

Meghan J. Clark, *The Vision of Catholic Social Thought: The Virtue of Solidarity and the Praxis of Human Rights*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014. Pp. 166. \$28.64

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In “Catholic Social Teaching” solidarity has been outlined as one of the pivotal moral virtues of people within the church. Consequently, various theologians and Church Fathers urge believers to put this essential virtue into practice. In *The Vision of Catholic Social Thought: The Virtue of Solidarity and the Praxis of Human Rights*, Meghan Clark draws on the deeply rooted historical construction of solidarity as cited by Church Fathers and in various papal encyclicals. She emphasizes the importance of the communal and the relational if human beings are to allow solidarity to flourish in the world. Although solidarity has been defined in various texts, social encyclicals, and articles centered on Catholic social teaching and thought, Clark adds to the conversation by

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emphasizing the mutual dependence of solidarity and addressing human rights.

Clark outlines the origins of solidarity in scripture using two passages. First, she grounds it in Genesis 1:26–27, which states that human beings are made in *Imago Dei*. Through this passage, we understand solidarity as essential to our faith based on the fact that as human beings we are created individually in the image of God. Second, as individuals we cannot be divorced from our community, since John 17:20–22 stresses the relational and social nature of human beings. This relational and social nature is then paralleled with the church’s teaching on the Trinity. Because of the scriptural foundation of solidarity, Clark argues that by necessity Christians must practice this virtue. Clark suggests that to measure our commitment to solidarity, we must ensure that human rights are honored and both recognize and commit to a relationship of solidarity with our neighbor.

Clark shapes her notion of the interdependence of solidarity and human rights through the theories of Amartya Sen and Charles Taylor. Based on these theories, particularly Sen’s, she challenges readers to question whether an individual person has both the means and the capacity to achieve a quality of life in which he or she is free. Clark argues that the individual is deeply embedded in the community, culture, and sphere of influence in which he or she dwells. Therefore, the good of the individual is tied to the common good and cannot be based solely on individual rights. She extends the definition of common good to include not only one’s immediate family or local neighborhood but globally to include all of humanity, which is consistent with church teaching on “universality.” Clark states, “Solidarity and human rights are

universally dependant and necessary in order to constitute an authentically human person or community” (107).

Clark’s experiential knowledge is palpable. She draws on her experiences in Africa and Latin America to establish the necessary foundation for authentic reflection on the principle of solidarity. Through her experiences, she is able to demonstrate that solidarity demands a response whereby choices that further the common good can be validated. She challenges readers to reflect on Matthew’s Gospel and to ask ourselves, “Who are the least among us today?” (65). One way to measure our response to this challenge is to also answer the question, Do we have deeply embedded relationships with others that need our help or do we shy away at a distance? Much like ordinary relationships, our concept of solidarity must be continually challenged, as the communities in which we live are constantly changing. We must participate in our communities to establish local solidarity so that we can work together for the common good on a global scale.

Catholic Social Teaching has a strong anthropological foundation rooted in the person of Christ and carried out in communion with others. Clark’s emphasis on the Trinity as the foundation for our Christian community is essential for understanding her definition of solidarity. Catholic Social Teaching encourages human beings to participate in ensuring universal human rights. Solidarity is also not merely a static moral ideology. Rather, it requires the shaping of an attitude that is attuned to others and the effort of the community to promote individual freedom for all persons.

Clark’s compelling synthesis of the principle of solidarity in Catholic Social Teaching offers a framework embedded in the church’s teaching of natural law, which allows Christians to add community-based praxis to the conversation about human rights.

Catholic Social Teaching, according to Clark, calls Christians to see themselves as deeply relational and to base their actions on an understanding of the narratives of others. This text is a must read for a person seeking to engage in a theological understanding of solidarity as well as to participate in the practical implications of the teaching.