

SOLIDARITY, STRUGGLE AND JUSTICE

Some Theological Reflections

(Dr. Paulos Gregorios)

Let us first seek some definition of a new key terms. I give the English and its Greek equivalent.

1) **Solidary** - no direct Greek equivalent. The term is not biblical. Comes from Latin solidus - undivided, whole, sound, firm, resolute.

Greek equivalent of solidus is holos, olos, olos - happy, whole, entire.

In modern English the word comes from French solidaire (joint & several responsibility or inter-dependent and co-responsible) and solidarité - joint interests, common interests or responsibility. So we will define solidarity as "the state of having common interests and goals, common views, and therefore being committed to mutual support".

Let it be added also that the original Latin root of 'solidarity' is "Sal" which means "to save" (salus - salvation).

2) **Struggle** - This word has several Greek equivalents in the Bible -

- a) Stratsia(n) = warfare, military service James 4:2
Stratagomai (v) (26 or 10:4
1 Tim 1:18)
- b) polemos(n) = battle, war Rev 19:11
polemeō(v) Mt 24:6
- c) agon(n) agonizomai(v) = to contest publicly in a fight (Phil.1:30; 1 Cor.9:25; 1 Tim.6:12)
- d) machē (n) machomai (v) = to fight against; to contend with (2 Cor.7:5; James 4:1)

Struggle thus is a process involving confrontation, contest, a conquest or overcoming.

The equivalent Hebrew words in the Old Testament are lāchan (v), milhāmah (n), and tsaba.

3) Righteousness or Justice.

Hebrew words are (a) Yāsar (adj) = upright

b) tsēdeq (n), tsēdīq (n, adj) = just, righteous, good

c) mişpat = right ruling

d) din = discernment, judgement

In Greek dikaion, dikaioō, dikaioōnōs

Can be used for all the above Hebrew words.

The Greek word krisis, krima, krinō have the meaning of the act of judgment. It is important to remember that the Hebrew verb shapāt (mişpat) does not mean primarily giving a judgment as in our law courts, but to execute and implement what is just, and therefore the word includes our modern concepts of legislation, judiciary and executive. Justice then is more commonly applied to society than to individuals. God is the Supreme Judge, law-given, and executive of the universe, and the way he runs the universe is the right way, the just way, the norm for all justice. Quite often the words judge and righteous judgement (Ps 72:2), which means that the act of are used together - e.g. 'judge righteously' (Ps 9:8) or a righteous judgement' (Ps 72:2), which means that the act of implementing justice can go wrong and has to be conforming to certain norms.

Righteousness is thus the quality of a society when it is properly coordinated, guided, and directed according to the norms of righteousness and with a proper discernment of good and evil, using force and knowledge in the right way to order society.

X

X

X

A Solidarity

The word solidarity, as has already been stated, is not biblical, whereas both struggle and justice are biblical words. But there are many words in the Bible which are related to the concept of solidarity. I suggest three such words in Greek

a) koinōnia = fellowship, community, sharing

b) plērōma = wholeness, fullness

c) agapē = love, concern, identification.

Koinōnia does not mean simply spiritual fellowship. It means primarily sharing or having in common, both life and that which is necessary for

life. The clearest example of koinonia is the earliest stratum of the New Testament Church in Jerusalem. They

- 1) shared all material possessions in common
- 2) shared the life of God, i.e. the Holy Spirit
- 3) were committed together to a common purpose - i.e. the Kingdom of God, and worked as a team for it.
- 4) had a common understanding of reality

These four criteria are also tests of the degree of solidarity. A perfect solidarity occurs only when all the four elements are present - i.e. the sharing of the Holy Spirit (more than what we call spiritual fellowship), the sharing of all material possessions (no man had anything called private property), a common understanding of reality (in the light of revelation, but with the help of ordinary human knowledge also) and a common commitment to social goals (the Kingdom of God).

The Christians' solidarity with others has to be necessarily partial. We can share material possessions without reservation; our understanding of reality can be only partially the same as that of non-Christians, but wherever a clear and scientific understanding of the socio-economic as well as the physical or biological aspects of reality are concerned we can have a very high degree of solidarity. In relation to goals also the norm of the Kingdom of God may be significantly variant from the social goal of say a classless society. The difference may be in the idea of transcendence and in the understanding of the agency that brings about the social goal as well as in the methods to be used for the same. But given all these differences, if one is not already prejudiced against the social goal of the classless society and not too deeply involved in personal or group acquisitiveness or greed, one can have a very high degree of solidarity with those committed to the classless society, as a social goal to be achieved through the revolutionary struggle of the people impelled by an assurance that history is on their side.

The sharing of God's life or the Holy Spirit would appear to be more problematic between Christians and non-Christians. Here too, we have to adopt the idea of partial solidarity. This we can do only by making distinction between the work of the Holy Spirit in the

Church and His work in the Creation as a whole. The two are the work of the same person and therefore necessarily inter-related. But we should not overlook the fact that the Holy Spirit was at work from the very beginning of Creation, and that the Second and Third Persons of the Trinity and inseparably one in ousia and united in their energeia or operation in the Creation. The Son and the Spirit were at work with the Father when the Creation began. The Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters when the Word of God brought forth light from darkness, being from non-being (Gen.1:2,3). When God fills Bezalel with the Spirit of God, he too becomes a creative artist with all knowledge and craftsmanship (Exodus 31:2-5; 35:30-35). It is God's Spirit which is both upon Moses and the elders of Israel, in order to rule the people in righteousness and justice (Numbers 11:16-16) and to "bear the burdens of the people" (Num. 11:17). Joshua has the Spirit of God to rule the people in righteousness. The same ruling elders are also prophets who discern the will of God and declare it to the people (Num 11:26-29) . In fact all the people are potentially prophets when they receive the Spirit of God. As Moses says to Joshua "How I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his Spirit upon them!" (Num.11:29).

The main functions of the Spirit of God as he works through human beings are therefore the following:

- a) ruling in justice (shepherd and elder)
- b) discerning and disclosing the will of God (prophet)
- c) worship (priest)
- d) spirit of wisdom and understanding
- e) spirit of skill and craftsmanship.

In all these five activities, which have their secular equivalent, the Spirit of God is at work, long before the Church was established. And therefore the work of the Spirit of God is in the whole of creation, and therefore in all mankind, not just in Israel or the Church alone.

Our solidarity with non-Christians shall thus be at least in these five fields:

- a) in political, economic and social ordering of human society (ruling)
- b) in prophetic discernment of what is good and right for human society and in struggling for it. (prophecy)
- c) in exalting that which is really good and giving respect to it, so that idols like money, vainglory, concupiscence etc. are overthrown and banished and values like social commitment, selflessness, discipline etc. are exalted.
- d) in scientific research as well as in literary, poetic, artistic and other forms of knowing and expressing reality.
- e) in technological and artistic creativity.

Without compromising at the level of the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church, we can have partial solidarity with all mankind in so far as they are committed to these five values.

The work of the Spirit in the Church is for building up the Body of Christ through the distribution of various charismata to the Church (1 Cor. 12:4-13, 14:3-5, 26:33). But the gifts of the Spirit should issue in the fruit of the Spirit, i.e. love, joy, peace, disciplined toughness, kindness, generosity, dependability, gentleness and self-discipline (Gal. 5:22-23).

The Church is a tree planted in the midst of humanity for the latter's life and salvation. Its mission is to bear fruit. But the fruit is not just for the Church. It is for humanity, for the cosmos and for God.

If Christians hate the rest of mankind, or are indifferent to them, then they are not Christians; they are of no use to Christ, since without love, every other gift is nothing. So we come to that central point - agape or love.

Agape is not just a feeling or an attitude, though both feeling and attitude are aspects of agape. Agape involves identification, regarding the other's interests as more important than one's own, and taking delight in serving the other's interests at considerable cost to oneself. It is thus the central element in the concept of solidarity. Without agape, there is no real solidarity. If it is only a strategy for serving our own interests that brings us into alliance with our fellow-men who claim to be unbelievers, then our solidarity is both false and unchristian. It is neither opportunism

not self-interest that brings the Church into alliance with the socialist movement; it is rather the realization that we are committed cause, that they are doing more than we are to bring about justice and righteousness in humanity, and therefore genuine respect and love for such unbelievers who are often better servants of the Kingdom of God and the righteousness of God than we Christians are.

Agape is never afraid of being misunderstood; nor does it collaborate out of fear or compromise for the sake of survival. Agape is open-eyed, but sincere, cheerful, not sullen about having to collaborate with what can be discerned as good for humanity. Agape is glad to suffer, rejoice in persecution and mis-understanding, and is willing to work without seeking for reward or recognition; happy when being calumniated and ridiculed because it dares to serve the cause of righteousness and justice.

Christian solidarity with non-believers has thus to be motivated by agape; it may be a partial solidarity, but never a half-hearted one; it must needs be costly and difficult, for agape is never without the element of sacrificial self-giving, it must be both fearless and sincere; it gives one the courage to act without cowardice or compromise, because it is rooted in trust in the love of God and in the triumph of the Cross, the triumph of good over evil.

B. Plērōma and Partisanship

The Greek word plērōma, often translated fullness, is both biblical and theological, it is in fact a key term in our understanding of both koinōnia and solidarity.

The Hebrew root is malē - to fill up, to make whole, to complete, to perfect. It is God's glory that fills heaven and earth (Isaiah 6:3) and should eventually perfect and complete them.

The opposite of fullness is lack, want, gap - chazek in Hebrew, husterōma in Greek (1 Thess 3:10)

All humanity comes short (husterōmi) of the glory of God (Heb.4:1, Romans 3:23) which is the vocation of man.

The idea of fullness is both quantitative and qualitative. In the quantitative sense, wherever there is lack or absence, the fullness is not there. Poverty is lack of fullness. But so is discrimination against any group of people or the exclusion of some

people.

In the qualitative sense, fullness demands that all lack of perfection in quality, all defect be removed. Injustice, oppressions, social evil, alienation, racialism, all these are against the fullness of humanity and need to be eradicated.

Of course, these words are used in other and more ordinary senses like when in Mk 8:20, the baskets which gathered the fragments left over after feeding the four thousand are referred to as αυριζὼν πλερόματα κλάσματα (of Mk 6:43). Schmoller's Handkonkordanz gives the various meanings as plenitudo, abundantia, supplementum, and plenus (plenus).

Both plenus and plenitudo are important aspects of this concept of the plerōma of humanity. When St. Paul speaks of the plerōma of Israel (Rom. 11:12) or the plerōma of the Gentiles, we have to understand the word in terms of the full number of Jews and Gentiles who are to come into the Kingdom of God, but also in terms of their qualitative perfection.

Even more important is the use of this word plerōma in the Colossian and Ephesian epistles. When Colossians says that "in him (i.e. Christ) inhabits the whole plerōma of deity bodily" (Col. 2:9 of Col. 1:19), this is certainly both quantitative and qualitative. And when Ephesians speaks of the Church as "the plerōma of him who fulfills the whole universe in every way" (Eph. 1:23) there is a rich and profound understanding of Christ as the one who brings the creation to quantitative and qualitative maturity, which is in fact "the measure of the stature (growth or maturity) of the plerōma of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). The Church is to complete this process of Christ's ongoing work in the Creation, and the Church is Christ's plerōma (Eph. 1:23) in the sense of supplementum or rather complementum.

It is always from God's plerōma bodily dwelling in Christ that we have all received (John 1:6 "from his plerōma"); it is the plerōma of grace and truth (plerōma charitōs kai alētheias Jn. 1:14) All human beings receive from this plerōma of God, for "Of the Lord is the earth and its plerōma" (1 Cor. 10:26, see Ps. 24:1).

But plerōma is also growing from one state to the next. For example when there is a movement from the law of Moses to love in Christ, it is the plerōma manifesting itself. For "agape is the plerōma of the nomos" as St. Paul says in Romans 13:10. Thus the movement
....8

of human history from feudalism to capitalism to socialism is part of this movement towards the plērōma of humanity.

We should leave this brief survey of the biblical notion of plērōma (for further study, see Josef Ernst, Plērōma und Plērōma Christi, Regensburg, Paset, 1970 - Biblische Untersuchungen) The concept of plērōma has played a significant and central role in the Christian patristic tradition.

The concept comes already into Colossians and Ephesians from a Gnostic or proto-Gnostic milieu. Col. 1:19 clearly refers to the Gnostic belief that reality is of two kinds - plērōma and sikōnes⁹ the first being real or substantial and the latter evanescent and unreal. For the Gnostic it was always a question of moving from this world, which was shadowy, into the world of the plērōma which alone is real and lasting.

The Fathers in the light of the experience of the Gnostic and docetic heresies, and of the doctrines of the eucharist and of bodily resurrection, move to a different way of relating the plērōma and history. A full study of this requires many volumes. Here in this paper I have time only to refer in a sentence or two to two main ideas of one Father, Gregory of Nyssa. The two ideas are:

- a) pantos agathou plērōma: the full maturity of all goods; and
- b) holon to tēs anthropotetos plērōma: the full number and the full growth of the whole of humanity.

Gregory's doctrine is that all created realities are finite and bounded by the measure given to them by the Creator. Humanity is a created reality. It has a beginning and a telos or end, and a mass and volume,

⁹ See especially the Ptolemaic doctrine of Soter where the distinction between plērōma and sikōnes is clearly drawn. Soter or Saviour was a title of Ptolemy I (323-283 B.C.) In the Gnostic system of Valentinus we see three levels (a) plērōma being the superior and substantial world of the ainos, (b) the intermediate world, and (c) the terrestrial world. Only the plērōma is real, all else is shadow and vanity, including history, according to almost all the Gnosiarchs. Ptolemy, disciple of Valentinus, is the author of the Letter to Flora, the probably lived in the latter half of the second century.