

Vulnerability and Hierarchicalism

Though this is a paper on the vulnerability and the abuse of power, I have structured it according to the four weeks of the *Spiritual Exercises*. The first half of the paper is strong; it is the first week, sin. The second week, which is on vulnerability, has at its heart the life of Jesus. Toward the end of the paper we consider the passion of Jesus. Finally, we are left with the fourth week, to live out what we have seen and heard.

The first wave of the sexual abuse crisis broke in 1985. In May, Fr Thomas Doyle, Fr Michael Peterson and Ray Mouton presented a 92-page document to a committee of the U.S. Bishops' Conference, warning them to handle pending cases well, defend victims, and be transparent with authorities and the public. In June, the *National Catholic Reporter* published a story based on Jason Berry's reporting of the case of Fr Gilbert Gauthe of Lafayette, La., who ultimately served 10 years of a 20-year sentence for molesting children. The lengthy story and accompanying editorial was the first national story concerning sexual abuse in the Catholic Church in the United States.

Between 1985 and 2002 when the second wave occurred, the bishops of the United States knew what very few other people knew, the horror and the extent of the crisis. There were eruptions across the country, however. For instance, in 1992, there were three isolated reports. The diocese of Dallas paid \$31 million to 11 victims who accused Fr Rudolph Kos of molesting altar boys from 1981 to

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1992. In Boston, Fr. James Porter admitted to abusing more than 100 boys and girls in several parishes; he was sentenced to 18-20 years in a maximum-security prison and died in 2005. Finally, a Hartford newspaper reported that former students had accused Fr Marcial Maciel Degollado, Mexican-born founder of the Legion of Christ, of sexually abusing them.

In January 2002, a Boston judge compelled Cardinal Bernard Law to handover over 10,000 pages of archdiocesan records that the *Boston Globe* began to report on. Thus, the second wave commenced then. Now the public learned what the bishops had covered up from 1985 to 2002.¹

From my vantage point, let me tell you how the second wave affected me. In 1991 I moved from Fordham University in the Bronx to begin teaching at Weston Jesuit School of Theology in Cambridge MA, where I taught students preparing for ordained and lay ministry. In 2002, the second wave began with the story of Fr John J. Geoghan who molested 130 children. I remember to this day reading *The Boston Globe* on January 6, 2002, as it reported about the many women who had complained to the Boston Chancery about the priest. One woman stood out, a devout lay woman, Margaret Gallant, who had repeatedly written to the Boston chancery about Fr Geoghan because she knew he had already molested 7 of her nephews. Here is an excerpt:

The files ... contain a poignant — and prophetic — August 1982 letter to Law's predecessor, the late Cardinal Humberto Medeiros, from the aunt of Geoghan's seven Jamaica Plain victims, expressing incredulity that the Church to which she was devoted would give Geoghan another chance at St Brendan's after what he had done to her family. "Regardless of what he, or the doctor who treated him, say, I do not believe he is cured; his actions strongly suggest that he is not, and there is no guarantee that persons with these obsessions are ever cured," Margaret Gallant said in her plea to Medeiros. "It embarrasses me that the Church is so negligent," Gallant wrote. Archdiocesan records obtained by the *Globe* make it clear why Gallant wrote her irate letter two years after the abuse: Geoghan had reappeared in the Jamaica Plain, and been seen with a young boy. The records note that the next month, "Another letter from Mrs Gallant. "Why is nothing being done?"²

¹ "Timeline of a Crisis," *National Catholic Reporter* July 6, 2015 <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/timeline-crisis>

² Michael Rezendes, "Church Allowed Abuse by Priest for Years," January 6, 2002, *Boston Globe*. This article narrates the numerous attempts by women to get the clerical authorities to stop giving the infamous Fr Geoghan access to boys.

All through the year we would learn of one more horrendous account of abuse, coupled with an even more disturbing account of episcopal cover-up. The case of Geoghan catalyzed an investigation and Geoghan himself was sentenced in February 2002 to 10 years in prison for molesting a 10-year-old boy.³ Then, on August 23, 2003, Geoghan was strangled and stomped to death by a fellow inmate in a maximum-security prison.⁴ These, and hundreds of other narratives, were regular stories from 2002-2003 in Boston alone. By the end of 2002, Cardinal Bernard Law had so betrayed children, the people of the Church of Boston, and his priests, that 58 priests, myself included, publicly wrote a statement calling for his resignation. The Cardinal resigned shortly afterwards and moved to Rome where he was made archpriest of the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore.

This account in 2002 would play out later around the world: a person trying to stop a particular priest from serially abusing children would inform hierarchy who, in most instances, actually decided to ignore the complaints. In more recent times we have heard not only of children of all ages as objects of sexual abuse, but also of vulnerable adults, whether people with intellectual disabilities, or employees or subordinate religious, or seminarians. These newer categories are emerging as decidedly more significant than we previously recognized and highlight further the problem of predation throughout the world Church, a problem erupting as we learn frequently of more stories from India and Africa of nuns being assaulted by bishops, or of seminarians being assaulted by Cardinal McCarrick or others like him.

I think, however, that any account about the abuse scandal cannot start anywhere but, as I have done, with the victims. I think that that is where any account of trying to respond to the crisis must begin. We did not protect the vulnerable. The vulnerable in our care were assaulted and harmed irreparably. They were children. The scandal is not simply that priests assaulted children: it was/is that many priests and their bishops simply were more concerned about the image of the Church than they were with these vulnerable children or their parents and family members who, in their vulnerability, came to us.

The first concern is to see with more clarity and confidence that there are, and need to be, directives in every diocese and throughout the world Church for protecting children and overseeing any claim of sexual assault. As one coming from Boston, where Cardinal Sean O'Malley has dedicated his life to responding to the crisis since arriving in Boston in 2003 and then becoming first chair of

³ <http://archive.boston.com/globe/spotlight/abuse/geoghan/>

⁴ <http://edition.cnn.com/2003/US/08/23/geoghan/index.html>

the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors in 2014, I find in him, despite mistakes, a true model bishop for our time.⁵ In no less measure, Archbishop Scicluna's outstanding record of responding to the crisis has also shown us how a bishop pursues truth and justice, restoring the faith and instilling confidence. It is a great honor for me, a theologian, to present this paper as a response to his request for it. Like others, we look to see the procedures that the Vatican will develop in the aftermath of the February 2019 meeting to address negligence, procedures that will couple well those of the *motu proprio*, "As a loving Mother."⁶ They will be appreciated or critiqued by all vigilant church members for their effectiveness because as we now know, the whole world is watching.

As those procedures take effect I want to note that in the aftermath of the second wave of the abuse scandal, that is, the one that began in 2002, the concept of clericalism immediately arose as a helpful concept. Clericalism is that culture which created the climate where Catholic men and women of conscience were routinely unable to be heard or understood, but where the self-preserving power of clerics was given sanction. In 2002 in a brilliant essay for *America magazine* entitled, "Farewell to the Club: On the Demise of Clerical Culture," Fr Michael Papesh named, described, and exposed the pervading, but hidden culture among the clergy.⁷

This word "culture" is used quite often and in a recent article reflecting on clerical culture, another priest, the Canadian moral theologian, Mark Slatter explained what a culture is:

A culture is a network of personal meaning and valuing. Clerical culture hinges on leaders attracting similarly disposed persons through the laws of social attraction, evoked in different ways since Plato as the principle of 'like seeks after like.' The psychology engenders webs of kinship among priests, bishops and similarly disposed lay groups, bishops and cardinals, wealthy lay Catholics and think tanks. They always find each other through family resemblance, whatever that happens to be.⁸

⁵ On Cardinal Sean O'Malley, see Emma Green, "Why Does the Catholic Church Keep Failing on Sexual Abuse?" *The Atlantic February* 14, 2019. <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2019/02/sean-omalley-pope-francis-catholic-church-sex-abuse/582658/>

⁶ https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco_lettera-ap_20160604_come-una-madre-amorevole.html

⁷ Michael L. Papesh, "Farewell to the Club: On the Demise of Clerical Culture," *America* (May 13, 2002). <https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/372/article/farewell-club>

⁸ Mark Slatter, "Clerical Crisis: Flock and Pasture Can't Tell Shepherd Who He Is," *National Catholic Reporter* (March 11, 2019). <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/clerical-identity-crisis-flock-and-pasture-cant-tell-shepherd-who-he>

Today clerical culture is routinely identified. Pope Francis has used clericalism as a contrast device distinguishing the servant leadership of the priest from a clericalism that seeks its own goods. In his address at the opening of the recent Synod, Pope Francis commented on the deep problem of clericalism.

It is therefore necessary, on the one hand, to decisively overcome the scourge of clericalism... Clericalism arises from an elitist and exclusivist vision of vocation, that interprets the ministry received as a power to be exercised rather than as a free and generous service to be given. This leads us to believe that we belong to a group that has all the answers and no longer needs to listen or learn anything, or that pretends to listen. Clericalism is a perversion and is the root of many evils in the Church: we must humbly ask forgiveness for this and above all create the conditions so that it is not repeated. We must, on the other hand, cure the virus of self-sufficiency and of hasty conclusions reached by many young people.⁹

Recently two American lay theologians teaching in seminaries, C. Colt Anderson and Christopher M. Bellitto, have proposed a helpful list of reforms for shifting the formation of men away from a clerical culture to one for a culture of servant priests.¹⁰ In the interest of time, let me name each of their proposals.

1. Until diaconal ordination, seminarians should dress as and be treated as they are, lay men.
2. Seminarians' classes of theology should be held with other lay and religious men and women.
3. The professional opinions of religious sisters and lay professors, professionals, and supervisors must be taken into real account when deliberating on whether a seminarian will proceed in formation and to ordination. These deliberative processes cannot be singularly in the hands of the clergy.
4. A seminary's board of trustees must have lay members who, again, have deliberative and not simply consultative votes.

⁹ *Address by his Holiness Pope Francis at the Opening of the Synod of Bishops on Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment* (October 3, 2018). http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2018/october/documents/papa-francesco_20181003_apertura-sinodo.html

¹⁰ C. Colt Anderson and Christopher M. Bellitto, "The Reform Seminaries Need," *Commonweal* (April 8, 2019). <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/scarlet-fever> See also Boston College Seminar on Priesthood and Religious Ministry for the Contemporary Church, "To Serve the People of God: Renewing the Conversation on Priesthood and Religious Formation," *Origins* 48. 31 (December 27, 2018) 484-493. <https://www.bc.edu/content/dam/bc1/schools/stm/continuing%20education/encore/pdf/To%20Serve%20the%20People%20of%20God.pdf>

5. We need to end the practice of moving unfit men from seminary to seminary until they find one that will testify that they are worthy of ordination.

We are now in the midst of a third wave of the crisis, one that began in 2018 and this wave brings a rather different focus of concern. Rather than naming predatory priests, these scandals focus mostly on the episcopacy. Witness Cardinal George Pell, Cardinal Ted McCarrick, Cardinal Philippe Barbarin, Cardinal Donald Wuerl, Archbishop Robert Finn, the Chilean Bishops, Indian Bishop Franco Mulakkal (accused of raping Indian religious women), etc. I think it would be a mistake to identify their actions as stemming from the ubiquitous “clericalism.” For this reason, I have identified the exclusive power culture of the episcopacy as “hierarchicalism.”

I came up with this distinction between clericalism and hierarchicalism¹¹ when I found in Slatter’s essay this comment: “Hierarchical culture is the gold carrot for those predisposed to its allurements.” Slatter is right to give that culture particular attention. That culture of the hierarchy is even more problematic and unknown than clerical culture. Just as clericalism is different from a culture that promotes servant priests, similarly hierarchicalism is different from the culture that promotes servant bishops.

What most priests and bishops know well is that the formative pathways for future bishops are generally speaking different from those for average priests. Early on, future bishops do not do most of their theology studies in their local or regional seminaries. Rather, they are sent to Rome for theology and examined in Rome in a variety of ways and there, in their national colleges, they are offered hierarchal “allurements” that most priests do not receive: dinner with visiting bishops, meetings with other bishops, the possibility of being appointed the bishop’s contact in Rome, receiving the bishop’s confidences, being welcomed back whenever returning home. There is a “grooming”¹² that happens that is radically different from anything that happens to other seminarians. They are being selected for another club.

Hierarchicalism is *that* culture then precisely emerging at the centre of the more recent sexual abuse scandal. Just as clericalism emerged as a source for the

¹¹ See Tom Roberts on my use of hierarchicalism, “A Mensch, a Church in Recovery, and Hierarchical Culture Examined,” *National Catholic Reporter* (March 26, 2019). <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/ncr-connections/mensch-church-recovery-and-hierarchical-culture-examined>

¹² See Emily Reimer-Barry, “Does Catechism Class Groom Young People for Sexual Abuse?” *The First* (April 1, 2019). <http://www.catholicethics.com/forum-submissions/does-catechism-class-groom-young-people-for-sexual-abuse>

scandals from 2002, hierarchicalism emerges today. But we would be wrong to think that hierarchicalism is giving us only the third wave. The scandal of the third wave finally exposes the real source of this crisis: Hierarchicalism in all its brutality and profound lack of accountability. We now see how the hierarchical culture has exercised its power and networking capabilities in the cover-up of their own actions. What we are only beginning to see is that hierarchicalism and its lack of accountability and ability to act with impunity will be harder to dismantle than clericalism and in fact will guarantee the survival of clericalism, for the former is the father and promoter of the second.

We need then to distinguish the two, not because clericalism is not problematic, it is, but because we have to better understand the problems of the culture more isolated and protected than the clergy's and certainly more complex, insidious, and driven than we know or acknowledge. We have to look at how we place young men on different preparatory trajectories away from their own dioceses and into Rome where all men ambitious for episcopacy live.

Still, in light of the third wave, I think our mindfulness of this episcopal culture, what I am calling "hierarchicalism," that is not ordered to service ministry is already having an impact. Let me offer this consideration, as being someone from Boston. While Pope John Paul II and Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger gave Cardinal Law the appointment of archpriest of the Basilica of St Mary Major's in Rome in 2004, as a true indication of the face of hierarchicalism, even after his own priests publicly called for his resignation, one could never imagine such a consolation prize being awarded in 2019 to any bishop, archbishop or cardinal for similar negligence, lies, cover-up, and gross abuse of power.

As an alternative to these two cultures, that dominate not only its own member's lives but also the life of the Church, I would like to propose another culture, a culture of vulnerability. I think in order to get to a servant priesthood or to a servant episcopacy we must pass through and live out a culture of vulnerability. There is a profound graceful irony in this: for it is precisely vulnerability that our clerics and hierarchs ignored throughout this scandal.

Still, throughout theology, philosophy, and ethics today, the concept of vulnerability is receiving a level of attention internationally that is, I think, very helpful as we consider the life of the Church as we respond to the scandal. But first, to convey vulnerability, let me tell you a story.

In the twenty-first chapter of T. H. White's wonderful *The Once and Future King*,¹³ we read a memorable account of creation that captures human

¹³ T. H. White, *The Once and Future King* (New York: Ace Books, 1987).

vulnerability beautifully. God gathers all the embryos of each and every species of animal life and offers each embryo a wish for something extra. The giraffe embryo gets a long neck for tree food, the porcupine asks for quills for protection, and so it goes for the entire animal kingdom. The last embryo is the human who when asked by God what he wants, responds, “I think that You made me in the shape which I now have for reasons best known to Yourselves, and that it would be rude to change.... I will stay a defenceless embryo all my life.” God is delighted and lets the human embryo have no particular protection, to be the most vulnerable of all newborns and says, “As for you, Man... You will look like an embryo till they bury you.”

White’s vision of the human embryo as the bearer of human vulnerability is remarkable, for behind this decision is the assumption that we are made in God’s image and that if we are vulnerable, so is God. And so White concludes his account with God disclosing to the human, “Adam,” “Eternally undeveloped, you will always remain potential in Our image, able to see some of Our sorrows and to feel some of Our joys. We are partly sorry for you, Adam, but partly hopeful.”

In 2005 Irish moral theologian, Enda McDonagh, introduced us to the theology of vulnerability in a book called *Vulnerable to the Holy: In Faith, Morality and Art*.¹⁴ McDonagh begins his treatment on vulnerability not with the human, but with God. God reveals to us God’s self as vulnerable by the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, his life in Nazareth, and by his death on Golgotha. Thus, sounding like White, McDonagh writes that to be made in God’s image is to be made vulnerable.

Thinking first of God as vulnerable is a remarkably important theological foundation for in *becoming vulnerable to the Holy*, we become prompted to look for the vulnerability of God in the Scriptures. And here I would suggest we look at two of the most famous parables, the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan. To appreciate the first, I would like to further develop the idea of vulnerability and then make a distinction between precarity and vulnerability.¹⁵

On vulnerability, the American Philosopher Judith Butler has developed an entire ethics, reflecting on the prior work by Emmanuel Levinas and Hannah

¹⁴ Enda McDonagh, *Vulnerable to the Holy: In Faith, Morality and Art* (Dublin: Columba Press, 2005).

¹⁵ See for instance, Judith Butler, “Precarious Life, Vulnerability, and the Ethics of Cohabitation,” *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 26/2 (2012): 134-151; See on a different platform, Clara Han, “Precarity, Precariousness, and Vulnerability,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 47 (October 2018): 331-343. I want to thank James Hanvey for introducing me to the importance of this distinction.

Arendt. In her own developed work, she writes, “ethical obligation not only depends upon our vulnerability to the claims of others but establishes us as creatures who are fundamentally defined by that ethical relation.”¹⁶ That is, vulnerability is what establishes us as creatures before God and one another. Butler adds:

This ethical relation is not a virtue that I have or exercise; it is prior to any individual sense of self. *It is not as discrete individuals that we honor this ethical relation. I am already bound to you, and this is what it means to be the self I am, receptive to you in ways that I cannot fully predict or control.*¹⁷

Vulnerability is our nature. She writes:

You call upon me, and I answer. But if I answer, it was only because I was already answerable; that is, this susceptibility and vulnerability constitutes me at the most fundamental level and is there, we might say, prior to any deliberate decision to answer the call. In other words, one has to be already capable of receiving the call before actually answering it. In this sense, ethical responsibility presupposes ethical responsiveness.¹⁸

To put it another way, “the *ought* is made capable by the *is*.” Approaches to vulnerability emerged in literature, theology, and philosophy, but also in psychology. Years ago, in 1988, in reflecting on gender and domination, the psychoanalyst and feminist theorist, Jessica Benjamin reflected on infancy and mutual recognition among infants. Mutual recognition is that central experience of infants among infants. Benjamin writes, “Mutual recognition is the most vulnerable point in the process of differentiation.” She adds, “In mutual recognition, the subject accepts the premise that others are separate but nonetheless share like feelings and intentions.”¹⁹ In this work Benjamin sought to explore ways of restoring mutual recognition as a defining key for understanding right relationship between the genders. In particular she was concerned with gender and the problem of why men turn to domination. She found, that males, as children, are taught to abandon their own vulnerability and to develop instead a need to dominate. The process to develop domination is a two-fold alienation. First, the male becomes alienated from his original vulnerable self. Second, he looks to dominate others, often women. In a more recent work in 2017, she turns again to mutual recognition and

¹⁶ Butler, 141.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 141-2. Emphasis mine

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 142.

¹⁹ Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination* (New York: Pantheon, 1988) 53.

among other matters finds the language of vulnerability key for recuperating and restoring the experience of mutual recognition.²⁰

These two scholars help us to appreciate more the reconciling and humanizing traits of vulnerability, helping us to see it, not as a liability, but as something which establishes for us as human beings the possibility to be relational and therefore moral.

Too many people think of vulnerability as a liability because they confuse it with precarity. Butler notes that “Precarity exposes our sociality, the fragile and necessary dimensions of our interdependency.”²¹ Therefore, we must be careful to recognize the difference between vulnerability and precarity. Certainly, in being vulnerable, we have the capacity to encounter and respond to another whose vulnerability is precarious, as in the Prodigal Son parable where the son’s own precarity exposes him to “the fragile and necessary dimensions of our interdependency.” In that parable, while the beginning of the story focuses on the younger brother’s precarity, the centre of the parable focuses on the vulnerable one, who is the Father who recognizes his son in the distance, embraces him, re-incorporates him, and works to restore all that was unstable, threatened, exposed, and jeopardized. The same Father remains vulnerable to his older son who does not really suffer from precarity but from resentment.²² The stability in the story is the vulnerable Father, as the precarious son returns and the resentful one leaves; the centrality of the story is the enduringly vigilant, attentive, and responsive Father who is so because he is vulnerable.

Vulnerability plays itself out even more so in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10: 29-37). It is important for us to remember why Jesus tells this parable. He has just given the commandment to love one another. In response, one of the Scribes asked Jesus, “Who is my neighbor?” A close reading of the story reveals that Jesus is offering a very surprising answer to the question. At the beginning of the story we are thinking that the answer to the question “who

²⁰ Jessica Benjamin, *Beyond Doer and Doing to* (New York: Routledge, 2017). See also her interview on *Psychology’s Feminist Voices Oral History Project* (July 7, 2006). <https://www.feministvoices.com/assets/Feminist-Presence/Benjamin/JessicaBenjaminOralHistoryTranscript.pdf>

²¹ Butler, 148. See also her, *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence* (Brooklyn: Verso, 2004). On Vulnerability see *Vulnerability in Resistance*, ed. Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti, and Leiticia Sabsay (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016). Also, see *Vulnerability: New Essays on Ethics and Feminist Philosophy*, ed. Catriona Mackenzie, Wendy Rogers, and Susan Dodds (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

²² See James Alison, *Faith Beyond Resentment* (New York: Crossroads, 2001). Alison suggests that the two brothers are but two sides of the same reality: a person who knows he needs to be forgiven and who thinks he does not. See pp. 17-20.

is my neighbour?” is the man lying wounded on the road, that is, the precarious one. But by the end of the story we are no longer looking for the neighbour as the precarious one but at the vulnerable one who is acting. The Scribe rightly answers that the neighbour is the one who shows mercy.

Like the surprise ending, many of us forget that this parable was never primarily a moral one. Throughout the tradition many preachers and theologians saw in the story of the Good Samaritan the narrative (in miniature) of our redemption by Christ. Starting with Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150-ca.215), then Origen (ca. 184-ca.254), Ambrose (339-397) and finally, Augustine (354-430), the Good Samaritan parable is the merciful narrative of our redemption. Later on, from the Venerable Bede (673–735) to Martin Luther (1483-1546), preachers and theologians have appropriated and modified the narrative.

The basic allegorical expression of the parable was this: the man who lies on the road is Adam, wounded (by sin), suffering outside the gates of Eden. The priest and the Levite, (the law and the prophets), are unable to do anything for Adam; they are not vulnerable to him. Along comes the Good Samaritan (Christ), a foreigner, one not from here, who vulnerably tends to Adam's wounds, takes him to the inn (the Church), gives a down payment of two denarii (the two commandments of love), leaves him in the inn (the Church) and promises to return for him (the second coming) when he will pay in full for the redemption and take him with him into his kingdom. The parable then is first and foremost *not* a moral story about how we should treat others, but rather the central story of our own redemption, that is, what Christ has done for us. We are called, if you will, to a mutual recognition, of seeing in Christ the one who became vulnerable for us so that we might be saved.

Like the parable of the Prodigal Son, the parable of the Good Samaritan is about the scandal of our redemption, not how bad we are, but how vulnerable God in Jesus Christ is. In realizing how vulnerable God is, we recognize our own capacity for vulnerability, and therein discover the capacity and the call to go and do likewise.

But let us now make a final return to theological ethics as we move to our conclusion. A great deal of ethics has lately focused on vulnerability. The French moralist Vincent LeClerq, who is also a doctor specializing in AIDS, wrote his first book about those who volunteer to work with patients suffering from AIDS. He developed an ethics of vulnerability for such doctors entitled *Blessed Are the Vulnerable: Reaching Out to Those with AIDS*.²³

²³ Vincent LeClerq, *Blessed Are the Vulnerable: Reaching Out to Those with AIDS* (Worcester, MA: Twenty-Third Publications, 2010)

This past year, Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church held its third international conference in Sarajevo with 500 theological ethicists from 80 countries. Linda Hogan, of Trinity College Dublin and an original chair of CTEWC gave the final plenary proposing an ethics of vulnerability for a divided world.²⁴ Following a host of moral theologians and philosophers, like Levinas, Arendt, McDonagh, Butler, LeClerq, but also Isabella Guenzini²⁵ and Roger Burggraeve,²⁶ she describes “vulnerability as a way of being, as the ground of our relationality, and as mode of social engagement.”

She finds promise in vulnerability and asks, “Can this existential experience of vulnerability be deployed in the service of a politics that unites rather than divides? This depends on whether this recognition of vulnerability can generate a new kind of conversation: about how we act in the world; about our ethical obligations towards each other; about how to oppose the conditions under which some lives are more vulnerable than others.”

She concludes: “Mutual dependence, shared vulnerability, these are elements of human experience that have rarely featured in the ways in which politics is constructed or ethical theories are framed. Indeed, much of our politics and ethics seems to be intent on foreclosing this recognition. And yet shared vulnerability and mutual dependence may be precisely the qualities that have a resonance with the individuals and communities world-wide who are struggling to find the grounds for the hope of shared future in a world divided.”

Let me close, as Hogan did, by making a proposal for vulnerability.

Why could not we develop an ecclesiology based on the risk-taking vulnerability of God? Right now, as we muddle through trying to rebuild our Church, should we not look precisely at vulnerability, a reality that we overlooked as our bishops turned deaf ears to vulnerable parents, about vulnerable children and vulnerable adults who were horrendously violated? Has it not been precisely vulnerability that we evidenced no concern or defence of? Could not a lesson from these twenty years of reckoning yield an alertness, a vigilance, a resonance to vulnerability? Is it not time for us to embrace it?

²⁴ Linda Hogan, “Vulnerability: An Ethic for a Divided World,” *Building Bridges in Sarajevo: The Plenary Papers of Sarajevo 2018*, ed. James Keenan, Kristin Heyer and Andrea Vicini, co-edited with L. Hogan (Marynoll: Orbis books, forthcoming, 2019).

²⁵ Isabella Guenzini, *Tenerenza. La rivoluzione del potere gentile* (Milan: Editore Ponte alle Grazie, 2017).

²⁶ Roger Burggraeve, “Violence and the Vulnerable Face of the Other: The Vision of Emmanuel Levinas on Moral Evil and Our Responsibility,” *Journal of Social Philosophy* 30/1 (1999): 29-45.

And what would it look like? Remember how Benjamin specifically found in vulnerability the opposite and corrective of domination²⁷ and does not that juxtaposition invoke in us the very stance of our Lord, who stood before those who accused and judged and murdered him. Think here too how Our Lord, on the night before he was betrayed, relinquished his garments and washed the feet of his disciples, conveying the very vulnerability that he displayed in his passion and death. Do we not see in our Church that we could follow in his steps as a servant leader who opts for vulnerability instead of domination, or clericalism or hierarchicalism?

But what would the formation of our clergy and episcopacy look like if its emphasis was not on dominance but on vulnerability? How would we be with the laity and in particular with women? Would we, in our vulnerability, be able to be who we are, as we are, attentive though to those whose vulnerability has been long overlooked or whose precarity is now most at risk?

Let me make two concrete suggestions that I cannot develop here. First, bishops and the rest of us must make bishops accountable. Archbishop Scicluna helped me to understand that accountability keeps leaders vulnerable but impunity destroys vulnerability. From 1985 until 2018, we have seen bishops who have been bound by hierarchicalism rely on impunity to avoid any accountability. That impunity is at the root of the comfortable space called hierarchicalism. It must be rooted out. I will develop this argument in a later paper.

Second, if I had further space to develop this ethics of vulnerability, I would obviously begin with mercy, the first virtuous expression of divine vulnerability, as we saw above. The mercy of the Samaritan (which is here akin to hospitality) is different, however, from the reconciling mercy of the Father who forgives and restores the prodigal while trying to cultivate and reconcile the older son. These different expressions of mercy highlight the inevitable need that mercy has for prudence, the virtue that offers us the concrete guidelines for the right realization of virtue. Without prudence, we could never rightly express mercy. Mercy is always coupled with justice. Most of justice is not tempered by mercy, but rather moved by mercy: mercy prompts justice to realize what is due to those on the margins, to those who have not yet received justice, as in bringing justice to the widow, the orphan, and the poor. Finally, we are called to a fidelity or a solidarity

²⁷ Lisa Sowle Cahill highlights this dominance in male clerical violence over against human vulnerability in her essay, "Power, Sex and Violence: Where Do Catholics Go from Here?" This essay was delivered on 30 January 2019 at Dequesne University. It was sponsored by the Department of Theology and McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts of the same University.

with those whom we serve by mercy, prudence, and justice, so that we, in our vulnerability, remain faithful to them in theirs. However, I shall be developing this on a later paper on human dignity, vulnerability and virtue ethics.

I think that after these twenty years, we priests and bishops have really, and rightly, taken a beating: everyone has a programme, a judgment, a claim, a strategy for us; but I think behind each offering, each proposal, each critique, there is a hope that our defensiveness and that our guard come down and we become what we really are: vulnerable, “as a way of being, as the ground of our relationality, and as mode of social engagement.” If we gave it a chance, if we let the vulnerability of our God enter into our seminaries and into our chanceries, maybe we could put away some of those allurements that we already know are as banal as they are compromising. If we learn the lessons of vulnerability and mutual recognition, we might be able to discern with the rest of the Church that is waiting for us, *already in their vulnerability*, how precisely we should reform our seminaries, our chanceries and of course, the Vatican, but it will be by vulnerability and not by the smoke and mirrors of hierarchical domination that has already taken the life out of so many.

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