

The Ethics of Solidarity

Solidarity can be described as a heroism of deed, of friendship, and sometimes it requires a heroism of thinking. In *The Ethics of Solidarity*, Józef Tischner acknowledges that to better understand how to pursue solidarity for the common good, it is necessary to distinguish between two types of solidarity:

“Solidarity is not against but towards [...] – these are echoes of times when our thinking was a thinking of open horizons, and our courage was a courage of offering hands to all people of goodwill.”⁶⁵

In contrast, Tischner describes ‘factional solidarity’ as a search for identity:

“Searches for identity [...] cause sharp controversies over ‘everything’ to rage across the country. There is no distinction between less and more important matters, because ‘everything is important’ for the building of identity.”⁶⁶

Rather than practicing solidarity with someone and “towards” someone, Tischner suggests that factional solidarity is distinguished by its stance “against” someone. It is an exchange of personal courage for haughtiness. That is, instead of being the person in the room to bravely raise an objection or ask, “Is that really true?” Factional solidarity is the chorus that haughtily responds, “you can’t ask that question!”

Instead of admitting to any fault or wrongdoing for failing to stand up for the only person asking a question, the person participating in factional solidarity consoles themselves with arrogance, grateful to be aligned with the chorus. Because factional solidarity believes in guilt by association. Whereas solidarity stands with the defenseless, despite loss or social and political oppression.

“Heroism is an essential dimension of human existence”, writes Tischner. “Each time one needs to reach beyond the limits of factional solidarity, we need courage.”⁶⁷ First of all, and above all, we need the heroism of thought, deed, and friendship for true solidarity.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

What are the two types of solidarity Tischner identifies?

Why does Tischner say that heroism is needed for true Solidarity?

⁶⁵ Józef Tischner, *The Ethics of Solidarity Years Later*, 2005.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*