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JOHN PAUL II, HEINRICH PESCH, AND THE CHRISTIAN VIRTUE OF SOLIDARITY

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HIS IS NOT A THEOLOGICAL TREATISE, SINCE I AM NOT A THEOLOGIAN BUT AN economist. Nevertheless, it involves an appeal to competent theologians to lose no time in studying the Christian virtue, solidarity, so as to incorporate it into their theological works in a systematic manner. Otherwise this important concept could suffer the fate of the virtue, social justice, after that was introduced in 1931 by Pius XI in *Quadragesimo Anno*. It could be reduced to pietistic fluff, or it could even become a slogan expressive of antagonistic sentiments. Indeed, there are already indications that solidarity is slipping into platitudinous usage in popular discourse.

Fortunately, in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* Pope John Paul II explained the meaning of the concept, solidarity, where he declared it to be “undoubtedly a *Christian virtue*” (40). Indeed, he took pains to indicate not only what it is, but also what it is not. Its essence is contained in the important 38th paragraph of the encyclical where we find reference to “the *positive* and moral value of the growing awareness of *interdependence* among individuals and nations.” The Pope stated that “the correlative response as a moral and social attitude, as a ‘virtue,’ is *solidarity*.” He referred to the response to the “awareness” of that interdependence, as he talked also about “interdependence” becoming “recognized in this way.” “In this way” involves “a *system* determining relationships in the contemporary world, in its economic, cultural, political and religious elements.” Thus, if solidarity is nurtured as a virtue, “it is a *firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good*.” On the other hand, it is “not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of many people, both near and far.” Such a reaction is little more than sentimentality.

Certainly, those particulars and the rest of what is contained in the important 5th section of the *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, ranging from paragraph 35 through paragraph 40, present the essence of what the virtue of solidarity is all about. Indeed, the concept is so central to the encyclical that if one were to assign a title to it based on its central content, abandoning for the moment the practice of using the first words of the Latin text, this could legitimately be called the encyclical *On Solidarity*, just as *Rerum Novarum* is often entitled the encyclical *On Labor*.

As if unwilling to leave an understanding of the important concept, solidarity, to misinterpretation, Pope John Paul II returned to the theme in his next social encyclical, *Centesimus Annus*. There we find it equated, with social charity which Pope Pius XI presented in *Quadragesimo Anno* as a companionate companionate social virtue with social justice (C.A 10). This is significant. If



social justice came to be misinterpreted at that time, the fate of social charity was worse in that it was virtually forgotten!¹ While Plus XI clearly intended to emphasize the great importance of the two virtues for reconstructing social order, he provided what amounted to only a functional definition of them in *Quadragesimo Anno*. That is to say, he highlighted their role as “more lofty and noble principles” for governing economic affairs in place of either free competition or “the economic supremacy which within recent times has taken the place of free competition”(94). The Pope then indicated that social charity “should be, as it were, the soul of this order”(95). Subsequently he linked social justice at two points to the common good (107, 118) making clear from the context what was its specific object as well as that of its twin virtue, social charity.

A more specific definition of social justice was provided six years later in the encyclical *Divini Redemptoris*, (*On Atheistic Communism*) where we find: “Now it is of the very essence of social justice to demand from each individual all that is necessary for the common good” (51). There could scarcely be a more explicit form of definition than one indicating what a thing is “of its very essence.” Unfortunately, much interpretation and extrapolation had already occurred by the time *Divini Redemptoris* appeared, so that even persons with the best of intentions sometimes ended up offering different notions of what social justice means.² Perhaps the desire to avoid such misunderstanding about the solidarity concept led the present Pope to point out in *Centesimus Annus* that previous pontiffs had already referred to it by other names. Thus we find:

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 concept to cover the many modern aspects of the social question, speaks of a *civilization of love*. (C. A. 10)

There are significant footnote references to *Rerum Novarum*, *Quadragesimo Anno*, and two homilies by Paul VI. Because of the importance of what is a further development, in the legitimate sense of the word, of a

vital doctrinal concept, it is worth pointing out how previous Roman Catholic popes approached the Christian virtue of solidarity which the present pontiff now tells us is synonymous with the virtue of social charity!

The masterful pace-setting nature of *Rerum Novarum* becomes more clear now that it has reached centenarian status. In it we find foreshadowed all of the essential social principles, albeit not by name, which appear subsequently in papal social encyclicals. These include the *principle of subsidiarity*, the principle of the *occupational organization* of economic life, and the guiding principles for social life: *social justice* and *social charity*, the latter of which Pope John Paul II now equates with the virtue of solidarity. As indicated, the Pope insists that social charity “is frequently inferred by Pope Leo XIII,” by his use of the term, “friendship.” The great pope spoke of that, first with regard to a rapprochement between “the two classes” which, “if Christian precepts



Heinrich Pesch

prevail ... will not only be united in bonds of friendship, but also those of brotherly love.” Such “bonds of friendship and of brotherly love,” he pointed out, derive from the fact that “all and each are redeemed by Jesus Christ, and raised to the dignity of children of God, and are thus united in brotherly ties both with each other and with Jesus Christ, ‘the first born among many brethren;’” so “the blessings of nature and the gifts of grace belong in common to the whole human race” (RN 21). That is clearly an expression of the law of universal solidarity, i.e., social charity. And Pius XI then explicitly used the term, social charity, in *Quadragesimo Anno* (94,95).

Paul VI is presented as “expanding the concept” by speaking of a “civilization of love.” He did this first in his *If You Want Peace Defend Life* homily on Christmas eve of 1976,³ repeating the same theme a few days later in the annual *Day of Peace* message on 1 January 1977. In the latter, the Pontiff offered a prophetic vision: “The civilization of love will prevail over the anxiety of implacable social struggles, and it will give to the world the longed-for transfiguration of humanity that, at last, is Christian.”⁴ That offers a powerful indication of the pivotal role that social charity, or solidarity, is to play in the longed for restoration of Christian social order!

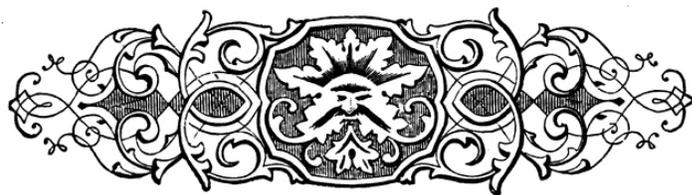
It is relevant to point out here that Pope Paul VI, like his predecessor Pius XII, had already begun using the term, *solidarity*, with significant frequency in his discourses. Indeed, in Pius XII's very first encyclical, *Summi Pontificatus* (October 20, 1939), solidarity emerged as a leitmotif.⁵ In it we find mention of “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 the redeeming Sacrifice offered by Jesus Christ on the Altar of the Cross to His Heavenly Father on behalf of sinful mankind” (para. 30, Paulist ed.). Shortly afterwards we find the theme repeated, but the same law is now referred to as “the law of universal charity” (46). In the Utz-Groner compilation of the social teachings of Pius XII there are listed no less than 21 discourses of various sorts, including *Summi Pontificatus*, where solidarity occurs as a central theme.⁶ Pope Paul VI persisted in that emphasis, if anything intensifying it. For example, the specific term, *solidarity*, occurs nine times in *Populorum Progressio*. It was left to Pope John Paul II to crown this development by declaring at last that, “Solidarity is undoubtedly a Christian virtue.”

The Pontiff had prepared the way for this by an earlier encyclical whose content was of a more specifically theological nature. In *Dives in Misericordia* (1980) we find the important statement: “The experience of the past and of our own time demonstrates that justice alone is not enough, that it can even lead to the negation and destruction of itself, if that *deeper power*, which is love, is not allowed to shape human life in its various dimensions” (para. 12, St. Paul ed. p. 37).

Permit me now to address the objection which may understandably be raised about an economist getting involved to this extent in what is basically a theological issue. Indeed, Pope John Paul II mentions specifically that the Church's discussion of these matters “belongs to the field, not of *ideology*, but of *theology* and particularly of moral theology” (SRS 41). Nevertheless, a Catholic economist, who is by definition not positivistic in the way he approaches his science, will take seriously what the *Magisterium* of his Church has to say about the moral implications of economic actions. Now the insertion of the solidarity theme into papal discourse, and also incidentally into Vatican II teachings, especially *Gaudium et Spes*, occurs predominantly in the context of documents addressed to the economic order. As indicated by Pope John Paul II in *Centesimus Annus*, that theme was con-

tained in the very first modern papal social encyclical addressed to the economic order, and it has been developed successively up until the present time.

A second overriding reason for my intense interest in this solidarity theme is that I am a solidarist economist. This means that I follow the teachings of an economist, virtually unknown among my contemporary colleagues, who made the principle of solidarity the focal point of the economic system which he outlined.⁷ In fact, theologians who are interested in analyzing solidarity as a virtue could profit by studying what this man had to say about justice and charity in their application to the social order and to economic life specifically.



Heinrich Pesch, (1854-1926) was a German Jesuit scholar who wrote what was at one and the same time the most extensive and outstanding economic textbook that has appeared until now. In his five volume *Lehrbuch der Nationalökonomie* Pesch did what only two economic writers, Adam Smith and Karl Marx, had attempted previously. He provided a blueprint for an economic system. He called this the *Solidaristic System*. It was based on the *principle of solidarity* (*das Prinzip der Solidarität*) as applied to economic life in all of its various aspects. These applications extended from the entire family of nations to relationships among citizens within a nation, and to all who work in the same occupation or shop, down to the family itself as the cell unit of society.⁸ Pope John Paul too made mention of the application of the principle of solidarity at these various levels in society. In *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* we find: “Solidarity therefore must play its part in the realization of this divine plan, both at the level of individuals and on the level of national and international society” (40). In *Centesimus Annus* the Pope mentions the need for “a concrete commitment to solidarity and charity, beginning in the family with the mutual support of husband and wife and the care which the different generations give to one another” (49). And in *Laborem Exercens* there is reference to solidarity among workers and throughout the working community (20). Needless to say, for Pesch the principle of solidarity involved the same interdependence which Pope John Paul II mentioned in his explanation of the virtue of solidarity. The Jesuit explained it in terms of “the social interdependence and

the actual reciprocal dependency among people” as applied to society generally.⁹ He regarded solidarity as so intrinsic to life in society, that it establishes “a moral bond among people,” so that “even if the annihilation of a fellow human being were to bring advantage to another, we may not wish for that, let alone contribute to bringing it about.” The significant difference from the Darwinistic economics of liberal capitalism is noteworthy! Yet, we are dealing with a moral bond (*sittliches Verhältniss*) among people, which clearly differs from the socialistic political bond based ultimately on class antagonism.

Aside from making the *principle of solidarity* the basis for his whole economic schema, there is a remarkably persistent concordance throughout between Pesch’s approach to the economic order and the teaching of the present Pope.¹⁰ That became especially apparent in the Pontiff’s first social encyclical, *Laborem Exercens* which one German scholar has already recognized as clearly Peschian.¹¹ For example, Pesch began his monumental work, with the topical heading: *Man as the Lord of the World in Accordance with God’s Command*. John Paul II prefaced his encyclical with a statement that is similar in its essence: “Man is made to be in the visible universe an image and likeness of God Himself, and he is placed in it in order to subdue the earth.” The Pope then proceeded to place the working human person at the center of economic life, which is quintessentially solidaristic economics. Pesch referred to his system alternately as the *solidaristic* or *social system of human work*. The worker, meaning any person who works for a living, whether as one who directs the work process, or as an employee, whether skilled or unskilled, who carries out directions, is represented as the ultimate source of a national economy’s well-being. That leads into the just wage doctrine which is pivotal to Pesch’s schema, as well as to that of John Paul II. The latter, in discussing “*Just remuneration* for work done,” goes so far as to propose that, “the justice of a socioeconomic system and, in each case, its just functioning, deserve in the final analysis to be evaluated by the way in which man’s work is properly remunerated in the system” (*LE* 19).

Other principles included in Pesch’s solidarist schema were already incorporated in earlier encyclicals, especially in *Quadragesimo Anno*. These include notably, the principle of occupational organization (also translated as “vocational groups”) which Pius XI made part and parcel of his program for reconstructing the social order. The subsidiarity principle is also clearly set forth in the

Lehrbuch, although not by that specific designation, as well as in Pesch’s earlier work where he formulated his social philosophy.¹²

It is indeed worthwhile for ethicists and moral theologians to examine also how Pesch treated what he called “the social virtues: justice and charity,” even though they appear mainly in specific economic applications.¹³ Heinrich Pesch was trained according to the solid 19th century Jesuit regimen of philosophy and theology. Nevertheless he relied also on his brother, Tillmann Pesch, S. J., a renowned philosopher in his time, for a good deal of the ethical content in the *Lehrbuch*, as in the formulation his principle of solidarity.¹⁴ He built on, but developed further, the traditional Aristotelian-Thomistic analysis of justice. Thus Pesch applied the essence of justice, the *suum cuique*, to the various relationships in human society. According to whether we are talking about the obligations of the citizens to society, of society to its citizens, or of the citizens among one another as individuals, we have respectively: legal justice, distributive justice, and commutative justice. The first of these is incumbent on persons subject to authority; the second, on persons in positions of authority; and the third involves individuals dealing with other individuals simply as equals. Thus the object of the latter, which is also sometimes referred to as *strict justice*, is the good of some particular person, whereas the other two applications already have as their object the common good.

The expression, social justice, which Pesch writing in 1909 characterized as “relatively new,” boils down to requiring the fulfillment of all obligations which have the common good as their immediate object. Understood in this sense, social justice clearly embraces distributive and legal justice, but not commutative justice. However, since legal justice has been viewed traditionally in terms of what is required by laws, especially by positive legislation, Pesch added a significant new dimension here which he called *contributive justice*. Thus, we are taken beyond what is required by specific legislation to a whole range of contributions required of members of society by the common good of society, but which could not be legislated with any hope of remaining within the bounds of good order. In the final analysis those bounds involve observance of the *principle of subsidiarity*. Socialistic society proposed to legislate all that the common good requires, with predictable chimerical results.¹⁵

Also noteworthy is Pesch’s definition of social

justice, and specifically *contributive* justice, in terms of “the fulfillment of all obligations and the actualization of all rights which have the social welfare as their object.” That comes very close to the definition provided in *Divini Redemptoris*, since “the social welfare” can be synonymous with the *common good*.

While the Jesuit economist did not refer specifically to social charity, the context in which he treated it clearly indicates that he was dealing with charity in its social application. First of all, the entire matter comes under the heading: “The social virtues: justice and charity.” Thus, like Pius XI after him, Pesch was making the virtue companionate to justice, with both having the common good as their object.¹⁶ He also indicated that charity provides a proper predisposition for justice. The concordance between what Pesch had to say here and what we find in *Quadragesimo Anno* emerges once again where he indicated that charity fills in the gaps which justice leaves.¹⁷ Pius XI proposed that, “Justice alone, even though most faithfully observed, can remove indeed the cause of social strife, but can never bring about a union of hearts and minds” (Q.A. 158). And finally, we have the similarity between what Pesch and Pope John Paul II both indicated that social charity was not. The former proposed that charity as a social virtue is “certainly by no means a mere decoration and sweetening of life in society;”¹⁸ and the Pope tells us that solidarity, i.e., social charity, is “not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people both near and far” (SRS 38).

As to why the modern popes whose teachings on moral applications in economic life clearly reflect Peschian thinking never mentioned the great Jesuit scholar by name, one can only venture an opinion. Pesch was a schooled economist who was within his sphere of competence in drawing up the outline for an economic system. He labored an entire lifetime to accomplish this. On the other hand, the Catholic Church, as Pope John Paul stated in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, “does not propose economic and political systems or programs” (41). What is more, those who know Pesch’s solidarist schema have characterized it as an alternative-in a sense-a “third way between *liberal* capitalism and *Marxist collectivism*,” some

thing which the Pope stated also, “The Church’s social doctrine *is not*.” Thus, to endorse or even to praise publicly Pesch’s work could jeopardize the Church’s position which is to evangelize all people on the path to their eternal salvation. Pesch himself stated that the solidaristic system, while it is based on natural law promptings, would stand the best chance of successful application in a Christian society; and being a Jesuit priest of an earlier vintage, Christianity in the fullest sense meant Catholic Christianity! Clearly in the present-day world, Catholicism has been reduced to a kind of minority status whereby it is also clearly on the defensive. Thus, what popes provide in their social teachings is not an “ideology,” but an “*accurate formulation* of the results of a careful reflection on the complex realities of human existence, in society and in

the international order, in the light of faith and of the Church’s tradition.” In other words, we are in “the field ... of *theology* and particularly of moral theology” (SRS 41).

That brings us back to our starting point the *carpe diem* admonition to competent theologians to study and integrate this important social virtue of solidarity into their theological thinking and textbooks.

The word itself and some variation

of it has been appealed to by a wide variety of strange bedfellows. Pesch himself never laid claim to having originated the notion, even though he was the first to outline an economic system based on it. He indicated that in its authentic sense it may be traced back to the common origin of the entire human family; and he refers to what later came to be known as the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ, as first presented in St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans (12: 4-6).¹⁹ That Scriptural basis may be said to reflect the bedrock of truth on which this important principle, now expressed as “a Christian virtue,” rests.

However, we know that not all who build on the same bedrock build wisely. Thus, the philosopher Comte, regarded by many as the father of modern positivistic sociology, appealed to solidarity in purely naturalistic terms. Indeed, he was immodest enough to claim that he discovered the principle. Among economic thinkers we find J. B. Say, Adam Smith, and Bastiat suggesting in one way or another the operation of the principle of solidarity within the framework of their liberal capitalistic approach to economic life. And on the other side of



“Justice alone, even though most faithfully observed, can remove indeed the cause of social strife, but can never bring about a union of hearts and minds”



the ideological spectrum we find socialists like Proudhon and the Fourierists appealing to it. And Peter Kropotkin, the “anarchist,” saw solidarity as an important factor in man’s evolution.²⁰

One who built solidly on the same bedrock as Pesch, and is quoted by him, was the Juan Donoso Cortes. The 19th century Spanish political philosopher and statesman referred human solidarity back to the doctrine of man’s origin and the original sin which makes man the “subject” of “a responsibility peculiarly his own ... which he shares in common with all men.”²¹ He refers to that “responsibility in common, which is called solidarity,” as “one of the most beautiful and august revelations of Catholic dogma.” Elsewhere we find: “The law of solidarity is so universal, that it is manifested in all human associations.” How closely this parallels the words in the encyclical where Pope John Paul II calls solidarity “undoubtedly a Christian virtue”!

Others, like the eminent sociologist Emile Durkheim in his *De la division travail social* (1893), used the concept in what approximates the Peschian sense. And

more recently, the widely read and significant work, *Habits of the Heart*, by Robert N. Bellah and Associates,²² has as its theme the intrinsic interdependence which persists in society despite the ravages of individualism. There are also references throughout to the social virtues, justice and charity, without specific mention of the terms.

Happily, the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* already provides the guidelines for integrating teaching about solidarity into theological discussion, and thence into catechetical work. It does so in various contexts ranging from the “law of human solidarity and of charity” as mentioned by Pius XII in *Summi Pontificatus*, to the section on social justice (Art. 3 of Chapter 12), and also to solidarity as expressed in the Our Father. In all, there are some 17 paragraph numerations throughout the *Catechism* where solidarity is mentioned in the relevant sense under discussion here.²³ If theologians will but build on this fundamental statement of the Catholic Faith, it will be a great day for the Church, and for civilization of which she remains the Mother and Teacher.



NOTES

1 Oswald von Nell-Breuning, S. J., in his *Reorganization of Social Economy* (1936) indicated that the expression, social charity, was first used by Pius XI in a letter to Cardinal Gasparri dated June 24 1923.

2It was disconcerting for me as a young student to find two of my learned professors in disagreement over the meaning of social justice a full 36 years after *Quadragesimo Anno* appeared. After the American Jesuit economist Bernard W. Dempsey presented his interpretation of it in a now extinct periodical, *Social Order*, in January of 1957, Rev. Charles N.R. McCoy, a political scientist, published a refutation in the June 1957 issue of the same journal.

3L’*Osservatore Romano* (Engl. ed.), Nr. 52 (456), December 23, 1975, p. 1.

4L’*Osservatore Romano* (Engl. ed.), Nr. 1(405), January 1, 1976, p. 12.

5The Spanish title assigned to that encyclical is *Solidaridad humana y Estado totalitario*.

6A. F. Utz. O.P. and J. F. Groner, O. P. *Soziale Summe Pius XII*, 3 vols. (Freiburg, Switzerland : Paulusverlag, 1964-61).

7Heinrich Pesch, S. J. *Lehrbuch der Nationalökonomie* (Freiburg im Br.: Herder & Co., 1924), I, p. 33. (N.B. University Press of America will publish in the near future an anthology, in English translation by Rupert J. Ederer, *Heinrich Pesch on Solidarist Economics*. It will feature the central ideas of the Jesuit scholar.)

8Cf. Rupert J. Ederer, “Solidarism: An Idea Whose Time Has Come,” *Faith and Reason*, Winter, 1976, 18-33.

9Ibid. I, 33.

10In a conversation with Father Joseph Tischner, following a lecture in Buffalo, N. Y. the priest, who is known as the philosopher behind the Solidarnosc movement, told me that at Lublin University where Karol Wojtyła taught ethics, Pesch’s theories were taught, and “we now attempt to put them into practice.”

11Lothar Roos, “Laborem Exercens und Heinrich Pesch,” *Stimmen der Zeit*, vol. 201 (1983), 282-284.

12That was accomplished masterfully in a work which is now very difficult to find, especially in the United States: *Liberalismus, Socialismus, und christliche Gesellschaftsordnung*. This is actually a compilation in revised form of articles published over a period of years in *Stimmen aus Maria Laach* (later, *Stimmen der Zeit*). Cf. esp. *Derchristliche Staatsbegriff* (Freiburg: Herder, 1898).

13 Pesch, *Lehrbuch*, vol. II: 2nd ed., 1925, pp. 272-276. Cf. also Pesch’s shorter work, *Ethics and the National Economy*, translated by Rupert J. Ederer and published by *Divine Word Publications in Manila* (1988).

14For example, where he first formulated his principle of solidarity in volume I of the *Lehrbuch*, we find reference to Tillmann’s work: *Christliche Lebensphilosophie* published in 1919.

15Pesch analyzed clearly the flaws in socialism on a priori grounds in *Liberalismus, socialismus, und christliche Gesellschaftsordnung*. The third part of that work, *Der moderne Socialismus*, appeared in 1900.

16As if providentially, it was Pope John XXIII, often referred to affectionately as “good Pope John,” who provided a precise definition of the “common good.” He wrote in *Mater et Magistra* (1961) that the common good “embraces the sum total of those conditions of social living, whereby men are enabled more fully and more readily to achieve their own perfection” (65). The Pope repeated that almost verbatim in *Pacem in Terris* (58); and the same definition is found in Vatican II documents, e.g., *Gaudium et Spes* 26 & 74. The new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* has now also incorporated it (1906).

17 The concordance between Pesch’s thinking and that of Pius XI should not be surprising. It is well known that the Pope relied heavily on Oswald von Nell-Breuning, S. J. and Gustav Gundlach, S. J. in preparing *Quadragesimo Anno*. Afterwards, Pius XII relied very much on Gundlach for his own social teachings.

18 Pesch, *Lehrbuch* II, p. 276.

19 Pesch, *Lehrbuch* I, 410ff.

20 Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid*, ed. Paul Avrich (New York: New York University Press, 1972).

21Juan Donoso Cortes, *Essays on Catholicism, Liberalism, and Socialism*, trans. Rev. William McDonald (Dublin: William B. Kelly, 1874), 243 ff.

22 Robert Bellah, *et. alii*, *Habits of the Heart* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985).

23Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*, English transl. by, U.S.C.C. , 1994.