

# RESPONSE TO PROFESSOR ARCHER'S PAPER

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## 1. Introduction

Professor Archer's paper is in two parts: the first is a historic review of attempts made especially in Europe to restore social solidarity lost in the French (political) and the British (industrial) revolutions culminating in the zenith of solidarity in the post Second World War reconstruction of Europe; and the second is a review of social solidarity and governance

## 2. Historical Review of Attempts to Restore Lost Solidarity

The genesis of Archer's paper is that despite the absence of agreement on the part of the founding fathers of sociology on the role of social solidarity, there was consensus on its prominence. Secondly, that once lost, there was no guarantee that solidarity could be automatically regained. The central thesis in Archer's paper is the notion that capitalism, as the most common mode of production, is the chief culprit leading to the loss of solidarity, and that three elements, all inherent in capitalism, can be held responsible. These are:

- the social division of labour leading to the formation of classes;
- competition; and
- bureaucratization.

Archer contends that Durkheim believed that solidarity 'cemented' society and that once lost, restoration depended on policy intervention. But such restoration was only possible within a central value system, which Parsons maintained could only be mediated through a shared culture. However, Gouldner challenged this proposition without denying the efficacy of a common value system (Archer: 2013). Archer proceeds to state that attempts to restore social solidarity demanded by the French and Industrial revolutions ended in ideological compromises rather than in shared values. The century of industrialisation and state formation destroyed solidarity. Two systems in the social structure were critical in attempting to resolve the dilemma of solidarity: a) the political; and b) the economic; the first through creating some form of value consensus and the second through self-regulation of the labour market. However, Archer contends that "there was still unfinished business on both sides" as on the part of the economy capitalism remained "unwaveringly and necessarily competitive" (*Ibid.* 4) while on the

part of the polity despite the post war social democracy citizenship and variants of welfare state reflected a compromise based on mutual regulation and not necessarily consensus in values. Therefore, despite the reconstruction following the Second World War, competition between political elites and the masses on the one side as demonstrated in elite attempts to limit political participation, and between entrepreneurs and workers on the other in the struggle over wages, hours and working conditions on the other, showed that the post-World War Two formula was not necessarily a recipe for social solidarity.

Four conditions purportedly representing ‘social integration’ namely:

- “absence of major social conflict based on class (or class, status and power);
- achievement of formal political representation for all;
- a low level of social provisions for old age, sickness, accident and children;
- a redistributive welfare state system”;

did not “reveal anything about the promotion of solidarity” (*op. cit.* 4). Rather, “In themselves they do nothing to engender social bonds; at most they remove obstacles to their formation; and their main inflection in terms of values accentuates fairness towards individuals” (*Ibid*). Archer maintains that “solidarity is ‘intrinsically relational’; it is about reciprocal orientation rather than the empirical outcome” listed above (*Ibid*). The three features of solidarity according to Archer are:

- “the acceptance of common responsibility between two parties for some state of affairs;
- the recognition of their independence; and
- a response entailing reciprocity not exchange, coercion or strategic concession of one to the other”.

What was, therefore, achieved in the Second World War phase was not solidarity, but rather mutual regulation or co-existence “operating largely as a morphostatic mechanism” (*Ibid.* 5). The onset of globalisation and particularly the growth in multinational corporations, an evident demonstration of the “situational logic of competition” intensified the assault on solidarity, as the economy was “delinked” from the state (*Ibid.* 6). “Mutual regulation based on the state of the national workforce mattering to corporate economic leadership and vice versa largely disappeared ” (*Ibid.*).

### 3. Solidarity and Governance

The second part of the paper addresses social solidarity and governance, and deals with three variables that undermine social solidarity in governance. These are:

- political parties;
- governance by performance indicators in social institutions; and
- governance by bureaucratic regulation.

#### 3.1. Political Parties

Pragmatism, rather than idealism and conviction, has undermined social solidarity in political parties as the latter have become less clear on whose interests they represent. Liberalism, as represented by liberal parties and socialism as represented by labour parties declined; the former with the diminishing class differences and the latter with the reduction in union membership because of increasing affluence. The consequence was the rise of centrist parties lacking in the idealistic convictions of their predecessors. There was thus no organic constituency whose aspirations could be articulated and aggregated by the new centric parties. Clichés such as for instance David Cameron's "big society" dominated the political discourse as politicians went into a frenzy for political support. Traditional constituencies diminished and with them social solidarity.

Another aspect of political parties without conviction is the "drastic shrinkage (crispation) of normativity in political life" (*Ibid.* 11) mainly because political parties are preoccupied with the "administration of things" – day to day management of austerity and the reduction of public spending with minimum backlash – not the government of people based on a normative conception of the good society" (*Ibid.*). This leads to a politics of single issues thus fostering a culture of political lobbying which institutionally results in the public domain being carved into smaller pieces each with its own technocratic solutions. Consequently normative behaviour is reduced to single acts or issues such as paedophilia, homosexuality, etc.

#### 3.2. Governance by Performance Indicators

Archer avers that the corporatisation of institutions has ushered in a new methodology of doing things and consequently, new standards of normativity. Whereas conventionally professions have determined the ethics, norms and standards of performance, corporatisation has engendered governance by performance indicators. In this instance, performance indicators reflect "the logic of competition from the business world" (*Ibid.* 12) to present

crude empirical measures such as throughput rather than the quality of performance. This undermines professional solidarity as well as the social solidarity between professionals and the public they serve. An example of such loss of solidarity presents in the Report of the Mid Staffordshire Health Trust in Britain where “meeting performance targets had taken precedence over patient care” (*Ibid.* 13). Similar comparisons can be made with the situation in education where neighbourhood groups get destroyed in quest of better performing schools and universities pursue performance indicators at the expense of quality teaching and research. The result is “Lecturers now hesitate about awarding low marks, and thus graduate expectations become inflated and a new competition is ushered amongst the student body about construction of a CV that will prove attractive on the employment market” (*Ibid.*). As members of faculty compete for publications and grant funders demand immediate demonstration of performance the Google ‘hit’ rates increase in academic references. All these measures undermine solidarity in favour of competition.

### **3.3. Governance by Bureaucratic Regulation**

Archer maintains that low solidarity in the population has encouraged governance by bureaucratic regulation in the absence of organic mechanisms to enforce norms. In turn bureaucratic regulation drives social solidarity even lower as regulations take over from rules, and since regulations must be respected but do not necessarily command normative consent, they do not encourage or foster social solidarity. Mainly because conformity does not require normative consensus, bureaucratic regulation has no space in building social solidarity (*Ibid.*).

## **4. Conclusion**

Professor Archer concludes that “the present socio-economic context could not be further from one based upon solidarity (fraternity) or less propitious to it. This then presents problems to the injunction in *Caritas in Veritate* calling for the revitalisation of social solidarity as “the logics of competition and of opportunity tend to be counterproductive towards solidarity since they pull the social order in two different directions” (*Ibid.* 17). The blame lies in the “colonisation by market and state” where the market “turns the activities that have been successfully pioneered by voluntary initiatives into business ventures” and the state “absorbs voluntary initiatives (in schooling, health, mental care) not only passing on some of the bill to them, at least for start-up costs, but also throttling voluntary sources of solidarity with bureaucratic regulation” (*Ibid.* 18).

There is an intrinsic competitiveness in capitalism and the paradox between solidarity and competition cannot be masked in concepts such as corporate social responsibility and business ethics. "The point is that multinationals remain competitive and Business schools reflect competition between universities" (*Ibid.*), hence capitalism "cannot be transformed by assuming a caring face" (*Ibid.*). Prof. Archer concurs with *Caritas in Veritate* on the observation that "both market and state continue to corrode social solidarity" hence building solidarity necessitates building up a civil society from the bottom up. Numerous examples of a breakdown in social solidarity exist in the developed world where advanced forms of capitalism exist in multinational and finance institutions, where families and neighbourhood communities are breaking down and intergenerational conflict is becoming a norm. Given this state of affairs, Prof Archer asks, how realistic is the injunction in *Caritas in Veritate*? The response she gives is that "*Caritas in Veritate* is a salutary but not a pessimistic document" (*Ibid.* 20). Apart from the few examples of a reconstruction of social solidarity, perhaps lessons from the developing world provide encouragement.

Professor Archer's paper takes the western state as a unit of analysis and finds it lacking in social solidarity. Elsewhere, particularly in the developing world smaller aggregates have taken over the function of the welfare state and have capitalised on the notion of situational selectivity to form solidarity groups for mutual upliftment in times of distress. For instance, in Southern Africa and particularly in South Africa, church-based solidarity groupings (women and youth) have pioneered mutual assistance groups. The mothers' union across Christian denominations manages home-based carers for terminally ill persons suffering from AIDS, tuberculosis and other chronic diseases. Burial societies abound in villages where paupers' funerals are simply a strange phenomenon and savings clubs (stokvels) have almost replaced banks and insurance companies. Such developments are expressions of solidarity where it is mostly needed.