life as a Jesuit, the lesson of the First Week of the *Spiritual Exercises*: the historical reality of this world, the context for the life of Christian discipleship, is *sinful*. In El Salvador’s case, reality was defined by the sins of injustice, poverty, marginalization, and brutality. El Salvador’s socioeconomic reality taught Sobrino that “this world is one gigantic cross for millions of innocent people.”²⁴

- *The Witness of the Martyrs: Romero, Ellacuría, & the Crucified Peoples*

Sobrino has written personally and poignantly about the witness and influence of Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero on his development as a Christian and as a theologian²⁵ — from the outright disappointment he felt at the conservative bishop’s appointment to Archbishop of San Salvador; to the “conversion” that Sobrino witnessed when Romero experienced the murder of his friend, Jesuit priest Rutilio Grande; and as someone moved by compassion and mercy for those who suffer to give his voice and his life on their behalf.²⁶ As a friend as well as one who worked closely with Archbishop Romero to provide theological insight and to write speeches, Sobrino was deeply moved by

²³ Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy*, 3.

²⁴ Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy*, 4.

²⁵ See especially, Jon Sobrino, *Archbishop Romero: Memories and Reflections*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990); Jon Sobrino, “Monseñor Romero, a Salvadoran and a Christian.” *Spiritus* 1 (2001); Jon Sobrino, *Witnesses to the Kingdom: The Martyrs of El Salvador and the Crucified Peoples* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2003); and Jon Sobrino, *No Salvation Outside the Poor: Prophetic-Utopian Essays* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008).

²⁶ Although Romero never admitted to such a conversion, Sobrino was convinced that Romero’s sudden and decisive turn toward the poor – as their friend, defender, and voice – was “Rutilio’s miracle.” See Sobrino, *Archbishop Romero: Memories and Reflections*, 9-10.

Romero's commitment to the people, and his willingness to put himself on the line on their behalf. The praxis of Archbishop Romero—the broad constellation of actions, commitments, and practices through which Romero lived out his faith, which ultimately led to his martyrdom—became for Sobrino a living gospel such that he would repeat the words of his friend Ignacio Ellacuría who said “With Archbishop Romero, God has visited El Salvador.”²⁷

Sobrino explicitly credits the examples of Archbishop Oscar Romero, Ignacio Ellacuría and his brother Jesuits who were assassinated in the attack on the UCA's Jesuit residence, as well as the countless nameless and faceless victims of Salvadoran repression for his spiritual transformation. Through them, he came to the discovery “of the truth of reality, and through it, the truth of human beings and of God.”²⁸ The wakening from his own sleep, Sobrino writes, “was made possible by the world of the poor and the victimized.”²⁹ While the lives and deaths of each of these individuals formed the context of Sobrino's spiritual awakening to the praxis of solidarity, Sobrino has written explicitly about the spiritual influence that Monseñor Romero and the six Jesuits massacred at the UCA had on his own formation.

Just as the exercise of Christian solidarity cannot be appreciated but from the experience and practice of it, neither can Sobrino's spirituality be fully understood except through an understanding of the profound “theological event” that forever shaped it: the active spirituality of Monseñor Oscar Romero;

²⁷ Sobrino, *Archbishop Romero: Memories and Reflections*, 58.

²⁸ Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy*, 4.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

...[W]e may say that, in his three years at the head of our local church, Archbishop Romero made the Word of God dwell among Salvadorans--made that Word to "pitch his tent" (John 1:14) among the poor, the *campesinos*, the tortured, the imprisoned, the orphans and widows, the slain. With him the Word of God drew near all of our people, in compassion for the oppressed, in menace for the mighty... The cries of a whole people were transformed into the prayer Archbishop Romero offered to God...³⁰

Although space does not allow a full discussion here, Sobrino and many of his colleagues who knew Romero before his archiepiscopacy credit the occasion of the Jesuit activist priest Rutilio Grande's murder with Romero's spiritual transformation to solidarity with the victims of his country. Whether one calls it a conversion or not, Sobrino explains, "the radical change that took place in Archbishop Romero on the occasion of Rutilio's murder [just a few short weeks into the Archbishop's term] was one of the most impressive things anyone around him, including myself, had ever seen."³¹ The night of Grande's murder, the poor *campesinos* of Aguilares "very promptly showed [Romero] their acceptance, support, affection, and love... Before the church made an option for the poor, the poor had made an option for the church. They had found no one else to defend them..."³² Sobrino believes that at the age of fifty-nine, Romero not only underwent a conversion, but had a new experience of God. Never again would he be capable of separating God from the poor, or his faith in God from his defense of the poor.³³ From the

³⁰ Sobrino, *Archbishop Romero: Memories and Reflections*, 174. Like many of Sobrino's books, this one is a compilation of essays written over a decade's time. The particular speech in which Sobrino defines Romero as a "theological event" was given in March, 1985, five years after Romero's assassination, on the occasion of an honorary doctorate of theology bestowed on Romero by the UCA.

³¹ Sobrino, *Archbishop Romero: Memories and Reflections*, 8-10.

³² *Ibid.*, 12-13.

³³ *Ibid.*, 16

new starting point in the poor, “Archbishop Romero discovered that God is theirs—their defender, their liberator.”³⁴

Twenty years after the assassination of Romero, Sobrino writes that he was most affected by the “profound realism” of Monseñor Romero’s spirituality.³⁵ What makes Romero’s spirituality so unique, Sobrino argues, is that “the special place from which he prayed and meditated was the reality of El Salvador, filled as it is with both sin and grace, with both injustice and hope.”³⁶ Not surprisingly, Sobrino admires that Romero’s spirituality was “situated in the real,” which is consistent, as we shall see, with his theological methodology. Romero’s spirituality was not an abstract spirituality, but centered on the *reality* of the Salvadoran context. In Sobrino’s own words, he says of Monseñor Romero:

In all sincerity, and with all gratitude, I must acknowledge that Archbishop Romero’s life, work and word—a word spoken from deep within that life and work—have been my theological light and inspiration. I do not think that, without Archbishop Romero, I could ever have achieved a satisfactory theological formulation of things as basic as the mystery of God, the church of the poor, hope, martyrdom, Christian fellowship, the essence of the gospel as good news, or even of Jesus Christ, whose three years of life and mission, cross and resurrection, have now been illuminated for me by Archbishop Romero’s three years as archbishop. *Archbishop Romero also made me realize the importance of using current reality as a theological argument.*³⁷

Reflecting on the spirituality of Romero revealed in his words and action, Sobrino refers to the four aspects of Romero’s faith that correspond to the life Jesus: “incarnation, mission, cross, and resurrection.”³⁸ Just as God was made incarnate in the debilities

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Sobrino, “Monseñor Romero, a Salvadoran and a Christian.” *Spiritus* 1 (2001), 143.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 144.

³⁷ Sobrino, *Archbishop Romero: Memories and Reflections*, 29-30, emphasis added.

³⁸ Sobrino, “Monseñor Romero, a Salvadoran and a Christian” 145.

of the flesh, Sobrino argues, so, too, did Romero “take on the debilities of [the Salvadoran] reality: the pain, poverty, suffering, and oppression of the poor, and the violence directed against them by the state.”³⁹ In other words, Romero’s spirituality was grounded in the “most real” aspect of El Salvador, the poor. In the poor Romero recognized “the endpoint of pain and of hope, and the endpoint of his own faith: the presence of God and of Jesus.”⁴⁰ Moreover, Romero’s mission was one of *merciful* evangelization, to work out the salvation of the entire people of El Salvador. He aimed to evangelize even the structures of society with the mercy and compassion he felt for all those who suffered—victims and victimizers alike.⁴¹

Monseñor Romero’s spirituality bore the burden of reality, the burden of humility and death on a cross. Incredibly, Romero bore the cross with joy,

I rejoice...that our church is persecuted precisely for its preferential option for the poor, and for seeking to become incarnate in the interests of the poor... How sad it would be, in a country where such horrible murders are being committed, if there were no priests among the victims! A murdered priest is a testimonial of a church incarnate in the problems of the people.⁴²

Spiritually, Monseñor Romero represents for Sobrino the one who has humbly chosen to walk beneath the standard of Jesus Christ, knowing full well that it will lead to persecution unto death. Finally, Monseñor Romero lived, in Sobrino’s eyes, as if he already participated in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the poverty and humility of the poor, he

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 147.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 151-2.

⁴² Sobrino, *Archbishop Romero: Memories and Reflections*, 38.

found the undeniable joy and hope of faith in Christ.⁴³ Despite the violence and threats of assassination, Romero's freedom was unimpeded: "No one takes my life from me, because I give my life up freely."⁴⁴ Monseñor Romero's spirituality did honor to the reality of El Salvador. In bearing the nation's burden of suffering and sin, Romero's spirit nevertheless sprang forth in "in grace, freedom, joy, and hope... In that regard, Monseñor Romero lived like someone who was already resurrected, although still living within history."⁴⁵

Against the backdrop of the Salvadoran civil war, which waged from roughly 1979 through the signing of the peace accords in 1991, the Jesuit UCA provided the immediate context within which Sobrino's theological voice developed and matured in a country torn apart by poverty, violent oppression and a struggle for justice.⁴⁶ Under the leadership of rector Ignacio Ellacuría, S.J., the UCA sought to study and respond to "la realidad nacional" (the national reality) and to be an agent of liberation in El Salvador. In addition to the traditional university commitments to teaching and research, the UCA embraced a third function—*proyección social* ("social projection")—whereby the UCA and its faculty were challenged to project the knowledge and wisdom of their respective disciplines into the wider society beyond campus.

⁴³ Sobrino, "Monseñor Romero, a Salvadoran and a Christian," 153: "When history no longer binds us down and we are able to triumph over those elements within it that enslave us, then we reflect in some way the triumph of the resurrection of Jesus."

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁴⁶ In this section, I rely on the excellent and concise account of the UCA and its persistent challenge offered in Dean Brackley, SJ *The University and Its Martyrs: Hope from Central America* (San Salvador: Universidad Centroamericana, 2004).

According to Ellacuría and the university leaders, “the extraordinary poverty and injustice of El Salvador constitute a dramatic negation of truth and reason.”⁴⁷ As a university, the UCA embraced the responsibility to confront and transform the dehumanizing aspects of society. Committed to being a university rather than a competing political party or social cause, the UCA engaged in critical examination of the social, political, and economic systems of the country without risking the corrupting influence of political ideology or partisan favor—the university did not seek political power, but to project the truth into the national consciousness by denouncing abuse and offering constructive solutions to social and economic problems. After the assassination of Archbishop Romero in 1980, Ellacuría took on a much more public role in continuing the legacy of providing a voice for the voiceless in El Salvador. Like Romero before him, Ellacuría drew the ire of both the established oligarchy as well as the armed rebel resistance.

In fulfilling the commitment to *proyección social*, the university established regular and public debates on the pressing issues of the day, created (and re-created, after several bombings) a radio station, a human rights center, a documentation and research center, as well as a national polling service. These efforts constituted a direct threat to the powers of oppression, violence, and control in El Salvador, which is why Ellacuría and his fellow Jesuits were brutally murdered along with their housekeeper and her daughter at the residence in the UCA on November 16, 1989. Had Sobrino not been out of the country at the time, he would be included in the martyrs of El Salvador; but in the days

⁴⁷ Brackley, *The University and Its Martyrs*, 28.

and years afterward reflecting on the praxis—the faithful actions—of these men and women have also provided abundant fruit for Sobrino’s theological work.⁴⁸

On November of 1989, while Jon Sobrino was in Thailand giving a short course on christology, six of his Jesuit colleagues, Ignacio Ellacuría, Amando López, Juan Ramón Moreno, Ignacio Martín-Baró, Joaquin López y López, Segundo Montes, and their housekeepers Elba Ramos and her daughter Celina Ramos were pulled from their beds and murdered by a large group of paramilitary soldiers. “The whole community,” Sobrino writes, “my whole community, had been murdered.”⁴⁹ The Jesuit university, committed not just to the education of each individual student, but also invested in a larger effort to project truth and justice into the in the social reality of the nation beyond the campus (*proyección social*), had proven too much of a threat to the powers in control of the military state. Two weeks after the murders, Jon Sobrino addressed the Georgetown University community in a speech that underscored the influence of the Ignatian *spirituality* of his martyred brother Jesuits.⁵⁰

The first and foremost attribute of these men, Sobrino writes, is that they were “human beings that incarnated themselves in Salvadoran reality.”⁵¹ Because the reality of El Salvador was overwhelming poverty, these six Jesuits reacted with compassion and mercy—as human beings do when they are confronted with the suffering of others. “The

⁴⁸ See especially Sobrino’s *Companions of Jesus: the Jesuit Martyrs of El Salvador* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990).

⁴⁹ Sobrino, *Companions of Jesus*, 5.

⁵⁰ Sobrino, “Men of life: The martyrs of the UCA” delivered at Georgetown University, December, 1989. Accessed on May 23, 2003, the speech appeared, without page numbers on the web at: www.rtfcam.org/report/volume_19/No_5/article_12.htm

The speech was later expanded and published as the first chapter of *Companions of Jesus*, but the Georgetown speech better reflects the raw immediacy of Sobrino’s thoughts on the Ignatian character of their spirituality.

⁵¹ Sobrino, “Men of life”

reaction of mercy and compassion is, I hope,” Sobrino writes, “to be human. And I don’t take that for granted. It’s not easy to be human...to consider, really, compassion and mercy as that which is first and that which is last.”⁵² Their compassion motivated them to immerse themselves in reality in the hope of transforming it, of shouldering its burdens so that those who suffer might be alleviated, and thereby they also “suffered the destiny of many Salvadorans.”⁵³

Secondly, these men believed in God in a world of death, “where death is not rhetorical but is the every day reality.”⁵⁴ As believers, Sobrino claims that their faith situated the requirements of Micah 6:8 in the historical reality of El Salvador, (Sobrino’s paraphrasing): “First that you do justice and love faithfully and then, second, that you walk humbly with your God in history, or in the history of the world.”⁵⁵ These men did justice, no matter the cost, Sobrino argued, and they were reminded that was what God wanted every day because they saw injustice every day. And secondly, these men walked with God in history, “and I think they were supported in their faith to be able to walk with God in history by the faith of others.”⁵⁶ In other words, Sobrino claims that these men were carried borne by the faith of others—they lived in solidarity with the people who were victimized, and they were borne by the faith of the poor.

Finally, Sobrino argues, these men were Ignatians, formed by the *Spiritual Exercises* that forces us “to look at the world the way God looks at the world... God sees a world of damnation, and the reaction of God—the literal translation—is, let’s do redemp-

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

tion, let's be salvific."⁵⁷ Recalling the general congregations of 1975 and 1983, Sobrino marvels at the extent to which these men lived the Jesuit vocation: the service of faith, the promotion of justice, and to do so as an option for the poor. According to Sobrino, Christian discipleship entails making an option for the poor because that's what Jesus of Nazareth did; and like Jesus of Nazareth, these men paid the ultimate price for putting the Jesuit mission into practice.

Sobrino places the message of the martyred Jesuits in the context of the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius, at the end of the Ignatian Meditation on Sin, the culmination of which finds the exercitant kneeling in prayer before the crucified Christ who is dying for our sins. Ignatius urges the exercitant to ask three questions: "What have I done for him, what do I do for him, and what am I going to do for him?"⁵⁸ Ellacuría, Sobrino relates, transformed that exercise by placing himself in the presence of the crucified peoples of the world and asking the following three questions: "What have we done so that these people are on the cross? What are we doing now and what are we going to do to bring them down from the cross?"⁵⁹ Ellacuría's questions reflect Sobrino's implicit assimilation of the spiritual exercise of solidarity: Sobrino, like Ellacuría, has situated himself in the suffering reality of the "crucified peoples;" confronted by the dehumanizing suffering of others, he has responded with a generous compassion; and by so doing, he has shouldered a bit of the burden, taken on their humility; in mutuality with the one who suffers, he experiences that his own burdens and his own faith are being borne by the one who

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* Here Sobrino is referring to Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* §107.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

was in need; and in so doing, he experiences the grace of mutuality, the hope and joy of true humility before God and one another.

- *Sobrino and the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola*

The *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius provide a helpful context for understanding Sobrino's transformation from an idealist "missionary" theologian to a theologian of liberation; from a theologian of ideas to one of praxis. In short, Sobrino's transformation was due to the confluence of his Ignatian spiritual formation and the reality of El Salvador and the followers of Jesus that he encountered there, in the lived faith of poor, as well as in the prophetic witness of the martyrs.⁶⁰ Together, his spiritual formation and the reality of the faith of the "crucified ones" created within him a fundamental orientation to the historical Jesus whose praxis of mercy invites followers, signifies the immanent Reign of God, and offers the hope of salvation: the grace of God's gratuitous liberation of communities of the poor and oppressed. Ultimately, I will argue, the ethical implications of Sobrino's theology leads to a praxis of *solidarity*, which might best be understood as a spiritual exercise. Solidarity became the practice from which his new faith—and the new theology flowing out of that faith—had sprung.⁶¹

As is typical of Jesuit formation, Sobrino had been trained in the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius of Loyola. While no one can ever know the extent to which Sobrino's spirituality has been shaped directly by the *Spiritual Exercises*, we can look for

⁶¹ The close friendship between Sobrino and Ellacuría undoubtedly adds another dimension to Sobrino's transformation, both personally and intellectually. For the present effort, however, we will explore Ellacuría's influence on Sobrino's theological methodology in a later section.

Sobrino's explicit acknowledgement of the Ignatian spiritual tradition in his writing. The most obvious place to start is the extended reflection on "The Christ of the Ignatian *Exercises*" that serves as the appendix to his first major work on christology.⁶²

From his brief treatment of the christology implicit in the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises*, four key terms emerge that figure largely in shaping our understanding of the spiritual exercise of solidarity that is characteristic of Sobrino's theological writings: an emphasis on the *historical Jesus*,⁶³ an understanding of *discipleship as praxis*, the identification of the privileged locus of discipleship as the situation of *humility, poverty*, or more harshly, *opprobrium*; and, ultimately, the gift of *grace to love as God loves*. The great advantage of the *Exercises*, that which makes them "a paradigm of what a theology ought to be," Sobrino writes, is that Ignatius did not impose upon them a rigid system of theological orthodoxy.⁶⁴ Sobrino identifies this as their foremost theological element, because they provide a spiritual context for an encounter with God in Jesus Christ, and from that encounter theological reflection is able to take place.

According to Sobrino, the *Spiritual Exercises*, modeled as they are on the synoptic narratives, emphasize an encounter with the *historical Jesus*. The *Exercises*, particularly the Second Week, focus on Jesus at a stage that is prior to later theological reflection, indicating that Ignatius assumed "that the concrete historical happenings of that life

⁶² Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads* (Orbis, 1978). Appendix: "The Christ of the Ignatian Exercises," 296-424. In this essay, Sobrino demonstrates how his own emphasis on a *historical* understanding of Jesus of Nazareth flows out of the Christ of the synoptic gospels at the center of Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*.

⁶³ *Christology at the Crossroads* is well known as Sobrino's extended argument about the relevance of the *historical Jesus* to Christian theology over an against reliance solely upon the *Christ of faith*.

⁶⁴ Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, 397.

were what could and should effect a change in those taking his *Exercises*.⁶⁵ Even further, Sobrino argues that the *Exercises* bring the participant to the point of acknowledging “There can be no Christian living without the historical Jesus.”⁶⁶ According to Sobrino, the most original and typical features of Ignatius’ thinking and his *Spiritual Exercises* are to be found in the Second Week, because “It is dedicated wholly to a consideration of the historical Jesus, but under a very specific aspect. It is concerned with a personal election or decision to render service to the kingdom.”⁶⁷ The call to discipleship is a call to service, a call to a praxis, a new way of life that communicates one’s ultimate hope and commitments.

Sobrino argues that by their emphasis on the *historical* Jesus who calls believers into a *praxis of discipleship*, the *Exercises* of Ignatius cultivate more than mere faithful or intellectual assent to God. “They are designed to arouse in the participant a strong disposition toward following Jesus. Without such discipleship Christian life, even the life of prayer, would be meaningless in the eyes of Ignatius.”⁶⁸ Such a view of the Exercises fits Sobrino’s understanding of theology as orthopraxis: as faith-in-action rather than mere intellectual assent to orthodox beliefs. The *Spiritual Exercises*, after all, are not directed in the first place toward correct Christian belief, but toward creating a disposition for Christian living. By contemplating, in detail, Jesus’ life and summons to discipleship, the participant comes to recognize that “imitation of Christ” does not entail “the mere repeti-

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 401

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 406

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 404.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 402. According to Sobrino each of the several different spiritual exercises, “every method of examination of conscience, of meditation, of contemplation, of vocal and mental prayer, and of other spiritual activities...are oriented toward discipleship. “Christian life,” as presented in the *Exercises*, “is the following of Jesus.” 402.

tion of Jesus' own traits."⁶⁹ Rather, the life of discipleship "means situating oneself in a concrete situation just as Jesus did."⁷⁰

As we shall see, *situating oneself in a concrete situation* will become a major theme in Sobrino's theological project, his attentiveness and commitment to reality. For the present moment, however, we must note that discipleship is a call to be present to the concrete, historical presence of God in a world riddled with conflict and sin. Meditating on the life and death of Jesus in the *Exercises*, Sobrino came to the conclusion that *sin* is what killed Jesus. Discipleship is a response to Jesus' call to overcome sin by living as Jesus did. The meditation on the "two standards" (nos. 136-48) spells out what discipleship in the contemporary world means, making hard choices between the forces of good and evil: between riches and poverty, honor or contempt, and finally between pride or humility. The task of discipleship is to choose to walk beneath the standard of Jesus, whose way entailed both spiritual and actual poverty, injurious contempt and suffering, and the utter *humility* of one who died without dignity, "a fool" in the eyes of the world. Indeed, the Third Week of the *Spiritual Exercises* cultivates and reinforces a commitment to this praxis of discipleship as the exercitant perseveres with Jesus in the humiliation and death of the Passion narratives.

The final foundational aspect of the *Spiritual Exercises* is the fruit of the Fourth Week, as the exercitant accompanies Jesus in the transformation from the Passion to the Resurrection. "The underlying conception here," Sobrino writes, "is that God is abso-

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 412.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

lutely greater than everything else.”⁷¹ The culmination of the Fourth Week is the “Contemplation to Attain the Love of God,” wherein the exercitant is challenged to love as God loves, “in some concrete action... Love must be historicized, ‘Love ought to manifest itself in deeds rather than in words.’”⁷² Moreover, this love is a mutual interchange, a pouring out of oneself for the other, giving from what we are able to give, and receiving from the other with gratitude. The fruit of the Ignatian *Exercises* is a simultaneous gratitude for God’s love that is made known to us in and through this world accompanied by a genuine desire to serve in making God’s loving presence and action known to others.⁷³

“The essential point,” Sobrino writes, “is that we must move from an awareness of being loved by God to an active response in works of service.”⁷⁴

Here again we find the same conception of God that was entertained by the historical Jesus. According to Jesus we respond by putting all our confidence in God who is drawing near. According to Ignatius, we must offer ourselves up to God (see the famous oblation, “Take, Lord, and receive...”). According to Jesus, we respond by engaging actively in service to the kingdom of God through discipleship... All this should prove what I suggested earlier about the basic structure of the Exercises. They do not begin with the God of Jesus Christ, move on to the historical Jesus himself, and then return to the God of Jesus Christ. Instead, they begin with the radical seriousness of human life, move on to Jesus as the best embodiment and response to this serious issue, and then end with the God whom we can now comprehend because of Jesus and his pattern of discipleship.⁷⁵

Through the *Spiritual Exercises*, Sobrino came to understand that the way of Jesus is the way of a “contemplative in action,” committed to a becoming present in history, engaging in a praxis of mercy in the midst of a world of sin; whose way is characterized by

⁷¹ *Christology at the Crossroads*, 421.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Wilkie Au, “Ignatian Service: Gratitude & Love in Action,” *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 40:2 (Summer 2008) 13.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 422.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

poverty, contempt, and humility, but who comes to an understanding of God's gratuitous love and self-gift in history. The challenge for a follower of Jesus, then is to acknowledge that discipleship is the authentic locale of contemplation... It is there where we can see what sin and injustice and what love and hope really are. It is there we can find out who exactly the Son of Man is, the one who preceded us on the same road. Finally, it is there where we can find out who exactly is this God who keeps opening out history until he eventually becomes all in all (1 Cor. 15:28).⁷⁶

These four aspects of Ignatian spirituality—an emphasis on the *historical* Jesus; a *praxis of discipleship* situated in the concrete, in a world of sin; a discipleship characterized by *poverty, contempt, and humility*; and ultimately the grace to love as God loves—provide the dispositional foundation from which an understanding of the spiritual exercise of solidarity emerges. On their own, these particularly Ignatian insights do not necessarily lead to a helpful understanding of *solidarity*. Rather, Sobrino's distinctive vision of Christian solidarity has developed out of the convergence of his Ignatian spiritual formation, the tragic reality of the “crucified peoples” of Latin America, and found expression in his writings in systematic theology. To that understanding, we will turn our attention in the next chapter.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 424.

CHAPTER FIVE

Jon Sobrino's Contributions to the Development of Solidarity

In the preceding chapter, we examined the historical context and major spiritual influences that provide the necessary points of reference for the development of solidarity in Jon Sobrino's theology. In this chapter, I argue that the Catholic social tradition has much to gain from considering solidarity in terms of concrete Christian experience and activity that flows out of a proper understanding of solidarity as *spiritual exercise*. John Paul II's phenomenological conception of Christian solidarity would do well, in other words, to be counterbalanced by a consideration of solidarity "from below"—in the praxis of faithful followers of Jesus who yearn for and are committed to liberation from poverty, suffering, and death.

In these pages, we will examine the theological and ethical case for a contemporary praxis of solidarity that is based on the theological writings of the Jesuit systematic theologian Jon Sobrino, who has both implicitly and explicitly articulated a vision of Christian solidarity from the context of El Salvador, in the tradition of Latin American liberation theology. Christian solidarity, properly understood, is at the very heart of Sobrino's theological project; and, I argue, the praxis of solidarity unites spirituality, christology, and ethics in Sobrino's writings. The key to understanding the significance of "solidarity" in Jon Sobrino's life and work, I submit, is by understanding solidarity as *spiritual exercise*. Accordingly, the first half of this chapter will examine the theological framework of Sobrino's approach to solidarity, while the second half constitutes my own

efforts to describe how an understanding of solidarity as spiritual exercise flows out of Sobrino's work.

In this chapter, we will follow this examination of Sobrino's context and influences by turning to an examination of Sobrino's theological method and content that provides the foundation for a proper understanding of solidarity as spiritual exercise; and then finally, a consideration of the implications understanding the praxis of solidarity as a spiritual exercise for contemporary Catholic ethics. Ultimately, I will make the case that solidarity understood as a spiritual exercise makes a vital contribution to contemporary Catholic social teaching that provides a necessary complement to the conception of solidarity proffered by the encyclical canon of the Catholic social tradition and the particular contributions of John Paul II.¹

- ***The Method and Content of Sobrino's Liberation Christology***

As a systematic theologian, Sobrino was greatly influenced by Ignacio Ellacuría, the Jesuit philosopher and theologian who served as the rector of the UCA during the years of the civil war. In 1975, Ellacuría presented a foundational paper in which he described the philosophical foundations of a Latin American theological method.² In this

¹ Using spirituality as a lens through which to analyze a particular theologian is a somewhat dangerous task: one might easily make the mistake of presuming to "see into the soul" of a theologian. To avoid this error, I'm following the example set by J. Matthew Ashley. See Ashley's *Interruptions: Mysticism, Politics, and Theology in the works of Johann Baptist Metz* (Notre Dame UP, 1998) and "Ignacio Ellacuría and the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola" *Theological Studies* 61 (March 2000) for two prototypical studies on the intersection of spirituality and theology.

² Ignacio Ellacuría. "Hacia una fundamentación filosófica del método teológico latinoamericano" as discussed both in Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994), 34; and Kevin Burke, *The Ground Beneath the Cross* (Washington, DC: Georgetown UP, 2000), 100-8.

Ellacuría was himself a disciple of the Spanish philosopher Xavier Zubiri. For more information on the relationship between Ellacuría and Zubiri, see Burke's *The Ground Beneath the Cross* and Teresa

paper, Ellacuría describes the formal structure of how humans come to *understand that which is real*, which Ellacuría considers to be, at its root, the task of liberation theology. According to Kevin Burke, Ellacuría provides a three-dimensional theological method “that mirrors the encounter between human sentient intelligence and historical reality.”³

Sobrino summarizes Ellacuría’s three dimensions as the *noetic*, or, in Ellacuría’s words “getting a grip on reality,” the *ethical*, “taking on the burden of reality,” and the *practical*, “taking responsibility for reality.”⁴ For Ellacuría, the task of understanding what is real, to quote Burke, “is an integral human encounter with historical reality: when confronting the problems of one’s fundamental existence, intelligible apprehension, ethical stance, and praxis emerge together.”⁵ As three dimensions of an integrated whole, each dimension involves the other, and none necessarily has any chronological priority or necessary import over and against the others. So too with theology, writes Jon Sobrino, who incorporated Ellacuría’s methodological structure into his theological—and particularly, his christological—investigations.⁶ In following Ellacuría’s lead, Sobrino’s work demonstrates an organic unity in the theological, ethical, and praxis dimensions of his writings.

Corresponding to the noetic level of Ellacuría’s methodology, Sobrino has a consistent commitment to the *real*, which in the realm of christology translates into the primacy of the *historical Jesus*. Sobrino’s first major work, *Christology at the Crossroads*,

Whitfield’s *Paying the Price: Ignacio Ellacuría and the Murdered Jesuits of El Salvador* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple UP, 1995).

³ Burke, *The Ground Beneath the Cross*, 100.

⁴ Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 34-35. For a full and detailed discussion of these three dimensions and their significance in the thought of Ellacuría, see Burke’s *The Ground Beneath the Cross*, 100-8.

⁵ Burke, *The Ground Beneath the Cross*, 101.

⁶ Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 35.

emphasizes both of these points, which are further elaborated in *Jesus in Latin America* and *Jesus the Liberator*. As we have already seen both in our consideration of *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius, and in the first movement of the spiritual exercise of solidarity, this methodological commitment is also a spiritual one. So too, as a theologian, Sobrino seeks in his investigations to confront reality with all the available tools of analysis and understanding at his disposal. For this reason, many Latin American theologians (Sobrino included) have been harshly criticized for introducing Marxist social analysis into their theological investigations.

Corresponding to the practical dimension of Ellacuría's methodology, Sobrino argues throughout his corpus that Christian discipleship entails a praxis of self-impoverishment. This clearly reflects the influence of the Meditation on Two Standards in the *Spiritual Exercises*. Sobrino argues that the primary object of Jesus' preaching was "the kingdom of God," preparing people for the transformation of history into a new communal reality. In action, Jesus invites people to follow him in the concrete realization of the kingdom not through intellectual or theological truth, but through praxis.⁷ Sobrino argues that two characteristics of the praxis of Jesus emerge clearly: tender mercy towards sinners and life-giving identification with the poor.⁸ Christian discipleship requires that believers follow Jesus' way of self-emptying on behalf of solidarity with the poor and marginalized, the victims of history, and, ultimately, his adoption of their situation, humility, and fate. Practical Christian ethics, according to Sobrino, entails a "volun-

⁷ Sobrino, *Jesus in Latin America*, 143: "The kingdom of God, that which is to be built, is the antithesis of the situation of those who are most deprived of life... what the kingdom of God consists of can be discovered by considering Jesus' actions as actions in service of the kingdom..."

⁸ Sobrino, *The True Church and the Poor*, 48.

tary solidarity” that consists in removing the real, objective sin that impoverishes those who are poor; this sin cannot be eradicated without taking on the condition of the poor; their dignity cannot be given back to them without taking on their humiliation.⁹

Corresponding to the ethical level of Ellacuría’s methodology, a recurring theme in Sobrino’s corpus is the *privileged theological place of the poor* which follows from a commitment to the *historical Jesus*. Here, Sobrino’s theological method is reflective of the incarnational, Ignatian spirituality: in the life and activity of the historical Jesus, God situated Godself in the context of history, and in history, among the poor, the marginalized, the crucified. Therefore, the faithful activity—the praxis—of the historical Jesus who is God’s revelation provides the “raw material” for theological and ethical reflection.¹⁰ Jesus’ own merciful praxis on behalf of the kingdom of God was one of efficacious love for the multitudinous poor and oppressed; a love expressed in justice.¹¹ The social location of the poor constitutes a privileged theological position by virtue of the fact that “in the world of poverty, the poor and Jesus of Nazareth converge and point to one another.”¹²

Before we can move to a direct consideration of Sobrino’s framework for a contemporary praxis of solidarity—a praxis, I argue, that is best understood as spiritual exercise—we would do well to understand certain characteristics of the systematic theology

⁹ Sobrino, *Jesus in Latin America*, 145.

¹⁰ Even though Sobrino’s method considers Jesus Christ “from below,” his most recent work *Christ the Liberator* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001) argues that the historical Jesus is *not* to be understood in opposition to the “Christ of faith.” Rather, the two approaches are mutually informative, and since christology “from above” has been so emphasized in the history of the Church, that the Church would do well to rediscover the meaning of the christological doctrines and titles by appreciating them “from below.”

¹¹ Sobrino, *The True Church and the Poor*, 48-50.

¹² Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 245.

through which this praxis is communicated. In the following pages, then, we will examine several aspects of Sobrino's work that provide the methodological and theological parameters within which we can come to understand his unique contribution to an understanding of solidarity: methodologically, *the commitment to reality and the priority of praxis over theory*; and theologically—especially in his writings on christology—the *primary need for liberation from sin and suffering, an emphasis on the historical Jesus and centrality of the Reign of God*, and finally, *following Jesus as the praxis and spirituality of discipleship*. A brief examination of each of these distinctive theological guideposts will provide the foundation for what I will argue is Sobrino's contribution to a contemporary understanding of *solidarity as spiritual exercise*.

- *Methodological commitments to reality, and to the priority of praxis over theory*

In El Salvador, Sobrino awakened to the realization that the world is divided into two groups of people: those living in the abundance of life (most obviously, the majority of those living the First World countries), and those living very close to death (the vast majority of people living in the developing world, or, the “Two Thirds World,” as Sobrino calls it).¹³ In terms of sheer numbers, the vast majority of people in this world experience a reality marked by poverty, suffering, and death – this, Sobrino argues, ought to be considered the *normative* human experience of reality, the fundamental fact of the

¹³ Sobrino, *Theology of Christian Solidarity*, 9-10: “At present humankind is not simply differentiated but deeply divided. The basic difference is between being close to life or close to death, between affluent societies where life and the most basic rights of the human person are safeguarded, and societies where misery, blatant violation of human rights and death prevail.”

contemporary era. Conversely, the First World experience of life in abundance—which is projected as normative from the perspective of globalization, mass media, education, and even most contemporary theology—is, in fact, *exceptional*.

For Sobrino and many other Latin American theologians inspired by the bishops at Medellín, theology is understood as critical reflection on the faith of the poor, upon their experience, their encounter with a God of hope in the midst of a reality that deals suffering and death, and the praxis by which they live out that faith. As Gustavo Gutiérrez put it, theology is “second act”—reflection on the lived praxis of Christians—and thus Sobrino asserts that the praxis of the “church of the poor” provides the appropriate context for doing theology.

As fellow UCA theologian Dean Brackley, S.J. explains:

“By [“church of the poor”] Sobrino means simply the church whose members are primarily poor, as in Central America, and whose leaders walk with them, a church that strives to follow Christ in the face of unjust suffering. The situation of this church, and above all its faith, throws a bright light on the truth of the gospel.”¹⁴

Sobrino’s methodological insistence on the significance of poverty as the primary context for theological reflection is not uncontroversial. The 2006 Notification issued by the Vatican’s Congregation on the Doctrine of the Faith cites this as the first of Sobrino’s “methodological presuppositions” which is “not in conformity with the doctrine of the Church.”¹⁵ The Congregation argues that however admirable Sobrino’s commitment to

¹⁴ Dean Brackley, “Theology and Solidarity: Learning from Sobrino’s Method,” 9.

¹⁵ See “Notification on the works of Father Jon Sobrino, SJ: *Jesucristo liberador. Lectura histórico-teológica de Jesús de Nazaret* (Madrid, 1991) and *La fe en Jesucristo. Ensayo desde las víctimas* (San Salvador, 1999).” Published on November 26, 2006. Accessed on September 26, 2008 at: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20061126_notificacion-sobrino_en.html

the poor may be, his insistence on the primacy of the poor displaces the long tradition and faith of the Church as the proper foundation for all theological reflection.¹⁶ The criticism is valid because the CDF desires theology to be an expression of orthodoxy, and for Christian praxis to flow out of orthodoxy. However, the criticism demonstrates just how significantly the CDF disagrees with one of Sobrino's major methodological insights, that theology should follow praxis, and so orthodoxy should be an expression of orthopraxis; not, as the CDF would have it, the other way around.¹⁷

Sobrino's methodological preference for praxis over theory—and specifically the priority of the praxis of the poor—is demonstrated by his frequent appeals both to the historical Jesus who by his praxis of mercy (healing on the Sabbath, welcoming the sinner, etc.) incurred the wrath of the religious authorities,¹⁸ and also to the martyrs of El Salvador, especially Archbishop Romero:

[Archbishop Romero] made an important contribution to theological method. He showed us how to practice theology precisely in the Christian fashion. First and foremost, he showed us the *locus from which* theology must be practiced... God is to be sought not necessarily where we, or theology, might like to see God manifested, but where God has promised to be manifested: in the poor of this world. And a Christian theology must develop the human being's response to God not from just any random starting point, but from the starting point of the gospel: in the discipleship of Jesus poor and crucified, and in the response of the poor who have understood the mysteries of the Reign.¹⁹

According to Sobrino, the praxis of Archbishop Romero and countless other Salvadorans who struggled for justice in a situation of dehumanizing, death-dealing oppression pro-

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, 389-390; Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy*, 39; and Sobrino, *Systematic Christology: Jesus Christ, the Absolute Mediator of the Reign of God*, 449

¹⁸ Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy*, 18-20.

¹⁹ Sobrino, *Archbishop Romero: Memories and Reflections*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990), 180.

vides a new light with which to read the gospels, to encounter Jesus Christ, and to experience the hope of liberation through the fulfillment of God's will for humanity: the Reign of God.

- *The need for liberation from sin and suffering*

Ultimately, Sobrino insists, the commitment to do theology with one's feet firmly planted in the world of the poor and the experience of the suffering ones is an option—a choice to allow the fundamental truth of the suffering of this world to bear upon one's understanding of Scripture, tradition, and all other theologies.²⁰ The impetus of this option is not made for theology's sake, however, but out of compassion for those who are suffering—out of a desire to alleviate the historical suffering of those upon whom injustice has been inflicted:

The option is, above all, a creaturely option that puts theology squarely in contact with the created order... It is an option that cuts across and divides humanity into two groups: those whose feelings are lacerated by the sufferings we have described and those whose feelings are untouched... It is an option that sees all reality from a preferential perspective—that sees suffering from the partiality of those who suffer and not from the (apparently) universal perspective of the metaphysical suffering characterizing all finite being.²¹

The desire to alleviate the suffering of others, according to Sobrino, is a *pretheological* response of compassion for others, to liberate them from their dehumanization so that they may live lives worthy of humans. What is at stake in a world of suffering is the very humanity of human beings—and in the context of contemporary global poverty, a majority of humans. (Although we will examine the topic of “following Jesus” more thor-

²⁰ Sobrino, *Principle of Mercy*, 33-36.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 33.

oughly in a later section, it is important to note that this impulse to respond to suffering with compassion corresponds directly to the praxis of Jesus in the gospels.)

As a theologian, Sobrino is also interested in considering the truth about this world and its relationship to the divine, “In other words, the place of theology is the reality which provides the greatest historical mediation of God—where one can find the “signs of the times,” understood in a strictly theological sense.”²² The overwhelming phenomena of poverty and unjust suffering in our world today are the defining facts of our times – facts that are increasing in prevalence rather than decreasing over time. Theology cannot ignore the overwhelming truth of this world, especially when contemplating the relationship between a God who is creator of this world, and the very world that is creation, or an insistence that God’s incarnation, message, death, and resurrection are “good news” for humanity.

Given the context of unjust suffering, the reality and praxis of what Ignacio Ellacuría calls the “crucified peoples” provides a privileged vantage point for Christian theology.²³ The language of crucifixion is important, Sobrino argues, because the poor of Latin America are actively being put to death—either through direct means such as war and violent repression or through indirect yet effective means such as the institutionalized violence of poverty and marginalization. The full theological impact of acknowledging the crucified peoples, however, is to identify and encounter the crucified Christ in these suffering ones, and to experience the fullness of hope for their liberation through their

²² *Ibid.*, 31.

²³ Published as Chapter 3 of *The Principle of Mercy*, Sobrino’s essay “The Crucified Peoples: Yahweh’s Suffering Servant Today” is dedicated to the memory of Ignacio Ellacuría.

identity with Jesus Christ, the liberator.²⁴ And like Jesus, the crucified people of today unjustly bear the marks of torture and execution by the hands of the powers that seek to perpetuate their own authority. Thus the language of crucifixion is also important because it signifies the existence of active resistance to the good news of Jesus Christ and the message that he preached in word and deed: the Reign of God. In short, then as now, the crucifiers are agents of the anti-Reign.

- *An emphasis on **the historical Jesus** and the centrality of **the Reign of God***

In El Salvador, among the “crucified peoples” in a context where the violence of poverty and the experience of repression is the norm—both within countries and from beyond through First World hegemony—Sobrinó came to understand that European theology, preoccupied as it is with overcoming Enlightenment problems such as individual reason, meaning, and identity, does not adequately correspond to the lived praxis and faith of the poor. Doing theology in the context of the poor requires a different theological methodology and invariably yields different theological insights.²⁵ For Sobrinó, this is particularly true for christology, which in Latin American liberation theology starts with the historical Jesus.

Unlike many European theologians who have argued for a return to the historical Jesus as a way of rationally overcoming Enlightenment suspicion that faith is mythical and authoritarian, Latin American theologians approach the historical Jesus differently:

²⁴ Sobrinó, *The Principle of Mercy*, 49-51.

²⁵ Sobrinó has written several essays and book chapters regarding the differences between European and Latin American christologies. The most helpful for our present purposes is “The Historical Jesus, The Starting Point for Christology,” in *Jesus the Liberator*, 36-63. See also *Christology at the Crossroads* (Orbis 1978), 17-39; and *The True Church and the Poor*, 7-38.

In Latin America... the main, immediate problem is not the meaning of life for the individual, but the non-meaning of the tragedy of life and society, within which personal life acquires meaning or non-meaning. From this point of view, the greatest task for faith is not the *demythologization* of Christ, as in progressive theologies, but the *depacification* of Christ, that he should not leave us in peace with the distress of the world, and of course, his *deidolization*, that people should not be able to oppress the world in his name.²⁶

According to Sobrino, a theology that is rooted in the church of the poor is interested in the historical Jesus who acted with the Spirit to engage the social reality in order to transform it into the Reign of God.²⁷ In short, liberation christology starts with the historic Jesus in order to preserve the invitation into the praxis²⁸ of Jesus—a praxis that liberates victims from sin and oppression.

Aspects of the historical Jesus are made known through the gospel texts, not because they record factual histories or verbatim accounts of what Jesus said and did, but because they are theological narratives that were written by early Christians to preserve and communicate the praxis of Jesus using his own words and deeds. However, the gospels are not the sole source of information regarding the historical Jesus; socio-historical and cultural research regarding the religious and political context of Jesus' time, particularly regarding the faith practices of Jews at the time of Jesus, provide important knowl-

²⁶ Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 50.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 51

²⁸ In chapter six of *Jesus the Liberator*, Sobrino makes a distinction between the *practice* of Jesus, referring to the broad sweep of Jesus' deeds and sayings in the service of the Kingdom (in short, activities that are "signs" of God's Reign), and the *prophetic praxis* of Jesus by which he refers to a specific group of verbal controversies, unmaskings and denunciations represented in the Gospels by which he unmasks the idolatries of the anti-Kingdom and proclaims what a society in accordance with the Kingdom of God should be (in the tradition of Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micah, etc.). Specifically, Jesus is put to death because of his *prophetic praxis*.

However, in an effort to keep terms consistent throughout this chapter, when I use the term *praxis*, I mean to signify the constellation of words and deeds through which one communicates one's ultimate commitments, in short, "action with spirit." This is consistent with Sobrino's use of the term "praxis of the poor," as the primary source for theological reflection, and when applied to Jesus, his praxis includes the words and actions (speeches, parables, miracles, denunciations, table-fellowship, and even his death) through which Jesus communicates a fundamental commitment to the Reign of God.

edge that allow us to understand the social context and implications of Jesus' lived praxis.²⁹ According to Sobrino, the praxis of the *historical* Jesus is epistemologically important because by engaging in his praxis, we come to know the person of Jesus more deeply and more fully—his mercy, his hope, his faith, his unique relationship to God: “To follow the practice of Jesus with his spirit is an ethical demand of the historical Jesus himself, but it is also an epistemological principle.”³⁰ (That a follower of Jesus who engages in his praxis leads to deeper knowledge of Jesus as Christ provides further evidence of Sobrino's methodological commitment to the priority of praxis to theory—of orthopraxis preceding orthodoxy). By engaging in the praxis of Jesus, followers come to understand that the life of Jesus is gospel – and experience Jesus' praxis as good news because his words and his actions communicate the ultimate value of Jesus' life and praxis, the Reign of God.³¹

The synoptic gospels are consistent in portraying the Reign of God as the central message of Jesus' ministry, actions, and teaching. Jesus did not proclaim himself, but always the Reign of God, the sovereignty of God.³² Problematically, however, as often as Jesus speaks of the Reign of God, he never explains exactly what the Reign is, only

²⁹ For a concise summary of the major tensions regarding Sobrino's emphasis on the historical Jesus in the larger context of contemporary theology (and especially in light of the theology of Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI) see Lisa Sowle Cahill's "Christ and Kingdom: The Identity of Jesus and Christian Politics" in Stephen Pope, ed. *Hope and Solidarity: Jon Sobrino's Challenge to Christian Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008), 242-254.

³⁰ Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 52-55.

³¹ Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 54.

n.b. The English translations of Sobrino's works tend to go back and forth between translating "el Reino de Dios" as "the Kingdom of God" and the "Reign of God." To avoid confusion and for the purposes of consistency in the present essay, I will use "Reign of God."

³² *Ibid.*, 68.

that it is at hand.³³ Sobrino argues that there are three ways to deduce what Jesus thought about the Reign of God: a *notional* way that examines Jesus' notion of the Reign vis-à-vis earlier notions of God's reign in Israel; through a consideration of the *addressee*, to whom the Reign of God is presented as "good news" in the gospel narratives; and finally, through a consideration of the *praxis of Jesus*, on the basis that what Jesus said and did was in the service of the proclamation of God's Reign.³⁴ According to Sobrino, modern theology typically engages in the *notional* way of understanding the Reign of God, with occasional use of the way of praxis, but liberation theology's unique contribution is to engage in the consideration of the *addressee* to know what Jesus meant by the Reign of God.

Importantly, the *notional* way of understanding Jesus' conception of the Reign of God is helpful because Israel's understanding of God's reign is a liberational one: in the midst of suffering and historical calamity, Israel (as a people) hopes for liberation and the establishment of a utopic social order free from oppression. The Reign of God is conceived of as an act *of God*—by God's initiative, a gift and grace—in history on behalf of God's people. The historical Jesus communicated in the gospel narratives certainly continues this hope-filled tradition of God's Reign as God's gratuitous act of liberation of the

³³ *Ibid.*, 69.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 69-70. cf. Sobrino, "Central Position of the Reign of God in Liberation Theology," *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, Ellacuría & Sobrino, eds. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993), 350-387.

"The notional way attempts to ascertain what the Reign of God was for Jesus from a starting point in the notion that Jesus himself might have had of it. This way analyzes the various notions of the Reign in the Hebrew scriptures and among Jesus' contemporaries (John the Baptist, the Zealots, the Pharisees, the apocalyptic groups, and so on). So, the researcher attempts to ferret out what Jesus thought about the Reign... Jesus proclaimed a utopia, something good and salvific, that was at hand." (*Central Position of the Reign of God in Liberation Theology*, 358).

oppressed, an act of God's love.³⁵ Moreover, the coming of the Reign of God is "good news" for those who are oppressed, "This is the vital core of Jesus' message: God is coming close; God is coming close because God is good, and it is good for us that God should come close... God is seen, in essence, as salvation, and God's approach is directly salvation."³⁶

According to Sobrino, the key insight of liberation christologies is to emphasize what we can come to know about the Reign of God by *way of the addressee* to whom the Reign was proclaimed. In order for the coming of the Reign of God to be considered "good news" (*eu-aggelion*), the message of love and liberation must have made its hearers rejoice. And while Jesus proclaimed God's love to all—that no one was excluded from the possibility of entering into the Reign of God—the gospel narratives tell us that Jesus addressed himself directly to the poor.³⁷ In short, "the poor are the first ones to whom Jesus' mission is directed."³⁸

Throughout the Synoptic gospels, *the poor* are spoken of in the plural, as a collective rather than as individuals—as crowds, multitudes, a class of people. As Sobrino points out, the Greek term for poor appears twenty-five times in the New Testament, in twenty-two of those cases it refers to the economically afflicted and disposed—and in the other three cases it refers to the spiritually poor.³⁹ Jesus' proclamation of the Reign of God is essentially *partial*—"one whose minimum, but basic content is the life and dignity

³⁵ Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 70-78.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 77.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 79. cf. Luke 4:18 "He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor"; Luke 7:12 & Mt. 11:5 "The poor have good news brought to them"; Luke 6:20 "Blessed are you who are poor, for ours is the Kingdom of God."

³⁸ Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 80.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 81.

of the poor.”⁴⁰ As we have seen, God’s partiality on behalf of the poor and oppressed is not new in Jesus’ proclamation of the Reign, but a continuation of Israel’s experience of a God who hears the cry of the poor, who defends widows, orphans, and strangers, who saves the oppressed from injustice.⁴¹ God’s partiality for the poor—not for anything they can do, but simply for who they are—is a theme woven throughout the scriptures and brought to fulfillment in Jesus’ proclamation of the Reign of God to the poor, as an indication that God’s Reign will be one of life for those who suffer death unjustly. The good news of the Reign of God is that it brings about the liberation of the oppressed.⁴²

The third and final way that Sobrino describes for understanding Jesus’ conception of the Reign of God is the way of the *praxis of Jesus*, such that, in the words of Schillebeeckx, “the concrete content of the Kingdom arises from [Jesus’] ministry and activity considered as a whole.”⁴³ By Sobrino’s own admission, the way of *Jesus’ praxis* is intimately related to the *way of the addressee* because Jesus’ activities, his parables, and his denunciations are intended for those to whom they are addressed, those who are his audience and who are invited to be his followers. In working miracles, casting out demons, welcoming sinners, teaching parables, celebrating the coming of God’s Reign, and denouncing the idolatries of the Anti-Reign, Jesus’ praxis mediates the qualities and

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 87.

⁴³ Sobrino, “Central Position of the Reign of God in Liberation Theology,” 361. Cf. Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 87-104. It should be noted that while these articles make parallel arguments regarding the three ways of understanding Jesus’ understanding of the Reign of God, the former discusses the “way of the praxis of Jesus,” while the latter discusses the “way of the practice of Jesus.” See note 28 above.

values of the Reign of God to all those he encountered, and most especially, the poor. In a word, the praxis of Jesus is *mercy*.⁴⁴

Historically, scholars agree that the early phase of Jesus' ministry included miraculous healings that "surprised and astonished his contemporaries."⁴⁵ The miracles of Jesus recounted in the Gospels—the healing of the blind, the lame, and lepers—are signs of the closeness of God's Reign, signs that indicate God's merciful love for the poor, and God's desire that the oppressed be liberated from that which oppresses them. The miracles indicate that Jesus' primary praxis is one of *mercy*—as the Gospels say time and again that Jesus felt "compassion and pity for the sorrows of others, particularly the simple people who followed him."⁴⁶ The enduring significance of Jesus' miracles is that they are expressions of mercy—a mercy that signifies the Reign of God in that they

⁴⁴ Although *Jesus the Liberator* translates *miser cordia* as "pity," I use "mercy" in keeping with Sobrino's preferred translation in the essays contained within *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992).

Sobrino's most articulate description of mercy, however can be found in his essay, "Central Position of the Reign of God in Liberation Theology," *Mysterium Liberationis*, 363:

It is this mercy that explains Jesus' miracles. Jesus presented as deeply moved by the pain of others, the pain of the weak. He reacts to this pain, and more important, acts with ultimacy. There is something ultimate in the need of the weak—something to which one *must* react. It is important to note that the verb with which Jesus' attitude is described in the passages cited is *splagchnizomai*, which comes from the noun *spagchnon*, meaning "belly, entrails, heart." The mercy expressed in Jesus' miracles is not a simple attitude of performing something prescribed or enjoined, then – not a reaction motivated by something apart from the pain itself. It is a reaction – therefore an action – to a reality that has been internalized, and which refuses to leave on in peace. It is a primary reaction, therefore—one which, when all is said and done, has no other explanation than the reality of the suffering of the weak, although it can be correctly denominated virtuous, or a compliance with the will of God, *afterwards*. With mercy we touch on something ultimate, something that is not arguable any further. So true is this that, when Jesus wishes to define the complete human being, he does so in terms of the Samaritan of the parable, who was "moved to pity" (Lk 10:33); when he defines God, in the figure of the parent of the prodigal child, he speaks again of someone who has been "deeply moved" (Lk 15:20)... That signs of the Reign are signs of mercy means that the reason—if one can speak of a reason in a free initiative of God—for the imminence of the Reign of God lies in the mercy of God, and precisely as we have explained that mercy: the gripping of God's entrails at the sight of the suffering of the weak. God will draw near for this reason, and for this reason alone."

⁴⁵ Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 88.

⁴⁶ Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 90.

arouse the hope for liberation—for salvation—in all those who are similarly and unjustly suffering.

In acts of mercy, initiative, and gratuitous grace, the Gospel narratives and historical scholarship confirm that Jesus welcomed and kept company with sinners, inviting all to salvation. To those who sin through active oppression, Jesus demands a radical conversion to cease their ways; and to those sinners by their own weakness or who were considered sinners by the law, Jesus requires conversion toward a different image of God, different than the God of judgment and shame imposed by their oppressors. In each case, Jesus' welcoming of sinners signifies the coming Reign of a God of love, "who comes out to meet the sinner, embrace him, and prepare a feast."⁴⁷ The merciful praxis of Jesus to welcome sinners liberates them from their own "inner principle of enslavement"—thereby signifying the ultimate agency, sovereignty, and efficacy of the grace of God over and against any human works.⁴⁸ Jesus' acceptance—his coming close to those who are sinful, who are unclean—is a merciful act that restores dignity to the poor, and communicates forgiveness.

The historical social context of Jesus' time was characterized by a world-view dominated by demons—forces stronger than humans that literally enslaved the suffering ones in disease and mental illness.⁴⁹ In the casting out of demons, Jesus' praxis indicates that the sovereign mercy of God is more powerful even than "the Evil One" and the individual demons who are mediators of the anti-Reign. Driving away the demons is another

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 93.

way to liberate the poor from powerlessness and the despair of utter objectification and oppression. While merciful at its core, the act of casting out demons is confrontational and a struggle against the powers of evil, indicating that the coming Reign of God will also entail a confrontation and active struggle that will ultimately result in the triumph of liberation over the powers of oppression.

Finally, Jesus' praxis is distinguished by the prophetic praxis of denunciation of the political powers, upholding the true God by denouncing the idolatries of the Anti-Kingdom.⁵⁰ This prophetic praxis, according to Sobrino, constitutes the historical reason for Jesus' crucifixion. Jesus directly threatened the prevailing powers of the Anti-Kingdom by unmasking the lies of the oppressors, exposing their idolatry, and confronting their economic, political, ideological and religious power. By confronting and denouncing in turn the rich, the priests, the scribes and the Pharisees, the praxis of Jesus—characterized by merciful love for the poor and oppressed, pointing to the imminent grace of God's Reign of love and liberation—led to certain persecution and even death.

- *“Following Jesus”*: ***discipleship as the integration of praxis and spirituality***

The final aspect of Sobrino's theology that should be explicated prior to an elaboration of Sobrino's unique contribution to a contemporary understanding of solidarity is the *integration of spirituality and praxis* in the following of Jesus, in discipleship. According to Sobrino and others who emphasize the primacy of the historical Jesus for theology, the earliest—pre-Gospel—expressions of faith in Jesus were in existential, praxic

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 160-192

form, “Thus, the Christian scriptures testify that existential faith has priority over formulations of faith, and that the former is expressed more radically as praxis of faith, as following or discipleship.”⁵¹ In the early stages of Jesus’ public ministry, discipleship consisted in “proclaiming and positing signs of the Reign,” and in the later stages, “it meant steadfastness in the face of the mighty reaction of the anti-Reign.”⁵² In both cases, however, discipleship entailed that followers of Jesus participate in a praxis consistent with the coming Reign of God. “To live with spirit,” Sobrino argues, “to react correctly to concrete reality is to re-create, throughout history, the fundamental structure of the life of Jesus.”⁵³

Discipleship, according to Sobrino, is not the mere imitation of Jesus, but the ongoing integration of the Spirit of Jesus—a consciousness of God’s drawing close to humanity in the coming Reign, an awareness of the utter mystery and gratuity of God, as well as an intimate love of God as Abba—into the praxis of followers appropriate to their time and place in history;

The Spirit always adapts Jesus to a given time and place... The following of Jesus, then, is a constant in the history of the Christians who have lived with the spirit. However, it adopts a particular guise in this or that particular era... The Spirit can only refer us to Jesus himself, who becomes present ever and again, throughout history.⁵⁴

At the present point in history, Sobrino argues that followers of Jesus live out the spirituality of discipleship in the option for the poor, because that is where the Spirit of Jesus

⁵¹ Sobrino, “Systematic Christology: Jesus Christ, the Absolute Mediator of the Reign of God,” *Mysterium Liberationis*, 448. See also, Sobrino, “Spirituality and the Following of Jesus” *Mysterium Liberationis*, 686.

⁵² Sobrino, “Systematic Christology,” 449.

⁵³ Sobrino, “Spirituality and the Following of Jesus,” 686-687.

⁵⁴ Sobrino, “Spirituality and the Following of Jesus,” 687.

can be encountered in the praxis of those who suffer and yet who struggle for justice in the hope for the coming Reign of God that will liberate them from their oppressors. By making an option for the poor, to be present in their reality, followers of Jesus today are invited to participate in the merciful praxis of Jesus, to encounter and denounce the signs of the anti-Reign, to commit oneself to self-emptying love, and to celebrate the hope and the joy of the liberation from sin and injustice that only God, in God's graciousness, can bestow. The praxis of discipleship—the activities and actions by which one lives out one's ultimate faith commitments in the context of one's social reality—is both an expression of one's spirituality and an ongoing invitation to encounter and be transformed by the Spirit of Jesus; discipleship entails an integrated, mutually-informing relationship between one's lived activities and one's awareness of God's grace..

As we have seen, Sobrino argues that the first and the last activity of the praxis of discipleship is *mercy*.⁵⁵ Just as Jesus engaged in concrete acts of mercy, so did the proclamation of God's Reign entail an announcement of God's gracious mercy poured out on the poor and the suffering for no other reason than that mercy is God's way of

~~being.~~⁵⁶ As a praxis of discipleship, Sobrino provides a definition of mercy that exceeds

⁵⁵ Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy*, 18 – 20: “Jesus is sentenced to death for practicing mercy consistently and to the last... Mercy is not the sole content of Jesus' practice, but it is mercy that stands at the origin of all that he practices, it is mercy that shapes and molds his entire life, mission, and fate.”

And, from *Christology at the Crossroads*, 389: “Jesus demanded much the same of his followers. Discipleship meant following in his footsteps and proclaiming the kingdom; it was a concrete praxis.”

⁵⁶ In “Central Position of the Reign of God in Liberation Theology,” 378-379, Sobrino describes the mutual relationship between gratuity and practice that characterizes Christian discipleship:

“From a systematic viewpoint, in scriptural language, let us remember that God has loved us “first,” and draw the ineluctable conclusion in terms of the practice of a historical, concrete love, a love among brothers and sisters. Gratuity in no way exempts from practice... It means that practice must be performed not with *hubris* but with gratitude; that God's first practice, the antecedent unconditional divine love, shows how historical practice is to be carried out and how one is enabled to perform it. The mystery of God is that God “has created us creators” (Bergson). In the most gratuitous of all the divine acts, God has stamped us with this analogy with the divinity, that we may be with others what God has been with us, that we may do for others what God has done for us, and that we may deal with others as God has dealt with us.”

As a praxis of discipleship, Sobrino provides a definition of mercy that exceeds typical understandings of mercy as mere pity or simply as the sentiment of compassion.⁵⁷

Rather, Sobrino defines mercy as a principle of Christian activity:

Mercy is a basic attitude toward the suffering of another, whereby one reacts to eradicate that suffering for the sole reason that it exists, and in the conviction that, in this reaction to the ought-not-to-be of the other's suffering, one's own being, without any possibility of subterfuge, hangs in the balance.⁵⁸

This definition of mercy, which Sobrino argues ought to be considered as a principle of Christian activity today – especially as a principle of action between those who are non-poor and those who are poor – implies a mutual, reciprocal component (“one’s own being...hangs in the balance”) that is not traditionally attributed to mercy. Implicit in Sobrino’s characterization is the notion that the sinful conditions of the poor and suffering adhere not only to the poor, but to the nonpoor as well. As a result, tending to the sinful suffering of the poor means simultaneously tending to the sinful realities of the nonpoor. Mercy, which is generally considered to be about alleviating the suffering of others, is in Sobrino’s account better understood as a praxis of mutual liberation wherein the poor and the nonpoor become collaborators in one another’s salvation.

What Sobrino is articulating here—and that I will build upon in the remainder of this chapter—is more accurately characterized as *solidarity*, and it constitutes the spiritual praxis of Christian discipleship most faithful to the historical and spiritual context from which Sobrino’s writings have emerged, the most significant theological commitments evidenced Sobrino’s work, and is most attentive to and appropriate the contemporary re-

⁵⁷ Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy*, 16.

⁵⁸ Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy*, 18.

ality – especially in light of the growing gap between the First and the Two-Thirds World.

- ***Solidarity as Spiritual Exercise***

Christian solidarity, properly understood, is at the very heart of Jon Sobrino’s theological project—and it would be impossible to consider his theological project separately from his spiritual formation as a Jesuit, his conversion from a “missionary” priest from Europe to a liberation theologian in El Salvador, the friendship and witness of Archbishop Oscar Romero, Ignacio Ellacuría and his brother Jesuits who were martyred at the UCA, and one who has accompanied countless “least and littlest” among us who are buoyed by hope and committed to a praxis of justice and mercy while suffering the indignities of poverty, marginalization, and violence. Although Sobrino himself never explicitly makes the case for a praxis of solidarity in these terms, I am arguing that the integration of his lived commitment in El Salvador, his theological insights, and his Ignatian spirituality is also his challenge and gift to the rest of the Church: *solidarity as a spiritual exercise*.

My argument is that solidarity as a spiritual exercise is a particularly appropriate way to understand and develop an ethic of discipleship for those who, like Sobrino prior to his experience in El Salvador, live in the abundance of life at a time in history when the majority of peoples live very close to death. In short, understanding solidarity as spiritual exercise may be especially helpful to those who live in the First World who long to be followers of Jesus in a world marked by poverty and oppression.

In the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius Loyola, the prescribed prayer, meditation, and contemplation exercises are primarily activities of the mind and heart structured and intended for the exercitant to draw closer in knowledge and love to God. However, these activities are largely *internal* realities wherein the exercitant is expected to engage one's thoughts, imagination, sensations of the body, affective feelings and sensory perceptions that emerge when contemplating a particular scriptural narrative, and so on. Reflecting on the world and its sins, entering into the Scriptural narratives regarding the life and works of Jesus, including his Passion and Resurrection, and various contemplations on Jesus, Mary, and God—all of this takes place as the exercitant turns inward with the hope and expectation that God will be encountered. Moreover, the structure of the *Exercises* is designed for practice, repetition, and improvement – the repetition of prayers draws the exercitant in deeper and deeper with each successive activity, none of the exercises are intended to be done once and disregarded, but rather revisited, reconsidered, and re-engaged as appropriate. In this manner, the *Spiritual Exercises* are intended to be a discipline that yields, through practice and repetition, a transformation in the exercitant, an ever-deeper conversion toward knowledge and love of God.

The spiritual exercise of solidarity, I would argue, is similar in structure and intent to the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola. Solidarity entails a similar series of movements designed to bring the exercitant ever deeper and closer in knowledge and love to God, but does so with an initial move *outward* – into concrete, historical reality, and into relationship with others, specifically, the poor. Following the lead of Ellacuría and Sobrino, the first movement of solidarity as a spiritual exercise is to ground oneself

in reality – in the words of the Brazilian proverb, to plant one’s feet in a context of those who are poor, marginalized or suffering. The former Superior General of the Jesuits, Fr. Peter Hans Kolvenbach, described this initial movement of the spiritual exercise of solidarity when he said

Personal involvement with innocent suffering, with the injustice others suffer, is the catalyst for solidarity which then gives rise to intellectual inquiry and moral reflection... Students, in the course of their formation, must let the gritty reality of this world into their lives, so they can learn to feel it, think about it critically, respond to its suffering and engage it constructively.⁵⁹

In this manner, the first movement of solidarity—just as it was in classical philosophy—is the development and exercise of an attentive awareness.⁶⁰ To be committed to the real, Sobrino argues, is to be attentive to the historical reality of human suffering and injustice, “the most basic fact in the world today.”⁶¹ In order to face and understand the reality of that basic fact, Christians need to put themselves into situations where reality will be revealed to them.

In the spiritual exercise of solidarity, cultivating the discipline of attentiveness to what is real is an exercise that is every bit as *physical* as it is meditative. In other words, those who wish to engage in solidarity need to physically go out to one or more of the many places in the world where the fundamental human reality is the experience of being close to death.⁶² To return to the Brazilian proverb at the outset of this chapter, for most

⁵⁹ Peter Hans Kolvenbach. “The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice in American Jesuit Higher Education.” A speech delivered at Santa Clara University, October 6, 2000: http://www.scu.edu/ignatiancenter/events/conferences/archives/justice/upload/f07_kolvenbach_keynote.pdf (Accessed June 15, 2009.)

⁶⁰ Recall the fundamental virtue of Stoic philosophy, *prosoche*. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 131.

⁶¹ Sobrino, *Theology of Christian Solidarity*, 5, 9.

⁶² Sobrino, *Theology of Christian Solidarity*, 9-10.

First World Christians this step requires the physical lifting of one's feet and planting them in a new location—the world of the poor. Confronted with the reality of misery, suffering and death, Christians will begin to open themselves to the spiritual crisis that follows from the First Week of the Ignatian *Exercises*: we live in a world of both individual and structural sin. Sin, as Sobrino so often reminds us, is what killed the Son of God, and sin is what continues to kill the vast majority of God's people.⁶³

The second movement in the spiritual exercise of solidarity consists in *responding* to reality. Whether the exercitant is cognitive of it or not, one's action (really, *re-action*) to the reality of suffering and death will be conditioned by their formation and the values that they internalized through their families, communities, education, faith development, and ideology. For followers of Jesus, however, the response to people who are suffering or in need is conditioned by the actions of Jesus as portrayed in the gospels – mercy – and the exercise of solidarity requires the same. Mercy, as Sobrino has defined it, “is an activity of love... a re-action to someone else's suffering that has come to penetrate one's own entrails and heart... this action is motivated only by that suffering.”⁶⁴ This mercy, according to Sobrino, is abundantly evident in Scripture, both as the activity of God who hears the cry of Israel in captivity, as well as in the praxis of Jesus who healed the sick, fed the hungry, and cast out demons from the possessed. Moreover, in the parables and teachings of Jesus, mercy is the praxis of discipleship exemplified by the good Samaritan,

⁶³ In interviews, writings, and public lectures in which he is addressing a North American or European audience, Sobrino often refers to the fact that the Western conception of the human person is not normative, but rather the exception. The modern conception of the human being (in affluent societies) as an autonomous and rational being, in pursuit of truth, development and abundance, is a myth that ignores the fact that the normative experience for the vast majority of humanity is a daily confrontation with—and struggle against—structures of sin and the reality of immanent death. *Ibid.*, 9.

⁶⁴ Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy*, 16.

the father of the prodigal son, and the righteous at the final judgment of nations before the Son of Man. By themselves, however, these first two dimensions do not constitute solidarity; there is nothing distinctively “solidaristic” about them as anyone who reaches out in compassion or “mere charity” to another person in need has done as much.

The key to the third movement that helps to distinguish solidarity as a spiritual exercise is found in the Ignatian idea of discipleship as a praxis of *poverty*, *contempt*, and *humility*. The third step of solidarity is coming to understand that generous compassion or mercy is not simply a gift out of one’s abundance, but an act of self-impoverishment by which the non-poor can actively share in the suffering and indignity of others. This path of humility requires one to recognize that the suffering of another person is a double scandal: first, the suffering of the poor is dehumanizing in the sense that hunger, violence, oppression robs them of the dignity that corresponds to their own humanity. Secondly, and more personally, the suffering of the poor is a scandal to the humanity of the non-poor inasmuch as their complacency and perhaps complicity has granted them life in abundance at the expense of (or at least with indifference to) great suffering for others.

The praxis of solidarity, therefore, entails a double humility for the non-poor. First, there is the humility that comes by associating oneself with the poor, the weak, the vulnerable, those close to death; the shared humility that comes by bearing with them their suffering, indignity, need, and, in some cases, sin. Second, and more spiritually transformative than materially liberative, the praxis of solidarity entails acknowledging the vulnerable truth that the human and Christian dignity of the non-poor have been com-

promised insofar as the non-poor have participated (unwittingly or actively) in creating a situation that has led the dehumanization and suffering of others.

In this way, the spiritual exercise of solidarity leads both the poor and the non-poor to an acknowledgement of and response to the sin that cuts across and unifies those who are otherwise separated by the gap between the abundance of life and the dehumanizing conditions of immanent death; the sin of one's suffering is the sin of another's complicity or indifference. Both are living in sinful conditions – one (the non-poor) is to blame, and the other (the poor), suffers the consequences. For many who engage in the spiritual exercise of solidarity, this may be experienced as a moment of profound desolation. The non-poor might experience debilitating guilt and shame at their sins of either indifference or even active oppression up until that point in their lives. They may fear (that they deserve) the anger and wrath of the poor. Similarly, the moment is also precarious for the poor, who may indeed lash out in anger and shame at the non-poor, resentful of their condescension or vengeful for their due.

Accordingly, this is moment where the gratuity of God needs to enter the experience and break through what could be a crippling desolation in the encounter between the poor and the non-poor. This is the moment for conversion, for transformation, for restoration, for God's Spirit to lead the participants in the encounter toward Christ – and as Sobrino tells us, this is often done through the generosity and the embrace of the poor, through the “forgiveness that is acceptance”:

What has happened in this encounter between persons who belong, structurally, to different worlds, the oppressed world and the oppressive? The answer is plain to see. The poor have welcomed those who belong to the world of their oppressors, and—without saying so, indeed without explicitly thinking of it in these terms—

have imparted to them the forgiveness that is acceptance. In this encounter, as so many have acknowledged who have been a part of it, the visitors have had the experience described above: They know themselves simultaneously as sinners and forgiven. They know themselves in their truth and in their possibility, and they reorient their lives in terms of “what I ought to do.”⁶⁵

Sobrinio describes the fourth movement of the spiritual exercise of solidarity as the grace of “bearing with one another in faith.”⁶⁶ Even if the practice of solidarity begins with a non-poor individual’s concrete effort to give of one’s self to those in need, the corresponding moment entails the (unexpected) and gratuitous gift of the poor in return:

Those who enter into solidarity with the poor... recover their human dignity by becoming integrated into the pain and suffering of the poor. From the poor they receive, in a way hardly expected, new eyes for seeing the ultimate truth of things and new energies for exploring unknown and dangerous paths.⁶⁷

In reaching out to the poor and suffering in mercy, offering to help carry their burdens, the non-poor find themselves borne up by the faith and the generosity of the poor. They receive from the poor a new horizon in which to understand their responsibilities to participate in the transformation of the social reality that separates them, and a consciousness of why they need the humanizing influence of the poor. In short, they experience and learn the truth of the phrase, “We need each other,” and experience without fear or misunderstanding the truth of the claim that “*extra paupere nulla salus* (apart from the poor there is no salvation).”⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Sobrinio, *The Principle of Mercy*, 98-99.

⁶⁶ Sobrinio, *Theology of Christian Solidarity*, 32, 37. The language of “bearing with one another in faith” corresponds to Romans 15:1, “We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak.” Quoting Romans 1:11-12, “For I long to see you... That we may be mutually encouraged by our common faith,” Sobrinio writes that “What Paul is speaking of here is not a one-way help from the believer Paul, a teacher and moreover an apostle, to the faith of others who are presumed to need help. It is a two-way aid, a mutual giving and receiving of faith itself—in other words, bearing with one another in faith.”

⁶⁷ Sobrinio, *The Principle of Mercy*, 11.

⁶⁸ Sobrinio, in the foreword to Brackley, *Divine Revolution*, xiv.

The fruit of the spiritual exercise of solidarity is an experience of God’s grace and an enduring mutuality of faith and discipleship that leads to a persevering sense of common responsibility among all people of faith. The distinction between rich and poor falls away to become a relationship between brothers and sisters who care for one another – who give of themselves to one another. By exercising ourselves in solidarity with the poor, Christians can cultivate a *disinterested* faith capable of experiencing life itself as joy. “At bottom,” Sobrino writes, “the spirit of solidarity is the attitude and conviction that the Christian does not go to God alone. We are saved as members of a people...each of us lives our faith in reference to others, bestowing it on them and receiving it from them again.”⁶⁹ This spirit of solidarity, an inherently *social* spirit, injects “an active hope” into the sin and death that mark this world, and by so doing reveals the fundamental totality of our reality: that we live in “a world of both sin and grace.”⁷⁰ The spiritual exercise of solidarity—in each of its dimensions—is always to be practiced and reflected upon within the horizon of the Christian narrative and community. As an exercise of contemplation and action, solidarity requires being open to the suffering and grace of others, as well as within oneself; and the goal of the exercise is create a space where God’s grace to be transformative for all of humanity.

- ***Conclusion.***

In this chapter, we have examined the conception of solidarity that has emerged from the lived experience and theological reflection of the Jesuit theologian Jon Sobrino

⁶⁹ Sobrino, *Spirituality of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988), 100.

⁷⁰ Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy*, 6.

in the context of revolutionary El Salvador, and concluded that an understanding of solidarity as spiritual exercise provides a helpful development to the Catholic social tradition. In direct contrast to the encyclicals of the Catholic social tradition, which ground solidarity in a particular theological anthropology, or to the writings of Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II, in which solidarity is grounded in a phenomenological analysis of human personhood, the praxis of solidarity described by Sobrino is based upon a particular Christology and spirituality of liberation.

Solidarity for Sobrino is a praxis of discipleship that originates with an experience of the Spirit of the historical Jesus who called his disciples to a praxis of loving mercy in the service of the Reign of God. According to Sobrino, Romero adopted this praxis when he experienced Jesus' spirit in the death of his friend Rutilio Grande, and pursued this praxis as a prophetic witness for peace and justice in the midst of a brutal civil war. The Jesuits at the UCA—Sobrino included—engaged in this same praxis through an institutional commitment to *proyección social*, confronting the sinful structures of Salvadoran society with social analysis, dialogue and critique on behalf of the suffering poor and vulnerable who were most directly ravaged by systematic oppression and the violence of the Salvadoran civil war. For both Romero and the UCA Jesuits, the encounter with the spirit of Jesus alive in the suffering poor prompted them to an ever-deepening commitment to a praxis of solidarity that sought the liberation of all persons – sufferers and sinners alike. Through the praxis of solidarity, these Salvadoran martyrs sought to love the world as God does: to give voice to the voiceless, to speak out against structures of injustice that deal death to the vulnerable, and to propose social structures that preserve the

full dignity of the entire human family. Disciples of Jesus Christ, they poured themselves out in loving mercy to others, even unto their own violent deaths.

Moreover, as a Jesuit trained and formed by the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola, Jon Sobrino recognizes in the lives of Romero and the Jesuit martyrs of the UCA the marks of the *Spiritual Exercises*. These martyrs were people of faith who strived to be disciples of the *historical Jesus*, whose lives, actions, and activities communicated their commitment to *discipleship as praxis*, even as the praxis led them to experience profound *poverty, contempt, and humility*. Ultimately, the martyrs of El Salvador, the lives of these friends and companions of Jon Sobrino, demonstrated that they had experienced ultimate grace of the *Exercises*: the gift of the *grace to love as God loves*, even to the point of their own deaths.

The martyred friends of Jon Sobrino provide the concrete point of reference for understanding how solidarity as spiritual exercise flows out of a particular encounter with Jesus Christ of the gospel narratives, who challenges his disciples to take up their crosses and to follow him in a praxis of merciful love for all, particularly those who suffer most, the most vulnerable. In contrast to the Catholic social encyclical tradition, as well as to the writings of Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II, the first movement to solidarity based on the writings of Jon Sobrino is not a turn *inward* to a personalist analysis of human subjectivity or an intellectual consideration of a particular theological anthropology. Rather, the first dimension of solidarity as spiritual exercise is a move *outward* to confront reality through an encounter with those who are suffering—the poor, the marginalized, the least and littlest ones—the ones with whom Jesus self-identified.

The second dimension of solidarity as spiritual exercise can be understood in the context of Christian discipleship, to heed the call to respond to the suffering ones as Jesus did – with compassionate mercy. The ministry of the historical Jesus that is recounted in the gospel stories indicates that Jesus was a man who had faith and hope in the coming of the Reign of God for all people. His praxis – the spirit-filled actions that communicated his faith and hope – was one of loving mercy toward those who suffer the effects of sin, who are excluded, who fail to recognize or experience the love of God. As followers of Jesus, Christians are challenged to cultivate a similar praxis of compassionate mercy when they encounter those who suffer the consequences of sin and poverty that prevent them from experiencing their God-given dignity. The spiritual exercise of solidarity invites Christians into an ongoing discernment on the extent to which the merciful praxis of Jesus shapes and conditions their own praxis of responding to those in need as Jesus' disciples.

The third step of the spiritual exercise of solidarity destabilizes what might otherwise be considered a benevolent, if paternalistic, relationship in which the preservation of one person's dignity depends upon the generous actions of another. However, in such close association with those who suffer poignantly from the consequences of sin, the disciple of Jesus who reaches out in compassionate mercy becomes aware of the myriad ways that one's own dignity has been and continues to be compromised by the consequences of sin, selfishness, and all that separates one from the fullness of the love of God for all people. The experience of genuine humility at this step in the exercise of solidarity might best understood as a spiritual grace: a gift of experiencing oneself not as one

who ought to be praised and exalted for actions of generosity and benevolence, but as an imperfect creature who has taken God's gift of life (and love) in abundance for granted – or even worse, as something individually earned or *deserved* – which in turn, has perpetuated or even justified the ongoing suffering of others.

The dynamic grace of this moment is that by entering into direct relationship with those whose life and dignity has been compromised, one might recognize how the dignity of *all* human life, one's own included, has been compromised by the consequences of sin. And yet, even as one is mindful of one's own implicit and explicit culpability in creating a social context that has perpetuated the indignity and suffering of others, the final grace of genuine solidarity occurs through the activity of the other, the ones who have suffered, through their offer of the forgiveness that is acceptance. The embrace of the poor symbolizes the integration of persons who would have otherwise remained separate, breaks open the dynamic that would perpetuate any distinction between the sinners and the sinned against, and fosters an authentic sense of human interdependence that would not have been possible but for the quality of their solidarity. In terms borrowed from Ignatian spirituality, they come to see and to love one another as God sees them, and as God loves them – members of the human community, created by God and destined for liberation from sin through the Reign of God.

Of course, the spiritual exercise of solidarity does not end there with the first genuine experience of solidarity – more accurately, in fact, one could say that is where the praxis of solidarity begins. As divergent as the conceptions of solidarity proffered by Sobrino and John Paul II may be, they converge on this point: solidarity shapes and

transform those who practice it. Like the virtues, solidarity is never realized in a single act, but instead through a commitment to such action over time.

However, Sobrino's conception of solidarity pushes the concept beyond merely understanding solidarity as a virtue of the acting person. Virtues, after all, are practices focused on the right formation of individuals – the cultivation of habits, discipline, and the right-ordering of one's passions, intellect, and will. Certainly, solidarity is virtuous to the extent that it has a profound influence on one's interior moral development. However, solidarity is not ultimately about the task of individual moral perfection – even the perfection of a community of individuals.

Rather, solidarity is about human persons transcending the consequences of sin together, in a way that no individual ever could by one's own. Solidarity entails a dynamic and mutual self-emptying; a revelation of the inherent dignity, value, and goodness of another; and ultimately an experience of one's own desolation that is obliterated by an experience of the generous and gratuitous love of another that fundamentally changes one's understanding of self in light of one's relationship to others. In its absolute dependence on the inter-subjective interaction between persons, solidarity transcends traditional concept of virtue as interior, intellectual or moral self-governance of an individual. Rather than virtue, solidarity more closely resembles the dynamics of a *spiritual exercise* through which one willingly empties oneself in contemplation of another, becomes painfully aware of one's own desolation, and yet finds oneself generously and abundantly embraced and transformed by the grace of the love of another. Such an experience effec-

tively changes not just the one, but the other, and changes their conceptions of the whole network of relationships and social structures through which they are united.

- ***Points of contact between solidarity according to John Paul II and Sobrino***

It should be noted that the conception of solidarity as spiritual exercise that is adumbrated in the work of Jon Sobrino has several points of contact with the development of solidarity in both the encyclical tradition of the Church, as well as with the solidarity advanced by Pope John Paul II. Methodologically, Sobrino's commitment to historical reality – and most notably, the overwhelming presence of the consequences of sin – resonates with the phenomenological approach to solidarity that John Paul II employs in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, in which he begins by reflecting on the negative experience of personal and structural sin and the effects of sin on persons and societies. According to Christine Firer Hinze, this “inductive, empathetic, and dialogical attention to the *signs of the times*,” is a continuation of the methodological approach adopted in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World at the Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*.⁷¹ Similarly, there is an obvious congruence between John Paul II and Jon Sobrino that *solidarity* is the moral response most appropriate to the contemporary reality. Both emphasize that solidarity is the primary moral category through which Christians are to meet the challenges of an increasingly interdependent, and yet deeply divided world.

⁷¹ Christine Firer Hinze, “Straining toward Solidarity in a Suffering World: *Gaudium et Spes* ‘After Forty Years’.” *Vatican II Forty Years Later*. Annual Volume 51 (2005) of the College Theology Society (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006) 168.

Though we will discuss this aspect in more detail in the concluding chapter, both Jon Sobrino and John Paul II see an intimate connection between solidarity and the mystical reality of God. For Sobrino, of course, those who engage in the spiritual exercise of solidarity will ultimately have a direct experience of God's transformative love mediated through the relationship with others. For John Paul, those who engage in the virtue of solidarity with others participate in the supreme model of unity: the activity of the divine Trinity itself. In this manner, both Sobrino and John Paul II see an intrinsic unity between spirituality and Christian ethics.

Finally, both John Paul II and Jon Sobrino agree that the praxis of solidarity has the characteristics of a virtue in that it has both external and internal effects on those who engage in it; and that solidarity is never a single, once-and-for-all act, but rather an invitation to an ongoing praxis with transformative effects on both the external world of human relationships and the internal disposition of those who engage in the praxis. Despite the nuances between solidarity as spiritual exercise and solidarity as virtue, both would agree that solidarity has virtuous consequences.

The Advantages of Sobrino's approach to solidarity vis-à-vis John Paul II's

Similarities between Sobrino and John Paul II notwithstanding, there are significant differences between their treatments of solidarity that merit some discussion. In fact, there are advantages to Sobrino's approach and to understanding solidarity as spiritual exercise that complement the weaknesses that we have already discussed in John Paul II's articulation of solidarity as virtue.

One of the most immediate differences between the two is that Sobrino's methodological approach favors a practical consideration of solidarity as opposed to John Paul II's more theoretical approach. Though both share a starting point in their consideration of the sinful aspects of the *signs of the times*, for example, John Paul II's methodology moves quickly into a consideration of how sin violates both the fundamental human dignity of the human person made in the *imago Dei* and the moral responsibility to human interdependence – both of which are theoretical considerations of theological anthropology. Sobrino, however, focuses on the challenge of discipleship – what following Jesus Christ practically entails for followers in the contemporary moment. As we have seen, Sobrino emphasizes the priority of praxis over theory.

This corresponds to another distinction between the approaches of Sobrino and John Paul II, though the difference is most likely one of degree. Consistent with much of the official Catholic social tradition, John Paul II's conception of solidarity is primarily formulated in terms and images that are theocentric, whereas Jon Sobrino's are more intentionally christocentric. In the documents of the Catholic social tradition—John Paul's encyclicals included—the reference points for both human dignity and human interdependence are most commonly asserted as conditions of humans being created in *imago Dei*. The life, praxis, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ do not provide the primary points of contact for the moral parameters of human persons and sociality, but rather more generally in terms of our relatedness to God the creator, or, to be sure, the divine trinity as a whole. Jon Sobrino, by contrast, is thoroughly christocentric in his approach to Christian ethics, which flow out of a particular encounter with the Jesus of history who

preached the Reign of God and invited his disciples to participate in it by engaging in a particular praxis. For Sobrino, Jesus is the primary mediator of knowledge about God, which is why his ethics is necessarily christocentric. This corresponds, not surprisingly, with the Ignatian spirituality of the Jesuits – the Companions of Jesus who engage the Christ of the Scriptures quite intimately and directly in the Spiritual Exercises.

A final point of contrast between John Paul II and Jon Sobrino – which is again, a difference of degree rather than a sharp distinction – is the tendency of solidarity in the writings of John Paul II to tend toward an individualism more than communalism. Part of this is a consequence of John Paul II's thoroughgoing commitment to Christian personalism – which by definition emphasizes and develops the inherent value and characteristics of the human person. Traditionally, virtue ethics have also had an individualist bent to the extent that virtue ethics emphasizes the right-ordering of each person's intellect, desires, and will. At its worst, virtue ethics can tend toward solipsism. To the extent that solidarity is the virtue that orients persons toward a common good that unites all other human persons, John Paul II is clearly not arguing for an individualistic conception of solidarity. However, because of his insistence on describing solidarity in terms of virtue ethics, it is not clear that he adequately accounts for or explains the aspect of solidarity that involves the personal agency and action of *other* persons as constitutive of the virtue of solidarity. A conception of solidarity as spiritual exercise, on the other hand, more adequately accounts for the dynamic and mutual reflexivity operative in the praxis of solidarity when it leads to an experience of grace. The difference is that the spiritual exercise of solidarity is dependent upon the inbreaking of the transcendent in a way that

is not fully or adequately accounted for merely in terms of virtue ethics – but we will discuss this in more detail in the concluding chapter.

CHAPTER 6:

Assessing the Implications of Solidarity as Spiritual Exercise

In the present study, we have examined solidarity's historical development in the official ecclesiastical documents of the Catholic social tradition, and then moved into a consideration of how Karol Wojtyła's theological and philosophical formation, coupled with the historical context of revolutionary Poland, have culminated in John Paul II's assertion that solidarity is the Christian virtue for an interdependent world. As a counter example to the development of solidarity in the texts of the official Catholic social tradition—the top-down approach to the development of Catholic social thought—we then examined a conception of solidarity that has developed from the bottom-up, out of the unique combination of Ignatian spirituality and the concrete historical situation of revolutionary El Salvador through the experiences and theological writings of the Jesuit theologian Jon Sobrino. As helpful as John Paul II's contribution has been to the development of solidarity in the tradition of official Catholic social thought, I have argued that an understanding of solidarity as spiritual exercise – an understanding that flows out of Sobrino's Ignatian spirituality, his personal witness to the lives and history of the martyrs of El Salvador, as well as his theological commitment to the methods of Latin American liberation theology – provides a necessary and complementary corrective to the virtue of solidarity espoused in the most recent social encyclicals. In the conclusion to this analysis, we turn to five significant implications of the spiritual exercise of solidarity as a contribution to the development of solidarity in the tradition of Catholic social thought:

- Solidarity as a distinctive unity of spirituality and ethics
- Solidarity transcends individualistic tendencies of personalism and virtue ethics.
- Solidarity entails a primary concern for the poor, suffering, and marginalized.
- Solidarity as orthopraxis
- Solidarity as participation

I. Solidarity: a distinctive unity of spirituality and ethics

As we have seen, solidarity has been an emerging concept in both official and non-official Catholic social thought over the past seventy years, as evidenced by its increasing prominence in the social encyclicals, as well as the role that solidarity has played in emerging and at times revolutionary social movements such as the labor revolution in Poland and the *proyección social* of the Universidad Centroamericana in El Salvador.¹ In both his rhetoric and his official social encyclicals, John Paul II placed solidarity at the very center of the Catholic social tradition, and articulated an understanding of solidarity as virtue that is grounded in a theologically and philosophically compelling vision of human agency, participation in a common good through community, and the fundamental dignity of an acting person who is made in the *imago Dei*.

¹ Jonathan Boswell has argued that the Catholic social tradition (CST) has suffered by overemphasizing the documents of the ecclesiastical magisterium (papal encyclicals and bishops' statements), which has effectively marginalized the non-official, often lay-led efforts to engage in "middle-level thinking" to transpose the high concepts and theories of the CST into concrete social action, or praxis, that engages economics, sociology, and politics. Boswell argues that the latter—the collection of strategies and social policies that Boswell calls "Catholic non-official social thought" (or CNOST)—has a major role to play in revitalizing a Catholic social tradition that is dominated by relatively abstract norms and principles. Boswell, J.S. "Solidarity, Justice and Power Sharing Patterns and Policies," in *Catholic Social Thought: Twilight or Renaissance?* Leuven, Belgium: Leuven UP, 2000, 93-113.

And yet, throughout the past several decades, solidarity has remained an elusive and slippery concept among many within the church—first because the concept has been somewhat of a moving target in that solidarity’s definition and scope have evolved in each of the texts of the successive popes and conferences of bishops who used it, and second because John Paul himself at various points has identified *solidarity* as a principle, attitude, duty, and virtue. By their very nature and intended audience, encyclicals of the Catholic social tradition are written to a wide and general audience, and therefore often lack the concrete specificity that would be most helpful to the faithful who seek clarity on otherwise rather abstract social norms or virtues. John Paul was particularly prescient when he wrote in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* that “[solidarity] is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far,” as this is a particularly apt description of culturally prevailing understandings of solidarity. “On the contrary,” John Paul continues, “it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good, that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual because we are all really responsible for all.”² And yet, even this positive definition of solidarity—which is philosophically and theologically quite rich, in the context of John Paul II’s philosophical and theological thought—lacks specificity regarding the how and why such a firm and persevering determination can be cultivated; and how it might be lived out concretely in a world constituted by complex and evolving relationships operative at levels ranging from the interpersonal to the international and everywhere in between.

² *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* §38.

I have argued that an analysis of solidarity as spiritual exercise – based upon a conception of solidarity adumbrated in the works of Jon Sobrino – provides an excellent and much-needed contribution to a contemporary understanding of solidarity that complements the development of solidarity proffered by John Paul II. Whereas the encyclical tradition is necessarily abstract and general, Sobrino’s contribution to our understanding of solidarity emerges out of the concrete context of a theological method steeped in Ignatian spirituality and grounded in the reality of revolutionary El Salvador – where individual men and women striving to live out Christian discipleship through a commitment to solidarity were murdered for their actions. In this sense, solidarity as spiritual exercise has emerged from a concrete historical and social location where it was expressed in concrete interpersonal and institutional decisions. And as we have seen, the phenomenology of this spiritual exercise of solidarity provides a clear and compelling account of how and why this “firm and persevering commitment to the common good” can be cultivated and begin to transform persons and the social structures by which they are related through a commitment to an ongoing praxis that mediates the very experience of God’s love.

This, I believe, is the aspect of solidarity that most intimately unites John Paul II, Sobrino, and the spiritual exercise of solidarity as we have explored it. The source and summit of the ethical praxis of solidarity is *an intimate and direct experience of God*. Exploring and engaging this mystical experience, I would argue, is the primary theological concern of both John Paul II in particular, and Ignatian spirituality in general, which is why it is also a mark of the Jesuit theologian Jon Sobrino’s thought.

In his theological dissertation, we remember, Karol Wojtyła turned his attention to the spirituality of John of the Cross, and explored “the personal nature of the human encounter with God, in which believers transcend the boundaries of their creaturely existence in such a way that they become more truly and completely themselves.”³ This same desire is an undercurrent of Wojtyła’s philosophical work on the phenomenology of the person; persons reveal themselves (as God does) in action. By engaging and exploring that which is distinctly *personal*, we learn what is true not only about humanity, but also about the personal God in whose image they are created. For this reason, as John Paul II has written, solidarity is valid when members of a community recognize their neighbors *as persons*.⁴ For Christians, John Paul continues, one’s neighbor is not only a human being with rights and a fundamental equality with everyone else, but “the living image of God the Father, redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ and placed under the permanent action of the Holy Spirit.”⁵ The communion of the divine trinity—“the intimate life of God”—according to John Paul II, is the supreme model for human solidarity.

Similarly, as we have seen, the goal of the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola is to create “an encounter that gives a person an active participatory understanding of God’s presence ‘from the inside’ . . . so as to draw the person into the mystery of God’s love.”⁶ The *Spiritual Exercises* are intended to immerse the exercitant in a mystical encounter with God. By extension, the methodology of Jon Sobrino’s theology as

³ Weigel, 85.

⁴ *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* §39.

⁵ *Ibid.* §40.

⁶ Ashley, “Ignacio Ellacuría and the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola,” 19. Ashley identifies Avery Dulles as one theologian who has demonstrated how the irreconcilable tensions inherent in the Exercises have led to a multiplicity of theologies and spiritual interpretations, 18.

well as his theological reflections on the life of the Salvadoran martyrs, bear the unmistakable influence of Ignatian spirituality: an emphasis on the historical Jesus situated in a concrete, historical situation; an understanding of discipleship as a praxis of overcoming sin; the characteristics of poverty, contempt, and humility as marks of Christian discipleship; and the ultimate gift of loving as God loves – gratuitously, mutually, and expressed in actions of loving service toward others.

The phenomenology of solidarity as *spiritual exercise* that we have developed based upon the Jon Sobrino’s writings on mercy and solidarity also depends upon an intimate experience of God’s love as it is mediated through an encounter with others. The fruit of the spiritual exercise of solidarity is an experience of God’s grace and an enduring mutuality of faith and discipleship that leads to a persevering sense of common responsibility among all people of faith. The distinction between rich and poor falls away to become a relationship between brothers and sisters who care for one another – who give of themselves to one another. “At bottom,” Sobrino writes, “the spirit of solidarity is the attitude and conviction that the Christian does not go to God alone. We are saved as members of a people...each of us lives our faith in reference to others, bestowing it on them and receiving it from them again.”⁷

The mystical experience of God – God’s action of gratuitous and unsolicited love, God’s trinitarian unity-in-diversity, God in whose image all persons are created – is the primary catalyst for conversion away from individualism (and all the sins which it perpetuates) toward a communal sense of human identity and purpose. This spiritual experi-

⁷ Sobrino, *Spirituality of Liberation* (Orbis, 1988), 100.

ence becomes the source and summit for Christian ethics – and solidarity becomes the virtue, or praxis, of Christian discipleship through which social structures are transformed and refashioned into structures that promote a particular commitment to the poor and marginalized in the service of full human participation, justice, and peace such that all human persons fully participate in the solidarity that participates in God’s divine activity.

II. Solidarity as spiritual exercise transcends the overly-individualistic tendencies of Christian personalism and virtue ethics.

As our survey of the major documents of the Catholic Social Tradition demonstrated, solidarity was a relevant, if developing, moral category within the Church’s social teaching prior to the papacy of John Paul II. Prior to John Paul II, the primary justification for solidarity as a principle within the canon of the Catholic social tradition has been that solidarity is the moral value corresponding to the fact of human interdependence.⁸ As such, solidarity connotes an awareness and appreciation of human interdependence at the service of unity and peace in a diverse world. The moral significance of the concept was based entirely on the truth of the fact that humans need one another, and that solidarity preserves the common good of peace for all people.

Beginning with the writings of Pius XII, solidarity was considered to be a social bond of common humanity that contributed to the common good of peace—

⁸ Christine Firer Hinze summarizes the “solidarity as fact” claim in her analysis of the Vatican II document *Gaudium et Spes*: “Solidarity is, first, the fact of human interconnection, the “is” of human interdependence that grounds the “ought” of an affirmative response to it. We are in this together, *Gaudium et Spes* contends, and we each have things to give to and receive/learn from one another.” Hinze, Christine Firer, “Straining toward Solidarity in a Suffering World: *Gaudium et Spes* ‘After Forty Years’.” Vatican II Forty Years Later. Annual Volume 51 (2005) of the College Theology Society. Orbis, 2006. 173.

interpersonally and internationally. This minimal description of solidarity is based largely upon the anthropological claim that humans are interdependent, although the earliest papal writing on solidarity also makes the philosophical argument that humans ought to respect one another by virtue of their common reason.

Beyond Pius XII, each of the subsequent popes and gatherings of bishops advanced the theological and ethical scope of solidarity considerably. John XXIII pushed the scope of solidarity beyond merely peace to include the economic order of human relationships, such as the distribution of wealth, food, and other economic goods. The Second Vatican Council provided an even broader theological account for an understanding of solidarity rooted in both Hebrew and Christian Scriptures through its incorporation of an incarnational anthropology and ecclesiology. Paul VI was the first to identify solidarity as a *moral duty* that applied not only to the economic life of the human person, but to the authentic development of the entire human person and all human associations, at the level of individual, the family, the community, all the way up to the international order. Paul's "call to action" required a concrete commitment to the duty of moral solidarity in every aspect of interpersonal life—a challenge so all-encompassing that the concept of solidarity lost its precision and distinctiveness.

The writings of Karol Wojtyła are helpful in this regard because over the course of his career he applied his skills in philosophy and theology, as well as his concrete experience of Poland – where solidarity became synonymous with the revolution – to develop and articulate a conception of solidarity at the very center of the Catholic social tradition. As we have seen, John Paul II's thick description of solidarity is very much

consistent with his predecessors. Like the popes before him, John Paul II clearly believes that solidarity is a virtue knowable to all of humanity through the moral acknowledgment of human interdependence and a fundamental commitment to the common good.⁹ And yet, John Paul II moved considerably beyond his predecessors by arguing in explicitly theological language that fullness of the virtue of solidarity consists in a proper Christian understanding of humanity as *imago Dei*, redeemed by Christ, and sustained in the Spirit – a virtue necessary for human conversion away from sin and toward theological truth.

In keeping with his commitment to Christian personalism, John Paul II develops an understanding of solidarity that places the human person at the center of the Catholic social tradition. All social relationships – politics, economics, legal systems, etc – exist in order to serve the human person, and solidarity is a particular virtue appropriate to the proper relationship between an individual person and the common good. As we have seen, what is unique about John Paul II’s development of solidarity in the Catholic social tradition is that he employs a phenomenological analysis to arrive at a unique description of a moral action appropriate to counter the effects of sin and the structures that perpetuate sin.

Solidarity has a comprehensive quality in the social teaching of John Paul II – it applies to every instance of human intersubjectivity, from the most intimate of personal

⁹ Jonathan Boswell has argued that traditional conceptions of solidarity based upon natural law categories are not adequate for capturing the fundamental nature of solidarity, which depend on the manifestation of the divine: “While ‘natural law’ may offer second-order validations of human dignity, common good, even of aspects of subsidiarity and justice, one thing it cannot do is to originate, let alone validate, a climactic principle of solidarity. For that a transcendental agency is needed, a specific manifestation of the divine.” Boswell, 107-108.

relationships, to economic transactions, to the relationship of state to citizen, and even between states. All human interaction demonstrates interdependence, and all interdependence ought to be governed by solidarity, which will manifest itself in a commitment to the poor, in justice, and in peace. So long as it is tempered by subsidiarity, there does not seem to be a situation between persons where solidarity does not apply.

As we have seen, solidarity in the writings of John Paul II is best understood *as the action of the person who, apprehending the fundamental dignity and rights of the human person as imago Dei and the moral truth of human interdependence, chooses in freedom to act for the realization of the common good over time. By so doing, the acting person contributes to the development of all people, and the development of one's self. Solidarity is ultimately oriented to the activity of the divine communion, which is mutual, dynamic, and unified.*

For John Paul II, solidarity applies to all dimensions of interpersonal sociality—family, community, nation, and even extends to personal relations with (and within) God. Solidarity is often expressed in a particular commitment to include the poor, the marginalized, and the victimized in the human community and the realization of the common good, though such activity needs always be tempered by the principle of subsidiarity. Though solidarity is properly regarded as interpersonal action, by analogy solidarity is action that is also appropriate for communities of persons – such as institutions and nations. Solidarity is the appropriate moral response to sinful structures that idolize profit at the expense of persons and objectify persons through domination. John Paul II, like fellow Polish philosopher Józef Tischner, argues that human work provides a ready con-

text for solidarity because work discloses the reality of interdependence and unites persons in community. Through work, persons creatively express themselves and engage one another in a conversation about the common good.

As we have seen, John Paul II characterizes solidarity as a *virtue*. Understood as virtue, solidarity is never realized in a single act, but instead in a commitment to such actions over time—in other words, the virtue is realized through one’s ongoing praxis, a praxis that is expressed externally through choices—actions and activities directed toward others—but which is also operative internally, in shaping the understanding, disposition, and character of the person engaged in the activity.

By insisting on solidarity as a personal virtue, however, John Paul II perhaps inadvertently emphasizes an overly individualistic characterization of solidarity—to the detriment of an understanding of solidarity that is interpersonal, intersubjective, and ultimately dependent not upon merely one person’s actions, but also upon the actions of others towards that person. As Jon Sobrino’s account more adequately describes, solidarity entails a dynamic, mutual reflexivity between subjects. The “virtue” of solidarity can never be practiced nor perfected by an individual alone – as a traditional understanding of virtue ethics might imply.¹⁰ This is the major drawback of John Paul II’s characterization of solidarity – it is so focused on the “acting person” that it does not adequately account for the reality that solidarity entails the acting person to be “acted upon” by oth-

¹⁰ Jim Keenan offers a succinct summary of virtue ethics when he writes, “The task of virtue is defined...as the acquisition and development of practices that perfect the agent into becoming a moral person while acting morally well. Through these practices or virtues, one’s character and one’s actions are enhanced.” Keenan, James. “Proposing Cardinal Virtues.” *Theological Studies* 56 (1995), p 711.

ers.¹¹ John Paul II's description does not fully account for the dual agency, the dynamic reflexivity, that consists between two or more persons actively engaging in solidarity *with* one another—disclosing themselves to each other, but also experiencing self-transcendence in the encounter with the other.

Missing from John Paul's description of solidarity is a more adequate account of the mutuality and reciprocity upon which solidarity depends—the sense that those engaged in solidarity need one another, not just as individual contributors to a common good through which they might each individually be sustained and fulfilled, but rather they need to experience others in a way that allows them to transcend their own desires for their own individual perfection and to simply experience the inherent value and worth of another person, and to experience their own inherent value and worth through the embrace of the other. Such an experience has the potential to redefine one's understandings of others, one's understanding of self, and one's understanding of the relationships and social structures that are vital to the preservation of interpersonal community. In this regard, solidarity is more appropriately characterized as a *spiritual exercise* in the Ignatian sense—not just the cultivation of ascetic disciplines for self-regulation—but as an opportunity to experience and engage God's presence “from the inside.”¹²

¹¹ I would argue that Chris Vogt's excellent article on a virtues-based approach to Catholic social thought, while helpful in providing a much-needed method for personal formation and a practical orientation to Catholic social ethics, similarly ultimately fails to adequately capture the socially transformative nature of solidarity that is dependent upon a dynamic and mutual reflexivity of love and grace. See Vogt, “Fostering a Catholic Commitment to the Common Good: An Approach Rooted in Virtue Ethics.” *Theological Studies* 68 (2007), 394-417.

¹² J. Matthew Ashley, “Ignacio Ellacuría and the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola” *Theological Studies* 61 (March 2000), 19.

What differentiates solidarity from the formal *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius, however, is that solidarity is Christian orthopraxis that is to be lived out in the world with others. Whereas Ignatius' *Exercises* guide the exercitant on an individualistic, inward journey through contemplation of Scriptures and the life of Jesus Christ—with an intended effect very similar to the cultivation of virtue—solidarity as spiritual exercise requires that people move out beyond themselves to engage others. And just as the *Spiritual Exercises* culminate with an intimate experience of God's gratuitous love, so too does the spiritual exercise of solidarity culminate with an experience of God's overwhelming love mediated through other persons—specifically, those who suffer the consequences of sin, the poor and vulnerable whose love (like God's) transcends the poverty, vulnerability and sin that would otherwise irrevocably separate the human community from one another and from God. In Sobrino's words:

[Solidarity] is a conception of Christian life and a way of practicing it in which reference to 'the other' is essential, both in giving and in receiving, both on the human level and on ecclesial and Christian levels, and the level of relationship with God, both in seeing in the other the ethical demand of responsibility and in finding graciousness in that other. Solidarity is therefore the Christian way to overcome, in principle, individualism, whether personal or collective, both at the level of our involvement in history and on the level of faith.¹³

III. Solidarity as particular commitment to the poor, suffering, and marginalized.

One aspect of the praxis of solidarity that both John Paul II and Jon Sobrino agree upon is the primary importance of solidarity as a commitment to the poor and vulnerable.

¹³ Sobrino, "A Theology of Christian Solidarity," 5.

In *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, John Paul II insists that solidarity is valid when members of the community recognize each other as persons, and as a result,

Those who are more influential, because they have a greater share of goods and common services, should feel responsible for the weaker and be ready to share with them all they possess. Those who are weaker, for their part, in the same spirit of solidarity, should not adopt a purely passive attitude or one that is destructive of the social fabric, but, while claiming their legitimate rights, should do what they can for the good of all.¹⁴

In the typically general and theoretical language that is common in papal encyclicals, John Paul effectively argues that one of the first movements of solidarity ought to directly address the consequences of sin, which are suffered most poignantly by those who have been excluded, marginalized, or victimized in the human community. There is an urgency and priority in solidarity to respond to the needs of those who are suffering the most severe consequences of sin.

The analog to this movement in the work of Jon Sobrino is to begin by committing oneself to reality, which in El Salvador has meant to be committed to the reality in which the vast majority of people live very close to death as opposed to the relatively few who have enjoyed the abundance of life. Perhaps due to his formation in Ignatian spirituality, his spiritual and methodological commitment to the historical Jesus, or simply due to his intimate friendships with the martyrs of El Salvador, Sobrino argues that the poor are the privileged locus for the manifestation of God—as evidenced by the historical incarnation, praxis, and death of Jesus. As we have discussed, the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith has formally criticized Sobrino for this position as being “not in conformity with the doctrine of the Church,” which holds the Church itself as the proper

¹⁴ *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* §39.

foundation, and presumably the proper location, for all theological reflection. It is worth noting here that the poor and the Church are not necessarily opposed, as the CDF's Notification implies. If the Church understands itself to be a Church of the poor, as Archbishop Romero contended, then the locus of theological reflection in El Salvador, at least, would be precisely among the poor.

The CDF's critique aside, however, both Sobrino and John Paul II, as we have seen, take the commitment to the reality of sin and its consequences very seriously. The appropriate response to the reality of sin and its destructive consequences is not to flee from it, however, but to engage it directly. This is the sentiment behind the first two dimensions of solidarity as a spiritual exercise: the impulse that one must physically place oneself in the context of ongoing suffering, where victimization and marginalization are the identifiable consequences of social and interpersonal sin. This also resonates with the kenotic impulses of the Christian incarnation and Jesus' crucifixion, as well as with the challenge of discipleship in which Jesus invites his disciples to pick up their crosses and follow him.¹⁵ In short, the suffering poor have an ethical priority and an urgent need for kenotic engagement in pursuit of Christian solidarity. Solidarity with the poor and marginalized will be physically and spiritually demanding on the non-poor, requiring an emptying of self that is appropriate for followers of Jesus Christ.

¹⁵ Christine Firer Hinze claims that the praxis of "incarnational solidarity"—the yet undeveloped thread woven throughout *Gaudium et Spes*—requires this very immersion of self into the reality of sin:

The solidarity *Gaudium et Spes* urges cannot remain simply an ideal, or an interior attitude. It involves the immersion of bodies, the expenditure of time and energies in the midst of the blood, sweat, and tears of the real world, in practices of presence and service. Incarnational solidarity entails cultivating concrete, habitual ways of acknowledging our we-ness by being *with* the neighbor, especially the suffering and needy neighbor. Hinze, 174.

This is an important contribution that Sobrino makes to the official Catholic social tradition. If solidarity is going to be a praxis, a spiritual exercise, then it requires those who wish to engage in it to physically enter into the places and situations where people are suffering; to seek relationship with; to engage those who are suffering with merciful and generous compassion; and to listen to them articulate their own hopes for liberation. Solidarity will not be effective in overcoming the poignant social challenges of the day unless the persons who seek to offer assistance actually meet with people affected, confront the reality of the sinful situation first-hand (and consider their own role in its propagation) and together imagine and work toward creating the conditions by which those who are suffering are able to participate with others in liberation from the sinful conditions.¹⁶

One of the most interesting implications of understanding solidarity as spiritual exercise is that the poor, the marginalized, and the neglected become the mediators of God's grace to the non-poor. Not in an instrumentalized or objectified way – as those who engage in traditional works-righteousness acts of charity and generosity might suggest. But rather, the fulfillment of the spiritual exercise of solidarity depends on the fact the poor and the marginalized who have long suffered the consequences of objectification and dehumanization through the direct and indirect actions of the non-poor, have the op-

¹⁶ Hinze writes:

“...incarnational solidarity involves a humble, kenotic posture that can help traverse divisions caused by disparities of power. To truly be “for” in a way that avoids paternalism, sentimentality, or a protected and aloof throwing of alms to the poor, whom we want to keep their distance, requires a praxis of humble presence and collaboration. Practices of solidarity must honor what Peter-Hans Kolvenbach calls “the logic of the incarnation, whereby Jesus did not cling to his divine station, but emptied himself of every privilege in order to be one of many.” Such practices make the goal of doing “for” another attainment of mutuality, of communion, or at least the potential thereof. Thus understood, solidarity has a hierarchy-melting, deeply egalitarian thrust.” (Hinze 175)

portunity to be agents of grace and love to those who might never have otherwise expected that to be possible. The poor will save the rich, Sobrino has argued, by offering them the forgiveness that is acceptance; by embracing the rich at a moment when they have become painfully aware of their own complicity in the sin whose consequences have been the suffering and dehumanization of others. If the third moment in the spiritual exercise of solidarity cultivates a sense of desolation, sinfulness, and unworthiness, then the embrace of the poor offering forgiveness and love is nothing short of the embrace of God incarnated in the least likely of bodies.

If the goal of solidarity as spiritual exercise is to recognize and experience in one another the gratuitous love of God, then the final (one might argue the *fifth*) movement of solidarity entails expressing this love in common efforts to create social structures that honor and preserve the inherent value and worth of all persons—to create community such that God might recognize it in God’s Reign. The result will not be a homogenized community that flattens differences and makes everyone the same, but instead a community that has created bridges to bring persons together who would otherwise be separated by the consequences of sin; a community of solidarity will foster unity and mutuality among diverse and unique persons.¹⁷

IV. Solidarity as orthopraxis

Another important implication of the conception of solidarity as spiritual exercise that emerges especially from Jon Sobrino’s theological writings—one that is consistent

¹⁷ Boswell, 106.

with John Paul II's insistence that solidarity is the virtue for an interdependent world—is the idea that solidarity can be considered Christian orthopraxis – a proper way to live out one's commitment to Christian discipleship consistent with the truth of the faith.¹⁸ To speak of orthopraxis is to assert that by engaging the practical reason – by committing oneself to solidarity as a concrete praxis of Christian discipleship lived out in the world – Christians can acquire real, experiential knowledge of the truth of God. Practical knowledge is acquired when the body, mind, and the imagination are actively engaged in a praxis, and the experiential character of such knowledge is quite distinct from the theoretical assent that is typically associated with orthodoxy. As William Dych argues most directly:

A person acquires real knowledge of God... primarily through how one lives, and not through how one thinks. This is not to deny, of course, that how one thinks and how one conceptualizes the reality of God is of crucial importance for the faith of the community. It is to affirm once again that if these theoretical aspects of faith are to be more than formal abstractions, they must be rooted in the actual practice of faith.¹⁹

As we have seen in the theological method and content of Jon Sobrino, the starting point for a consideration of contemporary Christian orthopraxis is the life and activity of the historical Jesus—the man of faith and hope whose praxis itself provides the template for contemporary orthopraxis. As such, contemporary orthopraxis draws heavily on Christian scriptures, which provide the narrative reference point for considering the praxis of Jesus as well as the invitation to the praxis of discipleship that Jesus extended to

¹⁸ This section has been greatly inspired by an article on orthopraxis by the late theologian William V. Dych, S.J., "Transposing Orthodoxy into Orthopraxis: The Importance of Practical Theology and Its Implications for Christology, Soteriology, and Ecclesiology." *Philosophy & Theology* vol. 11, no. 2 (1999), 223-255.

¹⁹ Dych, 234.

his followers.²⁰ Moreover, the scriptures themselves contain multiple references to Jesus' own emphasis on the significance of orthopraxis.²¹

In a world with increasingly complex social structures and layers of relationship—marked as it is by an ever-greater interdependence between and among people, communities, organizations, and nations—the intentional, spiritual exercise of solidarity is orthopraxis in that it is precisely the activity of Christian discipleship that is appropriate for mediating an encounter with God in the contemporary context. Solidarity, after all, is not just a vague feeling of compassion and sympathy for others, but a gratuitous experience of the love of God that unites human persons in their diversity and inspires them to set about the difficult task of structuring human relationships and social structures in a way that honors, preserves, and engenders the participation of all. The experience of God's utter gratuity that is mediated through a genuine and kenotic encounter with others, and the shared sense of purpose and mission that it fosters in those who have

²⁰ Sobrino has stated that his methodological commitment to the relevance of the historical Jesus for contemporary theology originated in his contemplation of the synoptic accounts of Jesus's life and ministry that are central to Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads* (Orbis, 1978). Appendix: "The Christ of the Ignatian Exercises," 296-424.

²¹ Dych cites several passages, including:

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Mt 7:21). Not saying but doing is the measure of faith and is constitutive of the identity of the disciple." Dych, 230.

"John's argument in the [First Letter of John] is brief and his logic simple. The reason one should love one's brothers and sisters is not just because of some extrinsic command of God, but because in doing so one is born into the very life of God, and living a life of love brings one knowledge of God. It does this because God is love... By living a life of love for one's neighbor one is touching and is being touched by the very reality that constitutes God's own reality and life, and through this very contact one is coming to know God not in a conceptual sense, but in an experiential and existential sense. A person acquires real knowledge of God... primarily through how one lives, and not through how one thinks." Dych, 234.

"The measure of the validity and vitality of the community's faith in Jesus lies not primarily in theory but in practice, and precisely in the practice that Jesus made the defining characteristic of his disciple, namely, the taking up one's own cross and following him (Mk 8:34; Mt 16:24; Lk 9:23)." Dych, 238.

experienced it provides valuable insight, the truth of which is not only apprehended by the mind, but also by the body and the spirit engaged in the activity which corresponds to the experience.²²

If our consideration and articulation of the spiritual exercise of solidarity has been faithful both to Sobrino's theological method based on the merciful praxis of Jesus in the service of the Reign of God and to an authentic interpretation of Jesus' invitation to Christian discipleship, then fostering and promoting solidarity as orthopraxis has the potential to reinvigorate a contemporary Church that has become increasingly known for its commitment to certain theological principles and dogmas of the faith. As William Dych has argued,

The theoretical content of faith in Jesus as this has been elaborated in scripture and in subsequent Councils can bring real knowledge of Jesus only when it is grounded in actual association with the faith of Jesus himself, for the Christian meaning of the theoretical concepts is discovered in Christian praxis.²³

The Church's emphasis on principles and doctrines must be complemented by an equal emphasis on praxis in order to foster the emotional and moral investment that is necessary to the fulfillment of the Catholic social vision.²⁴

Moreover, an emphasis on solidarity as orthopraxis will have profound implications for the Church itself. As both Sobrino and Dych would both argue, if the Church were to understand itself in terms of the praxis of the historical Jesus, it would be the

²² An emphasis on orthopraxis is a logical (and somewhat obvious) consequence of Ignatian spirituality, and as such might be considered a mark of a Jesuit approach to theology (Jon Sobrino and Bill Dych).

²³ Dych, 234-235.

²⁴ Vogt argues that fostering Christian formation in the virtues will provide a necessary counterbalance to the Church's emphasis on doctrine. See Vogt, "Fostering a Catholic Commitment to the Common Good: An Approach Rooted in Virtue Ethics." *Theological Studies* 68 (2007), 394-417.

community of disciples striving to live out Jesus' mission of action on behalf of the coming of the Reign of God. If that were the case, "the fundamental and primary ministry or service of the church is not directed inward to its own members, as though the community existed for its own sake, but outward to the world."²⁵ If the Church had this self-understanding, it would undoubtedly more closely resemble the Universidad Centroamericana of Ellacuría and his companions, consumed by an overwhelming concern for the systematic oppression and marginalization of the poor and engaging in a genuine praxis of *proyección social*, rather than an institution known more for its inordinate preoccupation with academic theology and taking decisive actions to suppress perceived theoretical threats to the doctrines of faith.

V. Solidarity as Participation

A final implication of solidarity as spiritual exercise for our consideration is the notion that solidarity strives for and values *participation*. For Sobrino and John Paul II alike, the praxis of solidarity is always an attempt to overcome the consequences of sin and separation: poverty and war, for example, have the effect of dehumanizing their victims and separating them from the human community. While death-dealing isolation and suffering gives particular priority to solidarity with the least, solidarity is ultimately intended for—and ought to be practiced by—all.

The notion of participation helps to illuminate how solidarity culminates in grace for all, and not just those who are most recognizably suffering the consequences of sin.

²⁵ Dych, 248-249.

Certainly the materially poor and physically suffering have a particular need for material relief, but as we have already discussed simple humanitarian assistance does not constitute solidarity. Rather, as we explored in the phenomenological analysis of the four movements of the spiritual exercise of solidarity based on the writings of Jon Sobrino, the encounter of the non-poor with the poor can have the effect of awakening within the non-poor an awareness of how their lives were deficient when they were not related to those who were suffering. In short, they become acutely aware of how their own humanity suffered by their lack of relationship to others. Transformed by the praxis and experience of solidarity, however, both the poor and the non-poor express their commitment to this participation that restores their humanity by engaging in actions and activities that create structures to support their ongoing relationship and mutual worth. In solidarity, they commit themselves to full participation – and thereby transcend the subject-object dynamic that often accompanies humanitarian assistance. John Paul II speaks of this notion of participation poignantly in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*:

Solidarity helps us to see the “other”-whether a person, people or nation-not just as some kind of instrument, with a work capacity and physical strength to be exploited at low cost and then discarded when no longer useful, but as our “neighbor,” a “helper” (cf. Gen 2:18-20), to be made a sharer, on a par with ourselves, in the banquet of life to which all are equally invited by God.²⁶

As this passage from John Paul indicates, the notion of participation as a fruit of solidarity extends beyond the relationship between persons who are separated by material poverty or suffering. Solidarity ought to be practiced in every situation where the human community risks intractable division, such as in the differences between people of diverse

²⁶ *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, §39.

cultures, religions, and political vision. As we have mentioned, in these cases, solidarity is not fulfilled by a homogenization of difference. Rather, solidarity can be a method by which bridges are built between those who are different, and the bridge itself becomes a meeting place through which people can engage and otherwise participate in each other's cultures, ideals, and beliefs.²⁷

At this level, David Hollenbach, S.J., has argued on behalf of a commitment to *intellectual solidarity*, which he defines as “a willingness to take other persons seriously enough to engage them in conversation and debate about what they think makes life worth living, including what they think will make for the good of the polis.”²⁸ David Tracy has also argued on behalf of a rich notion of *conversation*, whereby people from diverse traditions participate with another in a dialogue that risks learning from one another.²⁹ Both Tracy and Hollenbach well-explicate how the praxis of solidarity extends beyond the physical praxis of engaging with those in need to an intellectual and philosophical openness to others, and a readiness to learn and be transformed by the encounter with others. The praxis of *intellectual solidarity* itself, or of *conversation* itself, creates

²⁷ Boswell, 106.

²⁸ Hollenbach, David. “Contexts of the Political Role of Religion: Civil Society and Culture.” *San Diego Law Review* 30, 892.

See also Hollenbach's “Afterword: A Community of Freedom” in Douglas, R. Bruce, ed. *Catholicism and Liberalism: Contributions to American Public Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. 323-341.

²⁹ Tracy, David. *Plurality & Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope*. Chicago: U Chicago Press, 1987:

Conversation in its primary form is an exploration of possibilities in the search for truth. In following the track of any question, we must allow for difference and otherness. At the same time, as the question takes over, we notice that to attend to the other as other, the different as different, is also to understand the different *as possible*. To recognize possibility is to sense some similarity to what we have already experienced or understood. But similarity here must be described as similarity-in-difference, that is, analogy. An imagination trained to that kind of encounter is an analogical imagination. All good interpreters possess it. For the phrase “an analogical imagination” simply reminds us that conversation occurs if, and only if, we will risk ourselves by allowing the questions of the text. Tracy, 20.

the bridge that humanizes those who might otherwise be considered “other” due to their traditions or beliefs. Without homogenizing or steamrolling the differences between people with potentially incommensurable beliefs or traditions, engaging in this praxis strives for a dialogue and exchange of ideas that seeks the full participation of those who might otherwise be separated and alienated from one another.

The spiritual exercise of solidarity makes a particular and complementary contribution to the development of solidarity in the official Catholic social tradition. As we have seen, this conception of solidarity integrates and animates contemporary Christian spirituality, Scripture, and ethics in a manner that a traditional understanding of solidarity as virtue cannot. Moreover, solidarity as an interpersonal spiritual exercise is able to transcend the individualistic tendencies of Christian personalism and virtue ethics in a manner that is more appropriate to the Christian understanding of the Reign of God. Because the spiritual exercise of solidarity entails a primary concern for the poor, the suffering, and the marginalized, it provides a praxis by which we might respond to the most pressing and immediate humanitarian crises of our day, and assures that victims and those who suffer are not objectified as problems to be solved, but invited to be equal partners in creating social structures that preserve the integrity and full participation of all.

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