

**Rebecca Todd Peters**

*Solidarity Ethics: Transformation in a Globalized World.* Minneapolis, Minnesota, US, Fortress Press 2014. Pp. 141 + xx. \$30.00.

*Solidarity Ethics* offers first-world citizens a model of how to live in a world in which they are the beneficiaries of globalization – shopping malls full of quality consumer goods, easy access to IT, great investment opportunities, unlimited travel possibilities are all there for the taking. Peters' target audience is America's middle class for whom the blessings of a globalized world seem almost limitless. Unsurprisingly, this audience does not include those millions of Americans who live below the poverty line. Although the book is primarily directed towards US citizens, it is also important for other first world citizens living in places such as the UK, Australia, or New Zealand. But it is worth noting that small nations such as New Zealand often find that they are just as likely to be the losers in American decisions around the presumed benefits of free trade or nuclear energy as are two-thirds world nations in Latin America, Asia, or Africa.

Peters, influenced by Protestantism's social gospel, Catholic social teaching, and most importantly liberationist theologies, emphasizes the systemic nature of the economic disparities characteristic of a globalized world. She identifies ways in which more affluent citizens could be in solidarity with their economically disenfranchised sisters and brothers in the struggle to overcome economic injustice. This is not just an ethical imperative, it is also a biblical demand as Peters' judicious reading of representative biblical texts makes clear. She is convincing in her thesis that commitment to a solidarity ethic can lead to better futures for all.

Peters directs attention to the sociological, ethical, and theological characteristics associated with the various theories of solidarity before moving on to an exploration of what is foundational for a Christian ethics of solidarity, namely social justice. A Christian ethics of solidarity rooted in social justice is not merely a choice for the contemporary affluent Christian. It is a biblical and ethical imperative deeply rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition. To embrace such an imperative requires that Christians understand their own privileged social location and recognize that it is grounded in the exploitative economic relationships that exist between the first and two-thirds world nations.

Peters is very clear that works of charity – soup kitchens, emergency shelters, food parcels – are necessary, but essentially they are but steps on the way to identifying strategies that offer “deeper possibilities of transformation and justice in our communities” (109).

One criticism of this important book is that little reference is made to affluent citizens of the two-thirds world. America may still be the pre-eminent economic power, despite millions of its people living in poverty, but China, and to a lesser extent, India and Brazil, are rapidly catching up and all countries have enormous and growing gaps between rich and poor. Emerging middle classes now constitute sizeable, significant, and influential sectors in the two-thirds world but like their first world counterparts often fail to see their responsibilities towards the less fortunate in their countries. In a globalized world, wealthy elites and the middle classes in the two-thirds majority world are increasingly more culturally and economically aligned with economically similar citizens of first-world nations. Economic status unites the wealthy and the affluent, and governments whether in the US or a two-thirds world country, are often more interested in political and economic ties with these groups than in solidarity with the poor in their own countries. Economic relationships rather than nationalistic sentiments are what really counts in today's globalized world.

Publications like *Solidarity Ethics* offer a way out of this impasse. Therefore this book deserves much more than a cursory reading. It requires careful reading by academics, students, church and parish groups so that practical strategies, which will help overcome the ever-widening gap between rich and poor, are identified.

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