

Rebecca Todd Peters, *Solidarity Ethics: Transformation in a Globalized World*, Fortress, Minneapolis, MN, 2014. 160 pp. \$31.49. ISBN: 9781451465587.

In her introduction to *Solidarity Ethics*, Rebecca Todd Peters addresses the key problems that need to be solved in our society so we can live in a more just and sustainable world. Most importantly, she helps the reader understand economic globalization—which, she states, is the current context we are now living in. The way people in the developed world (her term) live is not a sustainable way of life for everyone. Furthermore, the policies and practices from wealthy Western countries, particularly the United States, have devastating and unjust consequences for the Global South. Given that reality, Peters believes that an ethic of solidarity is necessary to reorient the way we live in order to reflect mutuality, justice, and sustainability. The foundations of such an ethic are rooted in “understanding social location and personal privilege,” then “building relationships with people across lines of difference,” and finally “engaging in structural change” (10).

In chapter one, Peters explores theories of solidarity. Prior to the actual language of solidarity becoming popular, a similar ideal was expressed through the language of fraternity. In later generations, it would be expanded beyond Christian familial language and be applied to a variety of relationships and bonds. Most notably, revolutionaries have used the language to blur the lines of difference and to unite people under a common cause. Solidarity in the past 200 years has been used to talk about legal obligations, moral responsibility, sentiment, and public policy. The influence of Marxist thought increasingly applied solidarity to “relationships and bonds between members of the working class” and toward being understood as a type of political action (23). The Social Gospel Movement theologically adopted the language to express how to concretely pursue justice, and the Catholic Church increasingly developed its social teaching by employing solidarity to express the type of collective action and Christian life it believed was faithful. Most importantly, solidarity especially grew in significance from liberation theology in the early 1970s, Peters explains. Most often, solidarity has been understood as something arising out of poor and marginalized communities, but Peters believes there is a need to reflect on what solidarity should look like for privileged people.

Moving into the next chapter, Peters explores the moral habits and intuitions that people operate out of unconsciously when responding to social crises. The first, and most dominant, stage is sympathy, which basically is about responding to the situation with charity and temporary compassion but in a manner that does not disrupt one’s privileged life. Next is responsibility. In this stage, people understand much more that social structures create injustice and poverty, but they still tend to rely on principles of liberty and human rights to address these things and often feel overwhelmed by the depth of the problems. And finally, Peters articulates the

last category of mutuality, in which people see their own transformation bound up in these issues as privileged people; they can identify their social location and the systematic obstacles and seek to move beyond charity to systemic justice work.

The third chapter of the book was intriguing. It begins by considering the prophetic Christian tradition rooted in Hebrew scripture and embodied in the social gospel movement and liberation theology, as well as more pragmatic Niebuhrian stances of Christian realism. Peters calls for a balancing of the two in pursuit of justice. To move toward a theo-ethic of solidarity, she emphasizes the principles of sustainability and social justice, which can guide our theology and praxis. She also identifies repentance as another important Christian practice, one which can be implemented from various starting points and moves us toward honoring the differences in others, accountability to poor and oppressed people, and action that seeks to live lives that challenge the social order built upon neoliberal globalization. This theo-ethic of solidarity also calls for “some concrete engagement with oppressed or marginalized communities—locally or globally” (65).

Next, Peters calls for people of privilege to move toward solidarity through acknowledging their privilege and then building relationships across lines of difference. Some of the challenges to this, she says, are that most wealthy people identify themselves as middle class. Most people in the United States also think inequality was addressed and fixed in the 60s and 70s. Plus, most people are unable to identify their own privilege, or they think they have earned it through hard work. This highlights the need to understand US history, especially Native American and African American history and the systems designed to benefit some people and harm others. Then Christians will be positioned to move toward solidarity. Building relationships with people across these “chasms of difference” is critical and life changing. True solidarity needs these relational connections with people who have an experience of life different from that of privileged people.

The fifth chapter gets concrete. It wrestles with what embodying solidarity actually looks like on the ground. First, we are told to consider our purchasing power. Rather than just looking for deals and discounts as is so common in middle-class US culture, we are to spend our money in a just and sustainable manner. And Peters reminds us that there are non-monetary ways of organizing our economic life through bartering, familial-like gift exchange, communal contribution, and time banks. She insists that these shifts are only significant when combined with justice work seeking to change the social structures of inequality. Ultimately, she calls for the need for church communities and organizations to link together in creative collaboration toward social change. Peters also includes a brief conclusion reminding us to keep hope alive and explaining why this book was necessary. In her words, it is “a theology for people of privilege in the first world” (117).

This book is a good resource. It takes seriously the reality of globalization that is impacting people all around the world—a reality that most people in the United States are oblivious to. We must keep beating the drum on this issue, exposing the ways that our economic policies and practices oppress others.

I was pleasantly surprised at how closely this book aligned with the language and approach that I use. Solidarity, for instance, has been a key term for me, though I use it to emphasize a subversive grassroots communal struggle on the underside of oppression.

This book is particularly heavy on the social theory side of things, especially in relation to globalization and imagining new social practices; I would have appreciated deeper theological engagement, particularly a more Jesus-shaped emphasis. Considering how following Jesus in society explicitly matters in relation to globalization is vital for many people. The biggest limitation of the text, however, relates to how it minimalizes US history and context. Any time a book focuses on global realities but isn't first rooted in the local and historical context of one's own society, it risks a new set of problems as it corrects others. This is particularly true in relation to Peters's very brief engagement with American white supremacy. Chapter 4 does mention the history, but a book like this cannot afford to skim these realities in an effort to primarily focus on global partnerships. This is because many love the idea of solidarity with the oppressed beginning with those overseas while overlooking the racial mess in one's own backyard. Of course, such a vision for solidarity is thin. A lived commitment of renouncing racial oppression and exploitation while reorienting one's life through repentance in relation to Native American and Black oppression, needs to be the starting point for understanding our context and other people groups that are demonized, exploited, and scapegoated in our society. Without that foundation, meaningful global solidarity will not happen, and white savior complexes will be encouraged.

With this in mind, a deeper engagement with Black and Womanist theology might have strengthened Peters's good book into a great one. I don't suggest that a book on globalization can't be written, just that with the inclination of some to be white saviors, it ought to flow out of our concrete social, political, and historical realities in this land. All that said, I do still recommend this book. It is a fine resource that can be used to deepen our call to do justice in a globalized world. It is a book that wealthy Christians (if you are reading this, it likely pertains to you) ought to read and wrestle with. However, when you order the book, make sure you supplement it with some theological ethics books on oppression and exploitation that are written for the US context and that can be meaningful dialogue partners with this resource.

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Brad Roth, *God's Country: Faith, Hope, and the Future of the Rural Church*, Herald, Harrisonburg, VA, 2017. 223 pp. \$16.99. ISBN: 9781513801612.

"I love the rural church" (13). Brad Roth's opening line in *God's Country* defines his theological center: love for God and God's church in particular places named as rural. But he doesn't stop there. After describing the pitfalls of idealizing or disparaging rural communities and congregations, he offers a vision.

We need a new approach, one that sees rural communities not as places to pity or lionize but simply as *places*, places open to God's goodness and in need of God's grace. We need a vision for the rural church that discovers its common vocation and destiny alongside the global church. The church is forever calling people to passionate worship of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. We're calling everyone to live as disciples of Jesus who challenge structures of sin in our lives, families, and communities. It's a life animated by the Holy Spirit. . . . This is a vision that's bigger than urban or rural. It's a kingdom vision. (17)

We need this kingdom vision—rural, urban, suburban, local, and global. In my context, *God's Country* arrives at a critical time when Mennonite churches in the United States are seeking a faithful way forward amid great loss and change. While acknowledging loss and marginality as rural experiences, Roth calls rural congregations to reclaim God's kingdom vision for the rural church by "learning to praise, abide, watch, pray, grow, work the edges, die, befriend, and dream. Each of these disciplines is rooted in the biblical narrative and Christ's enduring commitment to the rural church" (18).

Readers will bring their own experiences of loss and marginality to these disciplines. I believe you will find your own story and a way forward as Roth skillfully engages each of these disciplines, bringing the biblical story alongside his own stories and those of congregations and people he meets. Through his message of hope to the rural church, Roth provides a kingdom vision for the whole church.

To further his discussion of church and place, Roth expands on ecclesiology, or "how we understand the church," to create a term he calls *ecclesioculture*. "Ecclesiology begins in doctrine and aims to define the church." "Ecclesioculture, on the other hand, begins in love. It aims to love the church as we discover it while still dreaming of where God is leading us. This is our respective ecclesioculture—a vision for cultivating churches of all sorts in communities of all sorts" (18).