

Pope Francis and the Christological Dimensions of Solidarity in Catholic Social Teaching

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Abstract

Solidarity is a central aspect of the Catholic social tradition and yet it is difficult to capture in a simple definition. Building upon his predecessor's examination of solidarity, Pope Francis develops solidarity's christological character, a previously under-developed aspect of Catholic social teaching. Francis's use of place and proclamation in public ministry calls for an ethic of inclusion and encounter. Francis turns to the Incarnation as informing a theology of solidarity focused on both Jesus as model of solidarity and of lived solidarity as an encounter with Christ.

Keywords

Catholic social teaching, common good, culture of encounter, Francis, globalization of indifference, Incarnation, solidarity

Solidarity is a central aspect of the Catholic social tradition and yet it is difficult to capture in a simple definition. For example, within *Gaudium et Spes*, the Second Vatican Council uses solidarity in three distinct ways.¹ First, solidarity

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1. *Gaudium et Spes* (December 7, 1965), http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html (hereafter cited in text as *GS*). Throughout the Pastoral Constitution, solidarity is used in these three distinct ways. However, it is not simply used in these three paragraphs. *GS* references solidarity in 3, 4, 32, 38, 48, 57, 75, 85, and 90.

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relates to the fact of interdependence and a growing sense of interconnectedness within the global community.² Second, it provides the framework for identifying and clarifying our responsibilities for distant others and “a desire to make the conditions of life more favorable to all.”³ Finally, *Gaudium et Spes* also connects human relationality and solidarity to the Incarnation, stating, “God did not create man for life in isolation, but for the formation of social unity . . . This communitarian character is developed and consummated in the work of Jesus Christ. For the very Word made flesh willed to share in the human fellowship.”⁴ In the last sixty years, Catholic social teaching largely focused on developing the theory and application of the first two aspects: the descriptive awareness of interdependence (attitude) and the normative obligations for all that flows from it (principle and duty), with this synthesis culminating in the articulation of solidarity as a virtue. Building upon this foundation, Pope Francis focuses on the previously underdeveloped aspect—solidarity’s connection to the Incarnation. My argument is that in focusing on solidarity as intimately connected to faith in Jesus Christ, Francis has developed Catholic social teaching on solidarity. In order to demonstrate this claim, I will place Francis’s teaching within the larger background of previous Catholic social teaching on solidarity and then examine his specific contribution to the theological ethic of solidarity. In particular, I maintain that through his public ministry and magisterial contributions, Francis draws out the deep christological elements of solidarity by centering on Jesus as model for solidarity, and lived solidarity with those on the margins as an encounter with Christ. By developing this christological element of solidarity, tied as it is in particular to the Incarnation, Francis calls for greater attention to communities of solidarity among the marginalized and to deep opposition to a throwaway culture.

Background on Solidarity in Catholic Social Teaching

During the Industrial Revolution, modern Catholic social teaching began in response to new social and economic realities and the growing exploitation of workers. It is fitting then that the word “solidarity” enters into the modern social tradition within the context of work. While Pius XII was the first pope to use the word in discussing the unity and care of the church, it was Pope John XXIII who introduced it into modern Catholic social teaching.⁵ In *Mater et Magistra*, John invoked the growing “spirit of solidarity” among

2. *GS* 4.

3. *GS* 57.

4. *GS* 32.

5. Gerald Beyer, “The Meaning of Solidarity in Catholic Social Teaching,” *Political Theology* 15 (2014): 7–25 at 9, <https://doi.org/10.1179/1462317x13z.00000000059>, where Beyer argues that in Pius’s 1939 encyclical *Summi Pontificatus*, we learn that the first page of Scripture (Gen 1:26–27) undergirds the law of “human solidarity and charity,” revealing our common origin and that all human beings are created in the image of God. It is also worth noting that prior to John XXIII, the word solidarity was sometimes viewed with suspicion within Catholic circles. Similar to resistance of human rights language, solidarity

rural agricultural workers as a natural outgrowth of the Catholic social tradition's support for worker associations.⁶ John was in effect invoking a spirit of interdependence. As a moral question, interdependence is always connected to human dignity. The theology of solidarity thus flows directly from a theological anthropology where the human person, as created *imago Dei*, includes human sociality. Human dignity, involving equality, mutuality, and reciprocity, is a given fact of each human person, without exception, and of humanity itself.⁷ Interdependence then is an observable reality or descriptive claim, as well as a normative claim about creation (who we are and who we should be) for Christian theology. Individual and collective flourishing are intrinsically linked as positive aspects of what it means to be created *imago Dei*.

Over the nearly sixty years since *Mater et Magistra*, Catholic social thought has proposed solidarity as an attitude, a principle and duty, and a virtue, as the tradition grapples with the ethics of interdependence and globalization. Beginning with John XXIII, then, the ethic of solidarity emerging from this theological anthropology develops in three steps: (1) awareness of interdependence, (2) identifying the moral obligations of solidarity, and finally, (3) its full explication as a virtue in John Paul II's teaching on solidarity. Here I will summarize this development of solidarity and situate the thought of Pope Francis within this developing tradition.

Step 1: Interdependence and an Attitude of Solidarity

An awareness—also called an attitude or spirit—of solidarity grows as the recognition of equal humanity grows in its response to mutual interdependence. Hence, John XXIII highlighted this spirit in worker associations. Catholic social teaching praises this increasing awareness of human collaboration and interdependence alongside the growing awareness of human dignity and human rights throughout the world. In 1967, Pope Paul VI unambiguously tied human rights and development to solidarity, arguing that “there can be no progress toward complete development of man without the development of all humanity in the spirit of solidarity.”⁸ According to Kevin Doran, “When the solidarity of a person is described as an attitude, it has a significance which has to do primarily with its outward direction towards other persons, their needs, and the structures of society within which they are called to be and to act.”⁹ This first level

was seen as potentially problematic given historical connections to the French Revolution and, in modern times, to socialism. For more on this history see Steinar Stjernø, *Solidarity in Europe: The History of an Idea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 75–85.

6. John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra* (May 15, 1961), 23 and 146, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_15051961_mater.html.

7. For a full explanation of this argument see: Meghan J. Clark, *The Vision of Catholic Social Teaching: The Virtue of Solidarity and the Praxis of Human Rights* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2014), esp. 43–71.

8. Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio* (March 26, 1967), 43, http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_26031967_populorum.html (hereafter cited as *PP*).

9. Kevin P. Doran, *Solidarity: A Synthesis of Personalism and Communalism in the Thought of Karol Wojtyła / Pope John Paul II* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), 191.

of solidarity as an awareness, spirit, or attitude is extended by Francis in *Laudato Si'* to include all of creation in some way a “new and universal solidarity.”¹⁰

Step 2: Moral Obligations of Solidarity: A Principle and Duty

A growing awareness in our time of human interdependence seems obvious. The stronger and more contentious claim of Catholic social thought is that our sociality and interdependence impose duties. As Pope John Paul II explains, “The conviction is growing of a *radical interdependence* and consequently of the need for a solidarity which will take interdependence and transfer it to the moral plane.”¹¹ And Gerald Beyer notes, “The reality of interdependence should have ethical implications for all human interactions in the economic, cultural, political, and religious spheres of social life.”¹² Our humanity, as image of God, is not only a fact of creation, but also places a claim upon us. In his philosophical writings, Karol Wojtyła (later, Pope John Paul II) held that “as human beings we are capable of participation in the very humanity of other people, and because of this every human being can become our neighbor” and that “a human being finds fulfillment of himself by adding to the fulfillment of others.”¹³ A hallmark of human dignity, as foundational for solidarity, is the range of dialogical possibilities of human agency. For solidarity, the reciprocal participation and agency of persons is not only possible but also a requirement. In the process of becoming “neighbor” in solidarity, we each become more fully human together. In this context, Wojtyła sees solidarity with the neighbor as a step to living out our lives as brothers and sisters, not simply inhabiting the same space. As pope, he expanded this insight, urging “collaboration in the development of the whole person and of every human being is in fact a duty of all towards all.”¹⁴

The obligations of solidarity in Catholic social teaching go beyond the merely negative duty to avoid harming or impeding others. *Gaudium et Spes*, rather, speaks of a “special obligation [that] binds us to make ourselves the neighbor of absolutely every person and of actively helping him when he comes across our path.”¹⁵ In *Populorum Progressio*, this is universalized, for since “we have obligations towards all . . . the reality of human solidarity, which is a benefit for us also imposes a duty.”¹⁶ Not only is the vision of Catholic social teaching universal, it also cuts across time

10. Francis, *Laudato Si'* (May 24, 2015), 14, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_encyclica-laudato-si.html (hereafter cited as *LS*).

11. John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (December 30, 1987), 26, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis.html (hereafter cited as *SRS*).

12. Beyer, “The Meaning of Solidarity,” 15.

13. John Paul II/Karol Wojtyła, *Toward a Philosophy of Praxis: An Anthology*, ed. Alfred Bloch and George T. Czuczka (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 49.

14. *SRS* 32.

15. *GS* 27.

16. *PP* 17.

looking both backward to the past and forward to future generations. *Populorum Progressio* emphasizes that “we have inherited from past generations and benefitted from the work of our contemporaries,”¹⁷ thus framing both human development and solidarity as in some ways cutting across space and time. Every man, woman, and child is called to the fullness of development which is bounded by an integral and communal understanding of human flourishing. This is an inclusive human flourishing; no one is excluded or marginalized, including future generations. For Catholic social teaching, this vision of flourishing together, of radical interdependence, is a positive quality of humanity and not a liability. In *Lumen Fidei*, Pope Francis reminds us that “persons always live in relationship. We come from others, we belong to others, and our lives are enlarged by our encounter with others.” On an existential level “self-knowledge is only possible when we share in greater memory.”¹⁸

Catholic social teaching, therefore, has expanded the understanding of rights and responsibilities beyond national boundaries to include a universality of concern and duty within the one human family. No human person or group is outside the one human family, and thus, despite the fact that a “constant tension exists between fullness and limitation,”¹⁹ we truly do have obligations toward all, even future generations. Solidarity as it is envisioned here is all-encompassing, operating on many different levels, each with its own corresponding responsibilities in cooperation with subsidiarity. Correlatively, families and specific communities provide the springboard for greater collective action in solidarity. For example, as *Amoris Laetitia* notes, “families should not see themselves as a refuge from society, but instead go forth from their homes in a spirit of solidarity with others.”²⁰ All of human society is included here, and each level plays a role: individuals, families, churches, cities, nations, and the global community. This ethic of solidarity develops with an increasing emphasis on human rights, inclusion, and participation by all.²¹ Integral human development is framed by creation or, as Francis calls it in *Laudato Si'*, “our common home.” Synthesizing this tradition, Francis explains, “Authentic human development has a moral character. It presumes full respect for the human person but it must also

17. *PP* 17.

18. Francis, *Lumen Fidei* (June 29, 2013), 38, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20130629_enciclica-lumen-fidei.html.

19. *LS* 222.

20. Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* (March 19, 2016), 181, https://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf (hereafter cited as *AL*).

21. Synod of Bishops, *Justitia En Mundo* (1971), <https://www.cctwincities.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Justicia-in-Mundo.pdf>. This holistic perspective was earlier established by *Caritas in Veritate* arguing that “projects for integral human development cannot ignore future generations and need to be marked by solidarity and intergenerational justice, while taking into account a variety of contexts: ecological, juridical, economic, political, and cultural.” See Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* (June 29, 2009), 48, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html (hereafter cited as *CV*).

be concerned with the world around us.”²² A constant attention to each person as well as the one human family is a hallmark of integral human development, and the seeking of solidarity. “It is the convergence of peoples who, within the universal order, maintain their own individuality. It is the sum total of persons within a society who pursue the common good which truly has a place for everyone.”²³

The overarching framework of solidarity, then, is the equal human dignity of all, with an emphasis on participation. Aid without participation and agency falls short of this view. In his address to the United Nations General Assembly, Pope Francis clearly argued that the purpose of development aid must be to allow the poor to become “dignified agents of their own destiny,” recognizing that “integral human development and the full exercise of human dignity cannot be imposed. They must be built up and allowed to unfold.”²⁴ When rich nations give “aid to developing nations in the form of simple almsgiving or charity, and without engagement or input from the receiving nations, [such aid] does not afford the requisite agency for the presence of solidarity.”²⁵ Duties of solidarity cannot be one-directional; developing communities must have effective participation in deciding the frame and use of development aid. Questions of solidarity and development are not simply a matter of generosity, for as Pope Benedict XVI notes in *Caritas in Veritate*, “I cannot ‘give’ what is mine to the other, without first giving him what pertains to him in justice. If we love others with charity, then first of all we are just towards them.”²⁶ This insight is further clarified and deepened by Francis, who urges that solidarity must be “lived as the decision to restore to the poor what belongs to them.”²⁷ Fulfilling these duties then is a dynamic and dialogical process which focuses on participation. Ultimately, all of this reaches its clearest expression when solidarity is approached as a virtue.²⁸

Step 3: The Virtue of Solidarity

In 1987, Pope John Paul II identified the virtue of solidarity as “a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say the good of all and of each individual because we are really *all* responsible for *all*.”²⁹ Very briefly, in order for solidarity to be a moral virtue, it must be able to be acquired and practiced.

22. *LS* 5.

23. *LS* 236.

24. Francis “Meeting at the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization,” (address, New York, September 25, 2015), http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco_20150925_onu-visita.html.

25. Clark, *The Vision of Catholic Social Thought*, 113.

26. *CV* 6.

27. *EG* 189.

28. This article merely provides a summary of the development of solidarity before Francis. For more in depth discussion, see Clark, *The Vision of Catholic Social Thought*, 9–42.

29. *SRS* 38, emphasis mine.

Developing moral virtue is a process of realizing human lives more fully in communities; and these communities can and should also be in the process of becoming more fully human. This combination of the personal and the communal, including an ever-evolving process of human development (of whole persons together), typifies Catholic social teaching's specific understanding of human development as "integral." Bridging the observable reality of interdependence and our corresponding duties, Catholic social teaching presents solidarity as a social virtue. As such, it involves a dynamic interplay of human agency, human dignity, and human rights. Personal and communal, "the end of solidarity is participation in the universal common good. To be more specific, it is the participation by all in the universal common good."³⁰ In practice, this requires active participation by all. As David Hollenbach explains, "Solidarity leads members of a community to recognize their well-being is shared. The relationships linking them with other members of the 'we' are themselves key aspects of the common good they share."³¹ Catholic social teaching contends that the virtue of solidarity can be practiced and acquired at all levels of human society—from personal friendships to the global community.

The call to build communities of solidarity, like the universal call to holiness, begins with personal conversion and relationship. As persons and communities, "we are called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do, wherever we find ourselves."³² In this way, Francis characterizes peacemakers as those who build "friendship in society."³³ The virtue of solidarity, like peace, "is a craft that demands serenity, creativity, sensitivity and skill."³⁴ He adds, "When Jesus comes into our lives . . . it makes us neighbors . . . Faith awakens our solidarity. It is a virtue, human and Christian . . . a virtue we must learn."³⁵

As Francis noted in his first World Day of Peace message centered on *fraternity*, "A lively awareness of our relatedness helps us to look upon and to treat each person as a true sister or brother; without fraternity it is impossible to build a just society and a solid and lasting peace."³⁶ Ultimately, for the social tradition, all

30. Clark, *The Vision of Catholic Social Thought*, 112–13.

31. David Hollenbach, "The Glory of God and the Global Common Good: Solidarity in a Turbulent World," *CTSA Proceedings* 72 (2017): 51–60, 56.

32. Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate* (April 9, 2018), 14, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco_20150925_onu-visita.html (hereafter cited as *GE*).

33. *GE* 88.

34. *GE* 89.

35. Francis, "Visit to the People of Bañado Norte," Paraguay (July 12, 2015), https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/july/documents/papa-francesco_20150712_parguay-banado-norte.html (hereafter cited as "Bañado Norte Address").

36. Francis, "Fraternity, the Foundation and Pathway to Peace," World Day of Peace Message (January 1, 2014), https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20131208_messaggio-xxvii-giornata-mondiale-pace-2014.html (hereafter cited as "Fraternity, the Foundation and Pathway to Peace").

persons—Christians and non-Christians—are called to build friendship in society by seeking solidarity among the members of the one human family. Practically, Hollenbach argues, “today we are challenged to act in ways that reflect the fact that local, regional, and global bonds of solidarity are *all* essential to human well-being. The common good is increasingly polycentric.”³⁷ Similarly, Francis uses the image of a polyhedron to visualize the common good, which is always intimately connected with solidarity. Thus solidarity, like the common good and peace, “is both God’s gift and a human achievement. As a gift of God, it is entrusted to all men and women who are called to attain it.”³⁸

Practically, it is logical that Catholic social teaching’s primary focus began with the moral reflection on interdependence and development; and it is this moral reflection which culminates in John Paul II’s definition of the virtue of solidarity. Yet, there is also a deeper theology of solidarity invoked in *Gaudium et Spes* 32 which does not get developed—the connection to the person of Jesus Christ and the Incarnation, in which the Word became flesh as an act of solidarity. John Paul II moves in this direction when he calls solidarity an “undoubtedly Christian virtue,” in which

one’s neighbor is then not only a human being with his or her own rights and a fundamental equality with everyone else, but becomes the living image of God the Father, redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ and placed under the permanent action of the Holy Spirit. One’s neighbor must therefore be loved, even if an enemy, with the same love with which the Lord loves him or her.³⁹

Yet, John Paul did not very much develop this virtue as such or expound on what it means to call it a specifically Christian virtue beyond reference to “total gratuity, forgiveness, and reconciliation.”⁴⁰ Benedict XVI similarly emphasizes the image of God in one’s neighbors and self-gift or *gratuitousness* as foundational for solidarity⁴¹ and highlights the intergenerational obligations of solidarity, but does not examine solidarity specifically, preferring instead to develop the theological ethics of charity and gratuitousness.⁴²

John Paul II and Benedict XVI both emphasize the unity of the Trinity and universal human dignity in which all are loved by God and redeemed by Christ. This builds upon the teaching in *Gaudium et Spes* that human community is called to reflect the

37. Hollenbach, “The Glory of God and the Global Common Good,” 56.

38. Francis, “Overcome Indifference and Win Peace,” World Day of Peace Message (January 1, 2016), 1, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20151208_messaggio-xlix-giornata-mondiale-pace-2016.html (hereafter cited as “Overcome Indifference and Win Peace”).

39. *SRS* 40.

40. *SRS* 40.

41. *CV* 43, 36.

42. While it is not developed in this article, Francis is also significantly developing the concept of intergenerational solidarity and intergenerational justice with respect to sustainable development.

unity of the Trinity.⁴³ As I have argued elsewhere, “Not only are we modeling human solidarity on the communion of the Trinity, but in solidarity we see the image of the living God, the Trinitarian God—one God in three persons.”⁴⁴ Building upon this unity between Trinity and solidarity, Francis continues his predecessors’ reflections on the moral obligations of solidarity. In *Laudato Si’*, he reminds his readers that “everything is interconnected, and this invites us to develop a solidarity which flows from the mystery of the Trinity.”⁴⁵ In this much, it is clear that Francis is not radically departing from traditional approaches to solidarity. At the same time, however, he is developing the tradition beyond what his predecessors laid out, and it is to his unique contribution that I now turn.

Pope Francis and Solidarity: Developing Christological Connections

“A faith that does not draw us into solidarity is a faith which is dead, it is deceitful . . . faith without solidarity is a faith without Christ.”⁴⁶ With this simple, stark, and strong statement, given at an address in Bañado Norte, Paraguay, Francis places Jesus Christ at the very center of his theological ethic of solidarity. In emphasizing the christological, and particularly the incarnational, aspects of solidarity, Francis presents solidarity not merely as an ethical principle or virtue but as a way of being Christian, a way of relationship with Jesus.⁴⁷ At Bañado Norte, he explained that the model for entering into solidarity is Jesus who became human “to express brotherly solidarity, a solidarity which comes from his love for the Father and from his love for us,”⁴⁸ thus echoing the identification of *Gaudium et Spes* of humanity’s communitarian character with the Incarnation itself.⁴⁹ In his 2016 World Day of Peace Message, he explained, “In the same way, in Jesus his son, God has come down among us. He took flesh and showed his solidarity with humanity in all things but sin.”⁵⁰ The Incarnation dispels both indifference and distance in the face of the marginalization or exclusion of one’s neighbor.

43. *GS* 24; see also: David Hollenbach, “Commentary on *Gaudium et Spes*,” *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations*, 2nd ed., ed. Kenneth R. Himes et al. (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2018), 275–301.

44. Clark, *Vision of Catholic Social Teaching*, 32.

45. *LS* 240.

46. Francis, “Bañado Norte Address.”

47. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (November 24, 2013), 7, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html (hereafter cited as *EG*). See also Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (December 25, 2005), 1, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritases.html (hereafter cited as *DCE*).

48. Francis, “Bañado Norte Address.”

49. *GS* 32.

50. Francis, “Overcome Indifference and Win Peace,” 5.

Using the Incarnation and solidarity as an overarching theme in his Angelus messages of January 2014, Francis began by emphasizing “God-with-us, God who loves us, God who walks with us . . . the word made flesh . . . Faith in the incarnation tells us God is in solidarity with human kind and with human history.”⁵¹ Jesus’s solidarity with sinners through both his baptism and ministry teaches that “Jesus does not dissociate himself from us, he considers us brothers and sisters and he shares with us.”⁵² As Michael Himes incisively notes, “the Incarnation tells us what it means to be human.”⁵³ It is the revelation not only of who we are, but who humanity is called to be. “The immense dignity of the human person is at the heart of the Christian tradition because it flows directly from the incarnation itself.”⁵⁴

Yet, Jesus’s identification with the marginalized and excluded is the most important element here. God enters into our reality not at a point of power and privilege but into human weakness, fragility, and finitude, “by becoming close to us, by showing true solidarity, especially to the poor and needy.”⁵⁵ Thus, Francis argues “our faith in Christ, who became poor, and was always close to the poor and outcast, is the basis for our concern for the integral development of societies most neglected members.”⁵⁶ As the Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean at Aparecida concluded, in addition to Scripture and the Eucharist, we encounter Jesus in the poor as a “constitutive dimension of our faith in Jesus Christ.”⁵⁷

Here, I will further examine Francis’s unique contribution to Catholic social teaching on solidarity through his focus on learning from Jesus as model of solidarity, and on lived solidarity as an encounter with Christ. Then I will turn to his critical identification of marginalized communities as witnesses to and locations of solidarity during his pastoral visits. Finally, I will address challenges to his christological vision of solidarity, including the primary obstacles of indifference and what he calls the “throwaway culture.”

Jesus as Model of Solidarity and Solidarity as Encounter with Christ

Speaking with residents at the Jesuit Refugee Center in Rome, Francis stated, “Empty convents are not ours, they are for the flesh of Christ: refugees.”⁵⁸ Here Francis once

51. Francis, “Angelus” (January 5, 2014), https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/angelus/2014/documents/papa-francesco_angelus_20140105.html.

52. Francis, “Angelus” (January 12, 2014), https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/angelus/2014/documents/papa-francesco_angelus_20140112.html.

53. Michael Himes, *The Mystery of Faith: An Introduction to Catholicism*, (Cincinnati, OH: St. Anthony Messenger, 2004), 1516.

54. Himes, 18.

55. Francis, “Meeting with the Academic and Cultural World,” Caligari (September 22, 2013), https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco_20130922_cultura-cagliari.html.

56. *EG* 186.

57. “Concluding Document,” Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean at Aparecida (2007), 257, <http://www.celam.org/aparecida/Ingles.pdf>.

58. Francis, *EG*, 7; cf. Benedict XVI, *DCE*, 1.

again draws a direct connection between Jesus Christ and solidarity with the marginalized. Empty buildings should be put at the service of the poor and not viewed just as private property, challenging the trend of turning empty church buildings into hotels. He further explained that the responsibility for neighbor is not something limited to the institutional church or religious “specialists,” but extends to the whole church as the responsibility of the people of God. Elsewhere, Francis often invokes the parable of the Good Samaritan. As Jesus taught in that parable, he argues, so too must we always be on guard against the self-righteousness and hypocrisy that blind us to the needs of the person in front of us. The model for solidarity is Jesus of Nazareth “who chose to live in our midst.”⁵⁹

In addition to posing Jesus as model, Francis sees solidarity fully realized when encounter with the marginalized and vulnerable is understood and experienced as an encounter with Christ.⁶⁰ Here, the social doctrine of the church itself becomes christological, for Christian doctrine “has a body that moves and develops; it has tender flesh: Christian doctrine is called Jesus Christ.”⁶¹ As Richard Gaillardetz explains, the theology of encounter called for has two aspects: “first, the church must be willing to encounter the world on its own turf, with humility and openness. Second, the missionary encounter must be, in the end, an encounter with Christ.”⁶²

And how does this encounter take place? In an address on humanism, Francis warned that “we must not domesticate the power of the face of Christ.” For where do we find that face? We find “Jesus’ face is similar to that of so many of our brothers and sisters, humiliated, rendered slaves, emptied. God took on their face.”⁶³ And we encounter this flesh in our neighbor for human dignity is understood “as a reflection of God in his creatures.”⁶⁴

Encounter with the poor and encounter with Christ are thus inextricably connected. In many of his statements, Francis argues for the centrality of the poor and marginalized to one’s relationship with Christ. This radical identification of Jesus Christ with the most neglected in society is most notably summarized in the parable of the Last Judgment (Matt 25). This parable identifies those in need and marginalized as a primary locus for encountering Christ. Theologically, Jesus does not identify himself with those who offer assistance by feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and so on; rather, Jesus identifies himself those who *are* hungry, homeless, or imprisoned. Jesus

59. Francis, “Bañado Norte Address.”

60. Francis, “Meeting with the Participants of the Fifth Convention of the Italian Church,” Florence (November 10, 2015), https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/november/documents/papa-francesco_20151110_firenze-convegno-chiesa-italiana.html (hereafter cited as “Meeting with the Participants of the Fifth Convention of the Italian Church”).

61. Francis, “Meeting with the Participants of the Fifth Convention of the Italian Church.”

62. Richard Gaillardetz, “Ecclesiological Foundations of Modern Catholic Social Teaching,” *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations*, 2nd ed., ed. Kenneth R. Himes et al. (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2018), 75–102.

63. Francis, “Meeting with the Participants of the Fifth Convention of the Italian Church.”

64. Francis, “Overcome Indifference and Win Peace,” 5.

radically identifies himself with the vulnerable, marginalized, and excluded. For solidarity, this fundamental identification is important for two reasons. First, it accentuates the absolute necessity of beginning with the full and equal human dignity of all persons. As Ignacio Ellacuría noted, “Jesus has discarded what humanity sees as great and has considered what is despised by the power of this world as a sacrament of God.”⁶⁵ In doing so, Jesus reshapes the boundaries of concern and responsibility. Second, agency and responsibility are affirmed. The social order and structures of exclusion are fashioned by humans, and thus humans can replace them with structures and communities of inclusion.

Concretely, this solidarity and encounter with Christ entails ethics in action: “These convictions and habits of solidarity, when they are put into practice, open the way to other structural transformations and make them possible.”⁶⁶ Incarnational solidarity takes Jesus’s identification with those on the peripheries, those who are excluded, and emphasizes a response that is both personal and communal. The ethical import of Matthew 25 lies not in personal works of mercy but in its summons to institutional work for justice. In his address at the Jesuit Refugee Service’s Astelli Centre, Francis explained this through the triptych of serving, accompanying, and defending. *Serving* is deeply personal; it “means working beside the neediest of people, establishing with them first and foremost human relationships of closeness and bonds of solidarity.”⁶⁷ *Accompanying* recognizes that “it is not enough to offer someone a sandwich unless it is accompanied by the possibility of learning how to stand on one’s own two feet . . . [the] mercy [that] God gives to us and teaches us, demands justice, it demands that the poor find the way to be poor no longer.”⁶⁸ And finally, *defending* requires implementing the preferential option for the poor by “taking the side of the weakest” and letting their voices be heard.⁶⁹

A lack of solidarity toward the neighbor directly affects relationship with God. In Christian theology, identifying the poor as a place of encountering Jesus leads to recognition that discomfort is necessary for the privileged believer’s relationship with God. Reflecting on the social teaching tradition, Francis often highlights the explicit Gospel message about wealth as a barrier to one’s relationship with God, as illustrated in the parable of the rich young man (Mark 10:21–22). Jesus asks the rich man to give up comfort, security, power, and privilege, to sell what he has, share his wealth with

65. Ignacio Ellacuría, “Historicity of Christian Salvation,” in *Essays on History, Liberation, and Salvation*, edited and with an introduction by Michael E. Lee, with commentary by Kevin F. Burke (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2018), 137–68 at 159.

66. *EG* 189

67. Francis, “Visit to the Astalli Centre, The Jesuit Refugee Service in Rome” (September 10, 2013), http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco_20130910_centro-astalli.htm (hereafter cited as “Visit to the Astalli Centre”).

68. Francis, “Visit to the Astalli Centre.”

69. Francis, “Visit to the Astalli Centre.”

the poor, and then to follow Jesus. This is an invitation to vulnerability and risk. "Solidarity in sharing sorrow and infusing hope is a premise and condition for receiving as an inheritance the kingdom that has been prepared for us."⁷⁰ Risk and vulnerability cannot be avoided if we are to develop communities of solidarity. Francis builds on his earlier reflections on the virtue of solidarity and relates that virtue specifically to the Incarnation.

Furthermore, in his theology, solidarity is not abstract or naïve: "it means working to eliminate the structural causes of poverty and promote the integral development of the poor, as well as small daily acts of solidarity in meeting the real needs which we encounter."⁷¹ M. Shawn Copeland notes, "Solidarity is a wrenching task: to stand up for justice in the midst of injustice; to take up simplicity in the midst of affluence and comfort; to embrace integrity in the midst of collusion and co-optation; to contest the gravitational pull of domination."⁷²

When Francis labels inequality the root of all social ills, it is because it creates a situation "making it practically impossible to live a human life ruled by moral principles."⁷³ The structures that perpetuate extreme economic, political, and social inequality harm both rich and poor, powerful and powerless. Changing these structures is not just a matter of justice but also solidarity. Francis explains: "Solidarity must be lived as the decision to restore to the poor what belongs to them. These convictions and habits of solidarity, when they are put into practice, open the way to other structural transformations and make them possible"⁷⁴ On behalf of the privileged, there is an unequivocal responsibility to work for justice and enter into solidarity with the marginalized and excluded. Incarnational solidarity cannot be accomplished while jealously guarding one's own security, comfort, privilege, power, and wealth. It is also a recognition that in discarding those on the margins as "disposable,"⁷⁵ one is disposing of Christ.

Recognizing Jesus and Solidarity at the Margins: Pope Francis's Pastoral Priorities

Using Jesus as a model for solidarity, Francis carefully crafts public speeches to marginalized communities, seeking to accompany those he is addressing in their struggle for dignity and justice while simultaneously providing a clear indictment of the prevailing power structures which render them invisible, forgotten, or discarded. He

70. For an elaboration of this point, see Francis, "General Audience" (November 27, 2013), https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20131127_udienza-generale.html.

71. *EG* 188.

72. M. Shawn Copeland, "Toward a Critical Christian Feminist Theology of Solidarity," in *Women and Theology*, ed. Mary Ann Hinsdale and Phyllis H. Kaminski (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995), 18.

73. *EG* 188.

74. *EG* 189.

75. *EG* 53.

consistently engages directly two primary marginalized groups: refugees and migrants, and those living in extreme poverty.⁷⁶ Themes that emerge in addressing these groups are repeated when he visits with other marginalized communities such as prisoners and the unemployed. A clear pattern of layered messages emerges. First, Francis speaks directly to persons experiencing structural and systematic marginalization and exclusion, aware that the rest of the world is listening and watching. Using both his physical location and his words, he highlights the challenge of the very *word* solidarity through the dynamic of seeking comfort and trying to avoid the discomfort of facing injustice, and calls for a conversion on the part of those observers remaining at a safe distance.

For his first papal visit outside of Rome, Francis visited the island of Lampedusa, the entry point for refugees arriving from North Africa. In this visit he revealed the pattern he continues to follow. A few short months before the tragic shipwreck of October 13, Francis offered Mass in the name of thousands fleeing North Africa who died before reaching Lampedusa. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, there were an estimated 65.6 million forcibly displaced persons at the end of 2016, the highest count ever recorded. Since 2012, there has been steady growth in the number of forced migrants.⁷⁷ Before, during, and after their displacement, refugees live in a near constant state of heightened vulnerability on the margins. The global refugee crisis is something that everyone openly laments; yet significant political action remains elusive. Francis is acutely aware of this and has made it a priority of pastoral outreach of his papacy. Standing among these North African refugees, Francis pointed out that

today no one in our world feels responsible; we have lost a sense of responsibility for our brothers and sisters. We have fallen into the hypocrisy of the priest and the Levite whom Jesus describes in the parable of the Good Samaritan because “we have become used to the suffering of others: it doesn’t affect me; it doesn’t concern me; it’s none of my business.”⁷⁸

Physically and morally placing himself alongside the refugees, he speaks to them and indicts much of the rest of the world—Christians and non-Christians alike. That no one “feels responsible” is central to the pope’s social critique of what he terms the “throwaway culture.” For example, in Kenya, Francis spoke to these multiple audiences when he praised the people of Kangemi for living “values grounded in the fact each human being is more important than the god of money. Thank you for reminding

76. This is not to claim that Francis’s predecessors did not also speak to multilayered audiences or visit with the poor, but these aspects of Francis’s pastoral visits are distinctive and noteworthy.

77. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “Global Trends 2016” (June 19, 2017), <http://www.unhcr.org/5943e8a34.pdf>.

78. Francis, “Visit to Lampedusa: Homily of the Holy Father” (July 8, 2013), https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130708_omelia-lampedusa.html (hereafter cited as “Visit to Lampedusa”).

us that another type of culture is possible.”⁷⁹ The pope is not romanticizing the struggles or violence that poverty generates; instead he is resisting narratives that see only poverty and deny the full humanity of the persons in these communities. If we embraced and lived as one human family, Francis claims, there would be no exclusion. In a true family, all are included.

An integral element of Francis’s message is his choice of venue: to learn how to build a culture of solidarity, the world needs to focus its attention on marginalized communities somewhat. As Robin Ryan encapsulates it, “Francis emphasizes that the poor have much to teach other Christians; we need to allow ourselves to be evangelized by the poor.”⁸⁰ On his apostolic journeys, the pope visits with presidents and national leaders; yet, the souls of his trips seem to be his visits with the poor. At each stop, Francis is clear he is coming to be with the people and reveals the vibrant communities that exist despite inhuman poverty, oppression, and injustice. These visits emphasize both the particularity and universality of the pope’s oft-quoted “field hospital” image. The violence of poverty and exclusion leaves people wounded and literally often means death. At the same time, the culture of indifference leaves unseen wounds, separating one from God. Yet Francis does not resign himself to the situation of the field hospital, instead always calling for a more just culture of solidarity, which begins with “the safeguard[ing] of human rights.”⁸¹ Francis thus uses his pastoral meetings with marginalized communities to refocus attention on Christ as the heart of a theological ethic of solidarity.

Identifying Barriers to Solidarity: Complicity, Comfort, and Indifference

It is estimated that more than 20 million people are currently victims of human trafficking. According to the International Labor Organization, “At any given time in 2016, an estimated 40.3 million people were in modern slavery, including 24.9 million in forced labor and 15.4 million in forced marriage.”⁸² The reality of human trafficking and modern-day slavery, according to Francis, “challenges us to examine seriously the various forms of complicity by which society tolerates, and encourages, particularly with regard to the sex trade, the exploitation of vulnerable men, women and children.”⁸³ Human trafficking is a form of ongoing structural violence that Francis himself

79. Pope Francis, “Visitto Kangemi Slum,” Nairobi, Kenya (November 27, 2015), http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/november/documents/papa-francesco_20151127_kenya-kangemi.html.

80. Robin Ryan, “Ecclesiological Themes in the Teaching of Pope Francis,” *New Theology Review* 27 (2014): 81–99 at 86.

81. Francis, “Visit to the Astalli Centre.”

82. International Labor Organization, “Forced Labor, Modern Slavery, and Human Trafficking,” <http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/lang-en/index.htm>.

83. Francis “Address to the Santa Marta Group,” Rome (February 8, 2018), https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2018/february/documents/papa-francesco_20180209_santa-marta-group.html.

addresses regularly. He has urged numerous Catholic groups, such as the Pontifical Academy for the Social Sciences, to place their focus on this issue.⁸⁴ While the Pontifical Academy and others investigate causes and ways of combatting this crime, Francis draws public attention to an uncomfortable and easily ignored aspect of the problem: complicity through indifference. Perhaps the greatest barrier in combating this profound evil is the globalization of indifference in which “almost without being aware of it, we end up incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor . . . as though they were someone else’s responsibility and not our own.”⁸⁵ The inability to face one’s own complicity in the global structures and “chain of consumption” allows sinful structures like human trafficking to flourish and persist.⁸⁶ Incarnational solidarity pushes one into the uncomfortable position of examining one’s own place in the status quo. “Faced with this tragic reality,” says Francis, “no one can wash their hands if they do not want to be an accomplice of this crime against humanity.”⁸⁷ And yet, in reality, “the culture of prosperity deadens us” to our neighbor and to Christ. Reflecting on the Beatitudes in his exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate*, Francis notes that “wealth ensures nothing. Indeed, once we think we are rich, we can become so self-satisfied that we leave no room for God’s word, for the love of our brothers and sisters.” Ultimately, wealth leaves no room for God.⁸⁸

Indifference as a barrier to solidarity frequently takes two forms. First, the indifference of those who “are vaguely aware of the tragedies afflicting humanity, but they have no sense of involvement or compassion. Theirs is the attitude of those who know, but keep their gaze, their thoughts and their actions focused on themselves.”⁸⁹ And second, there is the indifference where “some people prefer not to ask questions or seek answers; [but] lead lives of comfort, deaf to the cry of those who suffer.”⁹⁰ In both cases, he contends, those who are indifferent to their neighbor are indifferent to Christ. The failure to be moved by compassion for one’s brother or sister is a failure to respond to Christ.

Why do people fail to be moved? Francis first turns to Scripture for answers. The pope demonstrates clear preferences for certain biblical passages in answering this question, particularly, the story of Cain and Abel and the parable of the Good Samaritan. Francis interprets both these biblical stories as personal and communal. In his homily at Lampedusa, he stated:

84. For more information see Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences’ coordination of anti-human trafficking efforts: <http://www.endslavery.va/content/endslavery/en.html>; and the Santa Marta Group: <http://santamartagroup.com/>.

85. *EG* 54.

86. Francis, “Video Message to Brazil Anti-Slavery Conference,” May 8, 2018 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DopdAcJYz5k>; see also: “Pope Francis Sends Video Call for Action,” <http://santamartagroup.com/pope-francis-sends-video-to-call-for-action-against-slavery> (hereafter cited as “Video Message to Brazil Anti-Slavery Conference”).

87. Francis, “Video Message to Brazil Anti-Slavery Conference.”

88. *GE* 68.

89. Francis, “Overcome Indifference and Win Peace,” 3.

90. Francis, “Overcome Indifference and Win Peace,” 3.

How many of us, myself included, have lost our bearings; we are no longer attentive to the world in which we live; we don't care; we don't protect what God created for everyone, and we end up unable even to care for one another! And when humanity as a whole loses its bearings, it results in tragedies like the one we have witnessed. "Where is your brother?" His blood cries out to me, says the Lord. This is not a question directed to others; it is a question directed to me, to you, to each of us.⁹¹

There is always a personal and a communal element to both moral crises (such as human trafficking or migration) and indifference to responding. Francis stress that while Christians are called personally and communally to respond within the context of the one human family, in reality they often retreat, like Cain, with a dismissive "Am I my sister's keeper?" as if it is none of our concern.⁹²

Comfort, indifference, and individualism result in disconnection from the suffering of the poor. They are the primary barriers to solidarity and "represent a menace to the human family."⁹³ The pope often notes that this indifference leads to scapegoating migrants because "there is a fear that society will become less secure, that identity and culture will be lost, that competition for jobs will become stiffer, and even that criminal activity will increase."⁹⁴ Hiding behind these fears, then, becomes justification for resisting difference. However, as Copeland argues, it is "not difference but indifference, egoism, and selfishness [which] are obstacles to solidarity."⁹⁵ Francis has zeroed in on the plight of refugees and migrants as a marker for the "globalization of indifference." While indifference and selfishness have always existed, today they have "taken on global proportions" marked by indifference to God, to neighbor, and to the environment.⁹⁶

At times this indifference seems normal, even "casual," and "empties our lives and words of all meaning."⁹⁷ The social exclusion caused by structural violence and which

91. Francis, "Visit to Lampedusa."

92. Repeatedly, Francis invokes the biblical story of Cain and Abel when explaining indifference toward the poor. See, Francis, "Morning Meditation: The Story of Cain and Abel," February 13, 2017, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/cotidie/2017/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie_20170213_the-story-of-cain-and-abel.html, "Visit to Lampedusa" and "Fraternity, the Foundation and Pathway to Peace."

93. Francis, "Overcome Indifference and Win Peace," 2.

94. Francis, "Message of His Holiness for the World Day of Migrants 2014," Rome (August 5, 2013), https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/migration/documents/papa-francesco_20130805_world-migrants-day.html.

95. Copeland, "Toward a Critical Christian Feminist Theology of Solidarity," 24. Reflecting on migrants dying in the Mediterranean, Dan Groody notes, "Sin distorts our capacity to perceive the *imago dei* in another person; it warps our understanding of reality." See Daniel G. Groody, CSC, "Cup of Suffering, Chalice of Salvation: Refugees, Lampedusa, and the Eucharist," *Theological Studies* 78 (2017): 960–87 at 967, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040563917731745>.

96. Francis, "Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for Lent 2015," address, Rome (October 4, 2014), https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/lent/documents/papa-francesco_20141004_messaggio-quaresima2015.html.

97. *EG* 203.

perpetuates the throwaway culture is predicated upon a view of poverty described by Paul Farmer as an “inequity that is ‘nobody’s fault,’ that is just ‘the way things are,’ that we live with because we cannot, or will not, or do not know how to address the conditions that create” an unjust social order.⁹⁸ However, the communal struggle for justice within marginalized communities provides a lesson in solidarity. Discussing communities and the ways in which they manifest solidarity despite their poverty and exclusion, Francis notes that “in this way, any place can turn from being a hell on earth into a setting of a dignified life.”⁹⁹ It is in these contexts that one finds Jesus within the community. As a case in point, Francis met with residents in Varginha, a Rio slum of about 2,500 people notorious not only for its poverty but also the prevalence of violence from both gangs and the state police.¹⁰⁰ Standing among the people, Francis held them up as an example of building communities of solidarity in adversity, stating that

the culture of selfishness and individualism that often prevails in our society is not, I repeat, not what builds up and leads to a more habitable world: rather it is the culture of solidarity that does so; the culture that means seeing others not as rivals or statistics, but as brothers and sisters. And we are all brothers and sisters!¹⁰¹

The people of Varginha provide a twofold challenge to the outside world. On the one hand, their strong internal bonds of community are held up as a direct challenge to wealthy communities plagued by increasing individualism and segregation. On the other, the reality of the poverty, exclusion, and marginalization experienced by the residents of Varginha provides a strong indictment of those communities and individuals with power and privilege: no peace or flourishing is possible, for Francis, as long as groups of people are treated as “disposable.” Indifference and the throwaway culture are both barriers to solidarity, which, according to Francis, are tied in some way to fear of responsibility.

Francis himself often plays upon the use of avoidance of the “word” solidarity.¹⁰² And as a result, indifference and the throwaway culture are strengthened and the

98. Paul Farmer, “Reimagining Accompaniment: A Doctor’s Tribute to Gustavo Gutiérrez,” in *In the Company of the Poor: Conversations with Dr. Paul Farmer and Fr. Gustavo Gutiérrez*, ed. Michael P. Griffin and Jennie Weiss Block (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2017), 17.

99. *LS* 148.

100. For more information on the history of Varginha and Rio’s favelas, see Einar Braathen et al., *Rio de Janeiro: Favela Policies and Recent Social Mobilizations* (Oslo: Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research, December 2013), <http://www.hioa.no/content/download/130716/3566290/file/2013-110.pdf>.

101. Francis, “Visit to the Community of Varginha (Manguinhos),” Rio De Janeiro, Brazil (July 25, 2013), https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco_20130725_gmg-comunita-varginha.html (hereafter cited as “Visit to the Community of Varginha”).

102. In the popular children’s book, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*, Dumbledore counsels Harry, “fear of a name increases fear of a thing itself.” J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* (New York: Scholastic, 1998), 298. Fear of the name “Voldemort”

ability to see Jesus becomes more difficult. On a number of pastoral visits, Francis presents solidarity as a word that *scares* people, or is even received like a swear word. The pope presents solidarity as a word that is in danger of being dropped from the dictionary or, in *Evangelii Gaudium*, as “a little worn and at times poorly understood.”¹⁰³ Yet he ties the *word* to a *feeling* of discomfort: “This word solidarity is too often forgotten or silenced, because it is uncomfortable, it almost seems like a bad word.”¹⁰⁴ In a pastoral visit to Cagliari, he went so far as to say that “this word solidarity runs the risk of being deleted from the dictionary because it is a word that bothers us, it bothers us. Why? Because it requires you to look at another and give yourself to another in love.”¹⁰⁵ “Solidarity is a word that scares the developed world” and so “people try not to use it. It’s as if it were a swear word to them. But it is our Word!”¹⁰⁶ There are many audiences within this one sentence. The developed world, including Christians, is the “them” strongly indicted for a lack of solidarity. But whom is he talking to when he calls it *our word*? The “our” is two-fold. First, Francis is speaking with those in a specific community with him at the moment. At the same time, he is also issuing a call to all Christians, including those in the developed world, those in situations of comfort and wealth who are not embracing solidarity as “our” word. His use of *word* in this way directs attention to Jesus—the Word made flesh.

The targeted use of “word” thus directs attention to Jesus Christ and solidarity in light of the Incarnation and Jesus’s radical identification with the marginalized. Beyond the fear of giving up comfort, fear of the word solidarity poses an extra obstacle to seeing another person, particularly a marginalized person, as a neighbor. Fear of the word thus places an added obstacle in the way of pursuing justice. In his emphasis on the word solidarity, Francis appears to be pushing beyond addressing fear of the implications of solidarity, and points to the christological character of solidarity. To Christians in the developed world, he argues that in running from “our word,” one is running from the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

The heart of Francis’s theological ethic of solidarity is that a faith without solidarity is a faith without Christ. Within the Catholic social tradition, interdependence of the one human family is a good, but it also involves significant duties. The very idea that *we are all really responsible for all* necessarily disrupts any complacency

increased the mystique and fear of Voldemort himself. Similarly with solidarity, the less we engage the word, the harder it is to engage the call of an incarnational solidarity.

103. *EG* 188.

104. Pope Francis, “Visit to the Community of Varginha.”

105. Francis, “Meeting With the Poor and Prison Inmates,” Cagliari (September 22, 2013), https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco_20130922_emarginati-cagliari.html.

106. Pope Francis, “Visit to the Astalli Centre.”

or comfort in a social order that excludes, marginalizes, or discards persons. Solidarity “presumes the creation of a new mindset which thinks in terms of community and the priority of life over the appropriation of goods by a few.”¹⁰⁷ Alternatives to the status quo are possible, yet when practiced, solidarity “open[s] the way to other structural transformations and make[s] them possible.”¹⁰⁸ But this is only possible if the culture of indifference, a throwaway mentality, and fears, are resisted.

In his lunch visit with guests at a homeless shelter in Washington, DC, Francis said, “Jesus keeps knocking on our door in the faces of our brothers and sisters, in the faces of our neighbors, in the faces of those at our side.”¹⁰⁹ This lunch was held immediately after he had addressed the United States Congress, where he had urged politicians to refocus attention on the common good and policies affecting those on the margins. The pope’s pastoral visits, speeches, and teaching all converge as he attempts to refocus our attention on the peripheries. In doing so, he is developing and modeling an *incarnational solidarity*. By turning to the Incarnation, Francis emphasizes Jesus as model for practicing solidarity with those on the margins, and as the one who is encountered in this solidarity. This incarnational solidarity can only be achieved by a deep respect for persons as created in the image of God, and in whom we encounter with Christ. Ultimately a theological ethic of solidarity is one of hope that “for all our limitations, gestures of generosity, solidarity and care cannot but well up within us since we are made for love.”¹¹⁰ The goal is to live solidarity such that it “becomes a way of making history in a life setting where conflicts, tensions, and oppositions can achieve a diversified and life-saving unity.”¹¹¹ Through following the model of Jesus and encountering him by an embodied lived solidarity on the margins, Francis envisions that a more just community is possible, both locally and globally. Solidarity as the firm and persevering commitment of oneself to the common good of all¹¹² becomes not only a social virtue but also a Christian one—specifically, the virtue of an incarnational solidarity.

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107. *EG* 187.

108. *EG* 189.

109. Francis, “Visit to the Charitable Center of St. Patrick Parish and Meeting with the Homeless,” Washington, DC (September 24, 2015), https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco_20150924_usa-centro-caritativo.html.

110. *LS* 58.

111. *EG* 228.

112. *SRS* 38.

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