FORGIVE, YET NEVER FORGET:
Racial Injustice and the Ethics of Forgiveness

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By:
William Christopher Woody, S.J.

Mentors:
Margaret E. Guider, O.S.F., S.T.L., Th.D.
Daniel J. Daly, Ph.D.

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Introduction

The Ethics of Forgiveness

Questions surrounding forgiveness and reconciliation have received considerable attention in the past century, especially in the wake of the Shoah and the post-war era. These concerns are further heightened by continued crimes against humanity, such as systemic racism, the age of global terrorism, and the recurrence of genocide and other large-scale atrocities. Renewed considerations of forgiveness, reconciliation, mercy, and justice have thus taken on a particular urgency in the present day. Indeed, both secular philosophical and theological approaches have grappled with the challenges (and perhaps necessity) of forgiveness in response to such large-scale atrocities. Catholic theology and Christian ethics have a venerable tradition and resources to contribute to these considerations, and Pope Francis likewise has emerged as a prophetic voice emphasizing mercy, reconciliation, and forgiveness as critical virtues for the present day.

Yet despite an emerging consensus on the importance of forgiveness, these approaches are far from monolithic, and problems quickly arise in navigating the practical demands of forgiveness in an ethically responsible and just way. The roles of anger versus mercy, or punishment and pardon, pose a practical difficulty when balancing the extent to which these should be enacted. Disagreements unfold over the relation of forgiveness to punishment, and to accountability more generally. Questions of remembrance and forgetting, truth and trauma, speech and silence (or voicelessness) all emerge as contentious issues. Furthermore, recognizing moral standing and ascribing responsibility, complicity, blame, and guilt are complex and perennially contentious issues, in particular for survivors and bystanders. Such complexities are further compounded when considering future generations living with the legacy of past sins, and their cumulative structural consequences that exceed any one individual's freedom.

Each chapter of this thesis project considers a set of these practical contradictions in the enactment of forgiveness: (1) anger and mercy in the pursuit of justice; (2) memory and forgetting, or speech and silence, when wrestling with traumatic truths and the ethics of historical remembrance; and (3) reconsidering the distinction between guilt and innocence, especially when grappling with collective guilt or inherited structural sin.

Throughout this thesis project I argue for two primary contentions:

(1) Forgiveness is not a singular discrete action, but rather a temporally extended process that bears the weight of the past without being paralyzed by it, is enacted in an ongoing process, and opens onto a future of hope, but also of ongoing responsibilities. Forgiveness is neither ignorant of the past nor obsessively dwelling upon it, it is neither to be presumed nor automatically dispensed, and it is both qualified and conditional, with ongoing obligations.[1]

(2) I do not argue for one pole of these *aporia* at the expense of the other, as if synthesis or resolution were the desired end. Overemphasizing one at the expense of the other can lead to an unjust and ethically irresponsible approach to forgiveness. Instead, after examining the seemingly contradictory demands of these *aporia*, I contend that the practice of forgiveness must embrace and live out of the tension created by them– a process rooted in prudent discernment that is attentive both to the situation at hand and the wider context in which it occurs.

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[1] While some contemporary philosophical considerations of forgiveness consider its "impossibility" or its "unconditional" nature, from the Catholic perspective these are misguided debates. Avery Cardinal Dulles remains critical of such a "gross misunderstanding" and frankly dangerous notion that Christianity promotes an automatic, universal, and unqualified forgiveness in the face of any wrongdoing – an approach that inevitably either condones or simply ignores the wrongdoing, its effects on both the victim and the perpetrator, and which ultimately remains oblivious to the moral order and demands for justice. Certain conditions must be met, and forgiveness enacted in a particular way. Avery Dulles, "When To Forgive?" in *Church and Society: The Lawrence J. McGinley Lectures, 1988-2007* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 377. For more detailed discussions on the "impossibility" or "unconditional" nature of forgiveness, see Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness,* trans. Mark Dooley and Michael Hughes (New York: Routledge, 2001); Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Forgiveness,* trans. Andrew Kelley (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). A brief secondary survey of developments in both the French-Continental and Anglo-American landscapes appears in James K. Voiss, *Rethinking Christian Forgiveness: Theological, Philosophical, and Psychological Explorations* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015), 1-70.

Much of the literature concerning forgiveness at the social and political level responds to specific crises: the Shoah, South African apartheid, or the Rwandan genocide, to name a few. Each of these chapters draws from the lessons and assessments of such attempts at forgiveness, and brings them into dialogue with recent developments in Catholic theological ethics, the tradition of Catholic Social Teaching, contemporary philosophy, and the ethics of recognition. Importantly, such considerations do not exist in a vacuum or deal with abstractions alone – they respond to concrete realities of profound (and frequently racially-motivated) injustice. As such I propose to examine these claims in the light of renewed and ongoing considerations of racism and racial injustice in the American context.

Finally, an operational definition of forgiveness is necessary from the outset. As later chapters examine, the language of forgiveness is frequently conflated with similar though distinct terms such as "excuse," "justification," "clemency," and "reconciliation." Linguistic clarity is essential, and my working definition of "forgiveness" throughout this project draws from the work of Stephen Pope and Janine Geske who define forgiveness as an active response of love, "a love of neighbor grounded in the love of God," rather than a passive permissiveness in the face of wrongdoing.[2] As they define forgiveness, it is not simply the foreswearing of revenge and a renunciation of bad will, but also the resumption of good will – of benevolence – toward the wrongdoer.[3] This definition emphasizes the gratuitous nature of forgiveness as neither earned nor automatic, but freely chosen. Most importantly, it roots forgiveness in the virtue of *caritas,* a love which is strong enough to bear all things (1 Cor. 13:7) – including the seemingly impossible contradictory demands of forgiveness, to which this project now turns.

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[2] Stephen J. Pope and Janine P. Geske, "Anger, Forgiveness, and Restorative Justice in Light of Clerical Sexual Abuse and Its Cover-up," *Theological Studies* 80, no. 3 (2019): 622-23.

[3] Pope and Geske, "Anger, Forgiveness, and Restorative Justice," 624.

Chapter One

Righteous Indignation or Unbridled Rage:
Salvaging Anger in the Path to Forgiveness

"Rage – Goddess, sing the rage of Peleus' son Achilles,
Murderous, doomed, that cost the Achaeans countless losses,
Hurling down to the House of Death so many sturdy souls,
Great fighters' souls, but made their bodies carrion,
Feasts for the dogs and birds…"
– Homer, *The Iliad* I.1-5.[1]

"Be no one's lackey. Do not let others tread with impunity on your rights…
But one who makes himself into a worm cannot complain afterwards if people step on him."
– Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals,* 6:436-37.[2]

Introduction

At first glance, anger and mercy seem contradictory in nature and in practice. Expressions of mercy appear challenging to enact yet commendable in practice, while expressions of anger are rather easy to vent yet met with suspicion. Anger is oftentimes contrasted as antithetical to both mercy and forgiveness: for where anger stirs up desire for revenge, mercy limits such a desire and inflicts a less severe punishment than deserved, and forgiveness foreswears any such retribution and overcomes the vindictive passions.[3] While anger

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[1] Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), I.1-5. The opening word of the Homeric epic, *menin* [μῆνιν], is variously translated as rage, wrath, and anger. Such a wrath is an animating force – and the tragic flaw – characteristic of the legendary Achilles.

[2] Immanuel Kant, "Metaphysical First Principles on the Doctrine of Virtue," in *The Metaphysics of Morals,* trans. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 6:436-37, pp. 187-88.

[3] Jeffrie G. Murphy draws from the work of Bishop Joseph Butler's sermons on forgiveness to adapt a definition and to clarify terms (distinguishing, for example, "forgiveness" from "justification," "mercy," and "excuse"). Murphy's definitions are not the only operative definitions of these terms, but they are rather instructive and important distinctions. When mitigating factors, disposition, competencies, and external circumstances can render an unacceptable act either justified or understandable, a causal relationship of "responsibility" still exists yet it is not imputed as guilt. Examples such as *excuse* (internal factors or a lack of competency for one's actions, e.g. crimes committed by a child or someone with diminished capacity) or *justification* (external factors which, while admitting the act is ordinarily wrong, make it appropriate in this context, e.g. killing in self-defense or in war) are two such examples. Clemency and mercy pertain, in a legal context, to a reduced sentence when a more severe sentence is

and mercy certainly stand in tension with one another, they need not be mutually exclusive and can, in fact, function in tandem. Such is the argument of this present chapter: namely, that the pursuit of forgiveness can ignore neither the role of appropriate anger nor that of a just mercy. How can anger be understood as a valuable, even necessary passion in response to injustice – and how ought a righteous anger be tempered by mercy? In short, anger must be tempered and reframed by mercy, a mercy that remains mindful of justice. Consequently, mercy ought not to eliminate or suppress anger, as if to deny that any wrong has been suffered or ignore that injustices cry out for restitution and rehabilitation. Especially in the cause of systemic social injustices, righteous anger must not be overcome or repressed; inversely, it must not be nursed or stoked into a blind wrath. Rather, righteous anger is properly channeled.

Yet anger poses a considerable problem, and it initially appears difficult to justify as a requisite virtue in the process of forgiveness, and perhaps it even threatens to preclude the possibility for forgiveness. An inescapable and natural human passion, anger simultaneously provokes pain at perceived injustice and a sense of pleasure at the prospect of retribution.[4] Its proneness to exaggeration and its consuming nature have elicited suspicion on the part of ethicists, frequently advocating that the passion be moderated and controlled, if not suppressed

justifiable. See Jeffrie G. Murphy, "Forgiveness, Reconciliation and Responding to Evil: A Philosophical Overview," *Fordham Urban Law Journal* 27, no. 5 (2000): 1355-56.

[4] Martha C. Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness: Resentment, Generosity, Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 17. Paradoxically, what Nussbaum articulates in this "unusually complex emotion" that incites simultaneous pain and pleasure (pain at injustice, pleasure in retribution) constitutes what Jean-Luc Marion describes as the driving force of evil's "rigorous injustice, ordered and irremediably logical," to amplify and self-perpetuate evil with the "indisputable rigor" that iniquity deploys – an "immutable logic [of iniquity] that reproduces its rigor without end or flaw." Marion's assessment leads to the unreasonable (or perhaps superhuman) response that stupefies justice: "the only way not to perpetuate evil would consist in not attempting to rid oneself of it…to endure it…to absorb the cost," connecting this explicitly with the divine mission of Christ who "vanquishes evil only by refusing to transmit it…the just man is precisely he who endures evil without rendering it, suffers without claiming the right to make others suffer, suffers as if he were guilty." See Jean-Luc Marion, "Evil in Person," in *Prolegomena to Charity,* trans. Stephen E. Lewis (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 1-3.

outright. Without warning (or, perhaps more often, with some self-indulgent stoking), a flash of anger can easily flare up into unbridled wrath, eclipsing reason and setting one into a bestial rage or a brooding resentment with destructive consequences – a lesson harshly learned by Achaeans and Trojans alike at the hands of Achilles, a paradigmatic exemplar and cautionary tale of unbridled wrath. Yet anger also rightly testifies to one's sense of respect for self, for human dignity, and for the moral order – not simply a brooding resentment over perceived slights, but as a justifiable reaction in the face of injustice and harm, a necessary affirmation of justice and self-worth.[5]

This tension between destructive rage and righteous indignation, coupled with anger's notoriously volatile nature, have left philosophers and theologians to grapple with its ethical status. Is it a vice to be avoided, a passion to suppress, or a potential power to moderate? Can anger, in fact, stand as a virtue? If so, how ought it to be enacted and practiced? And, for the purposes of this larger project, how does it relate to mercy or the pursuit of justice in the process of forgiveness?

While by no means a univocal tradition, prominent ethical approaches espouse a type of anger as a potential virtue provided that it be moderated and controlled properly (albeit a

[5] Much attention has been given to anger's moral rightness (even moral necessity) in the face of injustice, particularly as an affirmation of respect for oneself and for the moral order. As the pages that follow shall examine, Aristotle condemns the "vice" of "unirascibility" (*aorgesia*), Aquinas considers anger as a force that animates and moves the will to justice and, as featured in the epigraph above, Kant belittles the one who futilely airs their grievances after making oneself "into a worm." These perspectives have received renewed interest in legal and philosophical discussions of forgiveness in more recent years. See again J.G. Murphy as instructive on this point, who further expounds upon the link between anger and the duty to self-love by noting that "just as indignation or guilt over the mistreatment of others stands as emotional testimony that we care about them and their rights, so does resentment stand as emotional testimony that we care about ourselves and our rights." He then observes that, "those who have vindictive dispositions toward those who wrong them give potential wrongdoers an incentive not to wrong them. If I were going to set out to oppress other people, I would surely prefer to select for my victims persons whose first response is forgiveness rather than persons whose first response is revenge" (1359). A complete lack of anger – even in the name of "mercy" and "forgiveness" – may in fact be a miscarriage of justice, one which perpetuates victimhood or enables through complicity. Jeffrie G. Murphy, "Forgiveness, Reconciliation, and Responding to Evil," 1359.

moderation which tends closer toward its deficiency in meekness than toward its excess in vindictiveness). This temperance of anger towards meekness and mercy have been further emphasized through the rise of Christianity, oftentimes misinterpreted as an injunction against any anger in an overly permissive, unfailingly forgiving manner – to "offer no resistance to one who is evil. When someone strikes you on your right cheek, turn the other one as well" (Matthew 5:39). Yet even the Christian tradition which points to Jesus Christ as the "face of the Father's mercy," an incarnate manifestation of mercy which is "the beating heart of the Gospel," makes no secret of Christ's own anger given vent in dramatic and public display (Matt. 21:12-17; Mark 11:15-19; Luke 19:45-48; and John 2:13-16).[6]

Still other approaches from antiquity, such as the Stoics, adopt an uncompromising perspective and reject anger as an "abhorrent or disfiguring" vice, contending that "no pestilence has been more costly for the human race," for "anger turns everything from what is best and most righteous to the opposite."[7] More contemporary approaches have sought to reclaim some

[6] Pope Francis's Bull for the Indiction of the Year of Mercy, *Misericordiae Vultus,* given on Divine Mercy Sunday (11 April 2015) opens by identifying Jesus Christ as the living, incarnate face of the Father's mercy: "Jesus Christ is the face of the Father's mercy. These words might well sum up the mystery of the Christian faith. Mercy has become living and visible in Jesus of Nazareth, reaching its culmination in him" (§1). Francis later remarks that mercy constitutes "the beating heart of the Gospel" (§12), and yet each of the four canonical Gospels includes a striking account of Jesus's own anger given rise to action through the cleansing of the Temple.

[7] Seneca, *On Anger*, I.1.4 – I.2.3a. In Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Anger, Mercy, Revenge*, trans. Robert A. Kaster and Martha C. Nussbaum (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 14-15. Hereafter cited parenthetically in text as *OA*. Seneca's reflections open with the vivid imagery of the consequences of anger: "butchery and poisoning, suits and countersuits, cities destroyed, entire nations wiped out, leading citizens sold on the auction block, dwellings put to the torch, then the blaze, unchecked by the city walls, turning vast tracts of land bright with the attacking flame. Consider the cities of vast renown whose foundation stones can now hardly be made out: anger cast these cities down. Consider the wastelands, deserted, without an inhabitant for many miles: anger emptied them. Consider the many leaders known to history as examples of grim destiny: anger ran one through in his bed, struck another dead (sacrilege!) at the dinner table, tore another limb from limb in full view of the crowded forum, the very bosom of the law. It caused one man to shed his blood as his son's victim, another to expose his royal throat to a slave's armed hand, another to splay his limbs on the cross. And I'm still talking about punishments visited on individuals; now set aside those whom blazing anger assailed one man at a time and consider whole assemblies mowed down, the common folk butchered when an army was loosed upon them, whole peoples condemned to die in promiscuous slaughter…" (*OA* I.2.1-3).

instances of anger as an ethical good, emphasizing its potentially righteous nature, as a force for liberation from oppressive systems, or as an impetus for change to unjust structures.[8]

An Age of Anger: Systemic Injustices and Our Contemporary Context

Suspicion, fear, and caution thus mark the tradition with respect to anger – and rightly so, given its tendency towards irascibility and destruction. Yet this overemphasis on control and moderation, on meekness and restraint, requires reexamination.[9] In particular, entrenched social injustices merit consideration as the foci of a renewed consideration on a type of righteous anger as a virtue. When harmful injustices are transposed from interpersonal grievances to social structures and systems, anger finds few appropriate fora for manifestation and is instead left to simmer as resentments at simply "the way things are." Virtues like "patience" and "docility" are hijacked to perpetuate injustice, manipulated from being virtues of an even-tempered spirit to the complacency of an apathetic enabler or a trapped victim. Victimization becomes normalized and overlooked rather than recognized, bolstering the perpetuation of an oppressive status quo. Anger in these situations seems not only justified but even demanded – an ethical imperative oriented toward the pursuit of justice, the animating impetus for a meaningful redress of grievances.

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[8] See, notably, John Giles Milhaven, *Good Anger* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1989). For a nascent feminist approach that reclaims anger from the "seven deadly sins" and a perpetuation of patriarchy, see Beverly Wildung Harrison, "The Power of Anger in the Work of Love," in *Making the Connections: Essays in Feminist Social Ethics*, ed. Carol S. Robb (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 3-21; more recently, Michael Jaycox makes the explicit connection between social anger and civic virtues in light of the Black Lives Matter movement in Michael Jaycox, "The Civic Virtues of Social Anger: A Critically Reconstructed Normative Ethic for Public Life," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 36, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2016): 123-43.

[9] Martha Nussbaum in particular stresses the adaptability and flexibility of virtue-based ethics, writing that we must remain mindful that "the Aristotelian virtues, and the deliberations they guide, unlike some systems of moral rules, remain always open to revision in the light of new circumstances and new evidence. In this way, again, they contain the flexibility to local conditions that the relativist would desire, but, again, without sacrificing objectivity. Sometimes the new circumstances may simply give rise to a new concrete specification of the virtue as previously defined; in some cases it may cause us to change our view about what the virtue itself is. All general accounts are held provisionally, as summaries of correct decisions and as guides to new ones." See Martha C. Nussbaum, "Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* XIII (1988): 45.

And yet despite the paltry display of a righteous indignation that animates toward the pursuit of justice, ours is also paradoxically an "age of anger," characterized by a festering anger over injustices (both real and perceived), with wide swaths of the population feeling perpetually alienated and resentful, a tinderbox fraught with fear and anxiety – the root causes of which stretch back decades if not centuries.[10] Social and political divisions often tap into this pervasive undercurrent of anger and, as the year 2020 revealed in the United States of America, gave rise to violent riots on both the political left and the right.

In a dismaying yet ultimately unsurprising development, pronounced divisions have grown more entrenched and violent demonstrations have become seemingly commonplace – or at least have lost their shock value. Cynicism and despair, or a less hopeful vision for the future, are very real temptations. Four and a half years ago, in the summer of 2016, I found myself writing on the spiritual and historical significance of a ministry of reconciliation for Jesuit ministers, particularly how "the themes of mercy and reconciliation have grown increasingly important in the contemporary context, and the signs of the times place reconciliation at the forefront of global concerns," and recounted "but a few of the dismal situations that, at the time of this writing, featured prominently in the news. More will undoubtedly follow."[11] At the time I could scarcely imagine our present situation – one marked by violent demonstrations of rage, and yet simultaneously one with a dearth of righteous anger which rebukes injustice, the absence of which breeds silence and even complicity. Deeply entrenched social injustices have been further exposed by a global pandemic, executions of African Americans by law enforcement officers

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[10] For an unsettling yet insightful exposition on this point, see Pankaj Mishra, *Age of Anger: A History of the Present* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017).

[11] William C. Woody, S.J., "'So We Are Ambassadors for Christ:' The Jesuit Ministry of Reconciliation," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 49, no. 1 (Spring 2017): 4-5.

continue with shocking impunity, demonstrations of peaceful protest have been drowned out by violent riots, and on January 6, 2021, the U.S. Capitol building was overrun by a violent mob of domestic terrorists, all while proudly bearing the flag of the nation's deadliest enemy in American history, the seditious Confederacy.[12] Pervasive anger is indeed an easy culprit to blame – the "inevitable result of four years of lies…four years of stoking of white racial resentment, anxiety, and fear." [13] There is indeed merit to these claims, which political scientists, ethicists, and psychologists will have to examine in the years to come. And yet the presence of anger is not solely to blame: it is equally the very *absence* of appropriate anger that enables and perpetuates such injustices, the absence of a righteous indignation that, according to Aquinas, "is passion that moves the will to justice. All too often, injustice flourishes in our society precisely because we're not angry enough."[14] The problem is paradoxically both on account of anger *and in its lack*. Perhaps it is not anger itself, but rather the pervasiveness of an anger that has become unmoored from truth, disconnected from any other virtues, and unchecked by mercy. While those under its sway may rationalize the righteousness of their anger, it remains a far cry from righteous indignation. This wrathful anger seeks destruction rather than justice, retaliation rather than redress, and wallows in one's victimhood instead of speaking of respect for the self, for the

[12] Maria Cramer, "Confederate Flag an Unnerving Sight in Capitol," *The New York Times*, January 9, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/09/us/politics/confederate-flag-capitol.html.

[13] Bryan N. Massingale, "The Racist Attack on our Nation's Capitol," *America Magazine,* January 6, 2021, https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2021/01/06/us-capitol-trump-riot-racist-239662.

[14] Massingale's article was followed by an interview to expand his claims and reflect on his own reaction of anger to these events born out of a different type of anger. See Bryan N. Massingale, "How to Make Spiritual Sense of the Attack on the Capitol," interview by Matthew F. Malone, S.J., *America Media*, January 7, 2021, video, 37:35, https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2021/01/07/capitol-attack-racial-justice-bryan-massingale-239667.

moral order, and for truth.[15] Consequently, there is an excess of unchecked and unbridled rage coupled with a deficiency of righteous indignation and the courage to speak for justice.

Such is the horrifying situation of anger in the contemporary American context. Facile explanations cannot suffice, and yet neither cynical resignation nor vengeful response bear hope for a just forgiveness. How, then, to consider anger in a process of forgiveness? Following a brief exposition and critique of the status of anger in the Western ethical tradition, this chapter shall seek to defend the notion that a certain breed of righteous indignation constitutes a moral virtue, and even stands as a moral imperative in the face of systemic oppression. As with the other chapters in this wider project, I consider this concretely in the context of racial injustice (although this is not to imply that anger be restricted solely to such instances). Ultimately, I argue to resituate this indignation as an *auxiliary* and a *social* virtue, properly understood within a wider constellation of virtues oriented toward justice, with mercy being the principal companion virtue for anger. Rooted in the works of Aristotle, Seneca, and Aquinas, I also draw from the work of contemporary virtue ethicists Martha Nussbaum, James Keenan, S.J., Stephen Pope, and Michael Jaycox to reclaim this righteous indignation as a requisite virtue in the pursuit of restorative justice rather than punitive vengeance.

Anger as a Moral Virtue: Historical Perspectives on Moderation

Before enumerating a provisional list of particular virtues and vices, recall how Aristotle famously sets forth a framework to define moral virtue in Book II.6 of his *Nicomachean Ethics:*

[15] Josef Pieper provides a helpful distinction in his reading of Aquinas on anger/wrath in *The Four Cardinal Virtues* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966), 193-97. He notes, "it is self-evident that the anger which breaks all bounds and disrupts the order of reason is evil and is sin. Blind wrath, bitterness of spirit, and revengeful resentment, the three basic forms of intemperate anger, are therefore evil and contrary to order," nonetheless "anger is 'good' if, in accordance with the order of reason, it is brought into service for the true goals of man" (194-95). Furthermore, as Aquinas contends and Pieper also explains, a feigned gentleness or total lack of anger "not only is not a virtue, but, as St. Thomas expressly says, [is] a fault: *peccatum* and *vitium*" (196).

> Virtue, therefore is a characteristic marked by choice, residing in the mean relative to us, a characteristic defined by reason and as the prudent person would define it. Virtue is also a mean with respect to two vices, the one vice related to excess, the other to deficiency; and further, it is a mean because some vices fall short of and others exceed what should be the case in both passions and actions, whereas virtue discovers and choose the middle term.[16]

Importantly, Aristotle's framework for moral virtue sees virtue not merely as the opposite of a vice, but rather as a mean between two corresponding vices of excess and deficiency. For example, the opposite of courage is not just cowardice, but cowardice *and* recklessness; against friendliness is not simply surliness but also obsequious flattery; against hope not just despair but presumption, as well. The virtuous mean ought not to be understood as a mathematical mean between the two vices, for a particular virtue may reside closer to its vice of deficiency; another more closely to its corresponding vice of excess. Aristotle explains:

> In some cases, it is the deficiency that is more opposed to a given middle term, in some cases it is the excess. For example, it is not recklessness, which is an excess, but rather cowardice, which is a deficiency, that is more opposed to courage. Then again, it is not "insensibility," which is a deficiency, but rather licentiousness, an excess, that is more opposed to moderation (*NE* 1109a1-6).

Anger fits precisely into this schema for Aristotle – a mean between vices of deficiency and excess, though which tends more toward its deficiency. Perhaps surprisingly, as Aristotle proceeds to enumerate specific virtues, he lists anger as a type of virtue, for "in what concerns anger too there is an excess, a deficiency, and a mean…let us call the mean gentleness, since we speak of the person in the middle as gentle" (*NE* 1108a4-6). At first glance this seems to preclude anger as a virtue, for surely the gentle person eschews anger and keeps an even-keel. Yet such terminology can be misleading, and Aristotle himself recognizes this. He is quick to note that a complete lack of anger – the deficiency of being an "unirascible person" – is actually

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[16] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* trans. Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collins (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), II.6 (1106b35 – 1107a6). Hereafter cited parenthetically in text as *NE*.

a vice. His approach to anger situates it as a moral virtue lying between a vice of deficiency of the vindictive passion ("unirascibility" / *aorgesia*) and a corresponding vice of excessive vindictive passion ("irascibility" / *orgilotes*). The mean of appropriate anger manifests as "gentleness" (*praotes*), although Aristotle astutely qualifies these labels as mere practical conventions since these vices and virtues "are pretty much nameless" (*NE* 1108a4-9). Such a gentleness is not devoid of retaliation, as Nussbaum observes, for "Aristotle insists that the virtuous disposition in the area of retaliation is called *praotes*, mildness of temper; and he insists that the virtuous person will be more likely to err in the direction of deficient than of excessive retributive anger."[17] Charles Griswold unpacks this more fully, employing the term "mildness" rather than "gentleness," but nonetheless still capturing the difficulty in labeling the virtue-vice spectrum of anger:

> In running through the moral virtues Aristotle discusses the mean with respect to anger: to be angry "at the right things and toward the right people, and also in the right way, at the right time, and for the right length of time, is praised" (1125b31-32). Hitherto this "mean" condition has been nameless, so Aristotle calls it "mildness." But mildness immediately comes in for mild chiding, as it errs more "in the direction of deficiency, since the mild person is ready to pardon (*sungnome*), not eager to exact a penalty" (1126a1-3). Being too mild and pardoning is "slavish," for such a person fails to defend himself and his own. The excess of anger is irascibility. Once again, the mild person's fault is his tendency to excuse or to let the offender off the hook too quickly, and this is linked to the former's tendency to give up his anger too quickly.[18]

Thus, while the Aristotelian moral virtue of anger may tend closer toward the vice of deficiency than excess (or, put another way, toward meekness over wrath), the virtue is not entirely devoid of the vindictive passions. To do so would lapse into vice and miss the mark of virtue. Such

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[17] Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001), 393. She continues to quote from Aristotle, noting that "the mild person is not inclined to retribution, but rather to sympathetic understanding" (*NE* IV.5, 1126a2-3).

[18] Charles L. Griswold, *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 6-7.

would also seem inhuman, or perhaps result in a psychologically dangerous attempt at repression. Nonetheless, anger remains a tricky case in Aristotle's schema, "for it is not easy to define how, with whom, at what sorts of things, and for how long a time one ought to be angry: sometimes we praise those who are deficient and assert that they are gentle, sometimes those who are harsh, calling them manly" (*NE* 1109b14-20). While Aristotle considers some moderated manifestation of anger as moral virtue, acting well in this regard is ultimately "rare, praiseworthy, and noble" (*NE* 1109a30). Subsequent consideration in the light of a Christian ethics which prizes mercy and forgiveness further complicates the matter.

Aristotle's foundational virtue ethics and his consideration of anger provide an inescapable background for subsequent treatments of anger, be it the negative rejection of his approach (as in Seneca) or in the theological emendation and expansion of his theory (as in Aquinas). This account of virtue brings a few important characteristics of a kind of "righteous" or "justified" anger into relief: namely, (1) the importance of context, (2) its reliance on other interconnected virtues, and (3) the need for moderation rather than elimination or repression.

First, righteous anger is contextual, and its enactment as "righteous" depends on the timing, place, manner, and orientation toward the proper people and things (*NE* 1125b31-32). Context matters, and a particular manifestation of anger in a given circumstance may not be universally virtuous. Consequently, the application of practical wisdom (*phronesis*) and prudence are co-requisite with the virtuous exercise of anger. The virtue of anger thus stands in necessary relation and enactment with other virtues – never in isolation. To isolate anger in an abstract and theoretical manner precludes its exercise as virtue, as its virtuous exercise is dependent on its relationship with other virtues as well (this is a point to which shall return in greater detail later).

Finally, Aristotle's approach does not advocate the elimination or repression of anger, but rather its appropriate moderation and expression. This perspective will prove critical as a corrective against some misinterpretations of Christianity in subsequent centuries, and the drive to eliminate or to overcome all anger as if it were a moral evil.

Stoic Perspectives: The Elimination of Anger

As noted above, the Western tradition is far from univocal on this issue. Seneca and later Stoic philosophers reject Aristotle's more nuanced approach to anger, and they certainly resist according it any virtuous status. Far from being a characteristic "defined by reason and as the prudent person would define it" (*phronesis, NE* 1106b36), the Stoics rather consider anger to be a type of anti-reason that comes to infect rational beings. "It must be said," Seneca paradoxically observes, "that wild animals – and all creatures save the human being – are without anger: though anger is reason's enemy, it comes into being only where reason resides" (*OA* I.3.4). Furthermore, Seneca is careful to distinguish this from a tool or a passion that could be employed usefully through moderation by reason. He notes that while "Aristotle says that some passions, if used well, serve as weapons," such does not apply to anger (*OA* I.17.1). Seneca protests that anger is not subject to control and use, but inverts this relationship and overwhelms sober reason:

> That would be true if, like the arms of war, they could be taken up and put off at the judgment of the one who dons them. But these weapons that Aristotle gives to virtue fight all on their own; they don't wait for the hand that wields them, they're not possessed, they do the possessing. There's no need for other arms: nature has armed us sufficiently with reason, a missile that's sure, ever ready, and obedient, neither double-edged nor capable of being sent back against its master. Reason suffices, in and of itself, not only for planning ahead but also for the conduct of affairs. Indeed, what's more foolish than for reason to seek protection from anger, a stable, trustworthy, and healthy thing from one that is wavering, untrustworthy, and sickly? (*OA* I.17.1-2).

In the Stoic assessment, anger infects, overwhelms, and possesses us. It supplants the stable surety of reason with wavering vicissitudes, and inevitably spills over into violence and

retribution. The dire consequences of anger are unparalleled, as "no pestilence has been more costly for the human race" (*OA* I.1.2). Thus, we should strive to free ourselves from this passion entirely, an evil from which we must "cleanse our thoughts, and tear out by the roots any traces, however slight, that will grow back wherever they've clung fast. We shouldn't control anger but destroy it entirely – for what 'control' is there for a thing that's fundamentally wicked?" (*OA* III.42.1). Disenchanted by its destructive capacities, Seneca is uncompromising in his consideration of anger as an evil – a truly virtuous individual will not seek moderation and control, but outright elimination of anger.

Although Martha Nussbaum's perspectives on anger and revenge have developed over the years,[19] it is worth noting the critique she levies against Seneca's dismissal of anger as an evil. She takes aim at Seneca's privileged perspective on anger that is ignorant of the very real concerns of those marginalized and oppressed:

> By far the largest number of social ills caused by revenge concern damages to fortunes, status, power, and honor…a brief perusal of Seneca's *On Anger* bears out this claim. For although once in a while does he represent anger over a damage that an Aristotelian would think serious, far more frequently he shows powerful and pampered people committing acts of violence over trivial slights – a slave's breaking of a cup, a host's less-than-attentive treatment, a subordinate's less-than-fawning subservience. None of this is the subject matter of tragedy. And when we get our concerns adjusted, our occasions for intense anger will be fewer.[20]

The vantage point and examples employed by Seneca are sheltered, to say the least, and remain ignorant of "injustice and serious wrongdoing," to say nothing of systemic social injustices.

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[19] Nussbaum's 2016 *Anger and Forgiveness* adopts a far more sympathetic perspective to the Stoic position than her 2001 *Upheavals of Thought*. A genealogy of Nussbaum's thought on the topic is beyond my ability to offer, though both works increase the scope of reflections on anger from interpersonal relations to movements concerned with social justice – or revolutionary justice. Be they accomplished through anger and non-violence, or non-anger and non-violence, Nussbaum's works show the historical relationship that has existed, and at times been resisted, between anger and the struggle for social justice.

[20] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 393.

Nussbaum proceeds to conclude that, "In short, we should simply deny that the excesses of anger give us reason to remove it. We should boldly tell the Stoics that anger is sometimes justified and right. It is an appropriate response to injustice and serious wrongdoing. Indeed, extirpating anger would extirpate a major force for social justice and the defense of the oppressed."[21]

Attention to anger in the role of such social justice and defense of the oppressed is brought into further relief by Michael Jaycox, who places Nussbaum's claims in dialogue with African American thinkers writing on an ethics of "black rage," such as Bryan Massingale, Cornel West, bell hooks, and Audre Lord. As Jaycox notes, these thinkers provide a "second, critical discourse" in which the "ethical arguments about the justifiability of anger are framed primarily in terms of the social location of the agents who are angry."[22] In this discourse, the primary moral question becomes not the moderation, management, or elimination of anger – it is not "how to constrain the ways in which anger might find disproportionate expression in order to prevent social harm" – but rather the moral dilemma shifts to "how to address the social conditions that prompt the anger in the first place."[23] Anger consequently emerges as not simply a virtuous response to injustice, but also as a heuristic that points the way and animates one's response to such injustice. Nonetheless, as Jaycox tragically points out, this discourse "encounters significant difficulty in gaining credibility" and is met with suspicion, even amounting to disincentivizing the use of one's own anger "to resist the status quo, especially if they wish to avoid reinforcing oppressive stereotypes such as 'the angry black woman' or 'the

[21] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 394.

[22] Jaycox, "Civic Virtues of Social Anger," 125-27.

[23] Jaycox, "Civic Virtues of Social Anger," 126.

violent Muslim man.'"[24] Although a potential impetus for identifying and effecting change to unjust structures of oppression, the suspicion with which anger is viewed and its affinity with retribution serve to reinforce the Stoic perspective that anger is a pestilence and destructive passion, and should therefore be eliminated.

A "Burdened" Virtue?

A further disconnect separates both the Aristotelian and Stoic accounts of anger from the situation of those whose anger is provoked by injustice or oppression. The philosophers of antiquity, like many philosophers, write from a place of privilege and status, without the direct experience of marginalization or oppression that characterizes the responsive, potentially "virtuous" anger as considered by Aristotle and expanded by Aquinas. Furthermore, as Nussbaum's critique brings into relief, the writings of many in the Western tradition adopt a racialized and gendered perspective (typically of a white male) that is made normative, and which remains ignorant of the situations, contexts, and lived experience of many moral agents. In addition to Nussbaum's critiques, the work of Lisa Tessman on "burdened virtues" and the writings of Kate Ward on "moral luck" provide a valuable corrective against glorifying anger as a virtue – especially if it remains a burdened virtue or trait that is appropriate for resistance to oppression, but which does not contribute to the overall flourishing of an individual.[25] While

[24] Jaycox, "Civic Virtues of Social Anger," 127. Strikingly, a racial double-standard if not an outright hypocrisy seems to endure on this front. In the wake of the Capitol riot, many news reports have pointed to the disparity between law enforcement responses to Black Lives Matter protestors demonstrating peacefully in Washington, D.C., on 2 July 2020, as protestors were met with a bevy of tear gas, rubber bullets, and a swift response by police in riot gear, to the relative lack of force or even preparation for the riots that overran the Capitol by (primarily) white domestic terrorists on 6 January 2021.

[25] See Lisa Tessman, *Burdened Virtues: Virtue Ethics for Liberatory Struggles*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. See also Kate Ward, "Toward a Christian Virtue Account of Moral Luck," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics,* 38, no. 1 (2018): 131-145. Tessman writes of a form of moral trouble that afflicts those living under oppression – namely, that in her search for certain character traits that "could be recommended as virtues within the context of liberatory political movements," such an endeavor proved fruitless and frustrating to develop a list that could "unambivalently be morally praised." In the end, she identifies virtues (such as anger) as "practically

perhaps necessary, the "best" or "most virtuous response" in oppressive conditions may inevitably come at a great cost for the agent, and such a response not only fails to promote *eudaimonistic* flourishing but actually impedes it.[26]

Anger in oppressive circumstances may be necessary for survival and for resistance, but it is non-ideal and does not promote human flourishing. In fact, situations of oppression that rightly elicit anger may simultaneously "imperil one's development of virtue," and may even "demand members to cultivate traits that oppose the self's flourishing, such as anger or extreme self-sacrifice."[27] Yet as Ward is careful to observe with some degree of hope, tragic moral luck and oppressive situations that may not promote flourishing "need not be the last word," and she turns to the work of black womanist theologians as a supplement to the stronger caution and critique of moral luck and oppressive situations from feminist thinkers. As Ward notes, "moving from lament of moral luck to action in response, womanist theologians propose practicing self-love, working for justice with others, naming oppressive structures, drawing on Christian theology, and remaining accountable to the Christian community."[28] Without ignoring the critiques advanced by more feminist positions, the womanist reclamation of moral agency which maintains an eye toward justice shows how even a "burdened" or non-ideal virtue (such as

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necessitated for surviving oppression or morally necessitated for opposing it," but which nonetheless also carry a cost for the moral agent. Thus Tessman defines such "burdened virtues" as those virtues "that have the unusual feature of being disjoined from their bearer's own flourishing." Tessman, *Burdened Virtues,* 4-5.

[26] For Tessman, Aristotle's account of eudaimonia and virtue ethics "usually take for granted that the background conditions for virtue are being met…he does not focus on systemic sources of adversity that would cause some people's lives to be predictably fraught with terrible conditions." In such conditions, "the talk of the virtues becomes irrelevant for eudaimonia, since eudaimonia is simply out of reach." See Tessman, *Burdened Virtues,* 159-60.

[27] Ward, "Toward a Christian Virtue Account of Moral Luck," 134.

[28] Ward, "Toward a Christian Virtue Account of Moral Luck," 141-42.

anger) holds potential as a force for empowerment and change – even as a means to "triumph" over emotional, psychic, and physical assault.[29]

Aquinas: Morally Legitimate Anger, with the Guidance of Charity

Saint Thomas Aquinas's approach to the question of anger closely parallels that of Aristotle, though he is more explicit about the interconnected and socially-oriented nature of a virtuous – or morally legitimate – anger. Unlike Tessman's concept of burdened virtues, Aquinas holds "that we can learn how to feel angry in ways that contribute to our flourishing (*ST* 1-2, q. 24, aa. 1-2; 1-2, q. 46)," and he later treats Jesus Christ himself as an exemplar of "virtuous anger (*ST* 2-2, q. 157)."[30] Further still, the absence of anger in the wake of wrongdoing can be reason for blame, for "if we truly love ourselves…something is wrong with us if we do not get angry at someone who has deliberately unjustly harmed us."[31] Anger in response to a slight or injustice affirms one's standing as a moral agent, as a human being worthy of dignity, and is indicative of one's respect for the moral order – of a commitment to a sense of justice. Like Aristotle, a morally legitimate anger is balanced between vices of deficiency and excess. Yet Aquinas also broadens this perspective through recourse to Christian love, *caritas* or *agape*, and

[29] M. Shawn Copeland argues for the reevaluation of Christian virtues in the light of black women's suffering, and in doing so seeks to break free from "caricatures" of the cardinal virtues. By articulating a "theology of suffering in womanist perspective," she articulates a perspective characterized "by remembering and retelling, by resisting, by redeeming," which resists and makes meaning of the suffering, and promotes its own reclaimed virtues: "with motherwit, courage, sometimes their fists, and most often sass, Black women resisted the degradation of chattel slavery. Sass gave Black women a weapon of self-defense…with sass, Black women survived, even triumphed over emotional and psychic assault." See M. Shawn Copeland, "Wading through Many Sorrows," in *A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering,* ed. Emilie M. Townes (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 124-25.

[30] Stephen J. Pope and Janine P. Geske, "Anger, Forgiveness, and Restorative Justice in Light of Clerical Sexual Abuse and Its Cover-up," *Theological Studies* 80, no. 3 (2019): 615-16.

[31] Pope and Geske, "Anger, Forgiveness, and Restorative Justice," 616.

adds a distinctive teleological aim to punishment – not simply punitive justice, but an aim at correction and rehabilitation.

This is an important distinguishing feature of such morally legitimate anger – it does not tend strictly toward the destructive or seek punishment for its own sake (that is not to say that it does not tend toward just punishment – for justice "assigns to the wrongdoer *only* the kind and degree of pain necessary for the victim's vindication.")[32] Aquinas links this to a sense of Christian charity, love or *caritas* for our neighbor who has wronged us. "Rather than overreacting to the injury…the wise person seeks to understand clearly, judge fairly, and decide to act constructively. The angry person naturally wants the wrongdoer to receive some kind of appropriate punishment," but such punishment (save for instances of capital punishment [see *ST* 2-2, q. 64, a. 2]) is meant to be "corrective and rehabilitative rather than simply destructive."[33] This corrective and rehabilitative vindication may inflict pain against the will of the perpetrator, but such punishment ought to function out of *caritas* with concern for the good of the agent, the perpetrator, and the community as a whole. Such a concern for the effects of evil on the perpetrator and an attempt to redress such harm speak to the role of *caritas,* of love and concern for the well-being of the offender. It is this very concern, rooted in love, that constitutes a decisive innovation of Catholic moral teaching – what Catherine Kaveny helpfully identifies as a "crucial aspect of Catholic moral teaching that has been in grave danger of being eclipsed in both the manuals of moral theology and in contemporary secular ethics: the teaching that an evil act does its greatest damage to the one who performs it."[34] The perpetrator of evils is grievously

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[32] Pope and Geske, "Anger, Forgiveness, and Restorative Justice," 616.

[33] Pope and Geske, "Anger, Forgiveness, and Restorative Justice," 616.

[34] M. Cathleen Kaveny, "Appropriation of Evil: Cooperation's Mirror Image," *Theological Studies* 61, no. 2 (2000): 281.

injured by their commission, and even the demands of charity may require a punishment against their will for the sake of rehabilitation or correction. The outward orientation of anger here, with concern the rehabilitation of the offender, stands in stark contrast to the vengeful rage envisioned by Seneca or exemplified by an excess of vindictive passions.

Elsewhere, Pope elaborates on the corrective nature of morally legitimate anger, functioning in concert with other moderating virtues such as clemency and meekness:

> The other potential parts of temperance include the virtues of clemency and meekness. Clemency mitigates external punishment, whereas meekness moderates the passion for revenge (q. 157, a. 1). Note that anger, defined as the desire to punish or to have revenge (*appetitus vindictae*), is not necessarily evil (q.158, a. 1). Anger is legitimate when emotionally moderate and in accord with right reason ("zealous anger"), that is, when it promotes justice and the true correction of the offender. Like other emotions, it can be evil by either excess or deficiency (q. 158, a. 2).[35]

The legitimacy of anger, according to Pope's reading of Aquinas, hinges not only upon its moderation and rational execution (features shared with an Aristotelian account of virtuous anger), but also the promotion of justice and the "true correction of the offender." The social dimension of the virtue is not simply with regard for the common good of society (e.g., simply to lock away a criminal for the protection of society), but also with concern for the rehabilitation and correction of the offender. In this way justice can be moved away from a strictly retributive or punitive model toward one that is more rehabilitative and generative – for all parties involved.[36] While this may necessarily include the infliction of pain or the privation of some good, it cannot solely function on this register.

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[35] Stephen J. Pope, "Virtue Ethics in Thomas Aquinas," in *Virtue: Readings in Moral Theology No. 16*, eds. Charles E. Curran and Lisa A. Fullam (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2011), 19.

[36] Justice need not always lead to reconciliation (and in some instances, to speak of "re-conciliation" is a misnomer, such as in the South African context when there was no instance of "conciliation" to which the nation ought to return). For this reason, terms such as "generative," "restorative," or "rehabilitative" justice is preferred. Nonetheless, even a generative or rehabilitative justice can include some punitive elements, if the punishment proves instructive or assists in the correction of the offending party. On the development and advocacy of restorative justice models, especially deriving from developments in Catholic Social teaching and moral theology, see Kathryn Getek

Stephen Pope's reading of Aquinas on morally legitimate anger, one which is chastened by charity and oriented toward justice (for the common good, the victim, and the victimizer) finds validation in Pope Francis's Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium,* which similarly draws from Aquinas to situate a hierarchy of virtues ordered around mercy and love:

> Saint Thomas Aquinas taught that the Church's moral teaching has its own "hierarchy", in the virtues and in the acts which proceed from them. What counts above all else is "faith working through love" (*Gal* 5:6). Works of love directed to one's neighbor are the most perfect external manifestation of the interior grace of the Spirit…"In itself mercy is the greatest of the virtues, since all the others revolve around it and, more than this, it makes up for their deficiencies. This is particular to the superior virtue, and as such it is proper to God to have mercy, through which his omnipotence is manifested to the greatest degree."[37]

This affirmation of mercy as a superior virtue, one which directs and accompanies other virtues (such as morally legitimate anger) is not to supplant or deny the other virtues. Quite the contrary, it stands as an affirmation that virtues seldom stand alone or in isolation. Virtues are enacted and function in relation to one another, as an "organic unity," and that in such a harmonious totality or organic unity, each is important and illuminative to the others.[38]

Two key insights recur here when considered in the light of a Catholic (Thomistic) virtue ethics, both of which we must revisit through the lens of contemporary virtue ethics: (1) the interconnectedness of the virtues, specifically the balance of a tension between mercy and anger, oriented toward justice; and (2) the social orientation, in particular the pursuit of social justice

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Soltis and Katie Walker Grimes, "Order, Reform, and Abolition: Changes in Catholic Theological Imagination on Prisons and Punishment," *Theological Studies* 82, no. 1 (2021): 95-115. Soltis and Grimes observe that, "restorative justice emphasizes processes that actively involve all those impacted by crime in an effort to set things right. It is constructive, inclusive, and seek to respond to harm so that there can be accountability and, *to the extent possible*, a restoration of what has been violated and lost" (107, emphasis added).

[37] Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium,* §37.

[38] Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium,* §39: "Just as the organic unity existing among the virtues means that no one of them can be excluded from the Christian ideal, so no truth may be denied. The integrity of the Gospel message must not be deformed. What is more, each truth is better understood when related to the harmonious totality of the Christian message; in this context all of the truths are important and illumine one another."

and the common good, as well as the rehabilitation of offenders or restoration in society. These emphases help to situate more authentically anger as a virtue – neither treated in theoretical abstraction and isolation from other virtues, nor experienced as a self-enclosed passion over which a vengeful individual relentlessly broods.

Contemporary Insights: Auxiliary Virtues and Social Orientation

Jesuit moral theologian James F. Keenan, S.J., offers a helpful lens to consider how righteous indignation may function as a virtue. In a brief chapter, "Seven Reasons for Doing Virtue Ethics Today," Keenan posits that "as the reasons for doing virtue ethics unfold, our understanding of virtue ethics will develop as will our engagement with it."[39] While some of these reasons appear readily in Aristotelian and Thomistic accounts of virtue (such as offering a very "active" ethics, or being concerned with ordinary life, or the comprehensive system offered by virtue ethics), his latter three reasons offer an insightful hermeneutic through which to reconsider righteous indignation specifically as a potential virtue: namely, that virtues are interconnected, inherently social, and teach through exemplars.

Keenan makes explicit one of the insights of Aquinas pertaining to anger, and a realization running back to Socrates and Plato with respect to virtue: that virtues never stand alone, and that by their nature, "the virtues are related to one another."[40] Further still, when virtues are treated in artificial isolation and theoretical abstraction, they can become distorted and

[39] James F. Keenan, S.J., "Seven Reasons for Doing Virtue Ethics Today," in *Virtue and the Moral Life: Theological and Philosophical Perspectives*, eds. Kathryn Getek Soltis and William Werpehowski (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014), 3.

[40] Keenan, "Seven Reasons," 13.

prone to manipulation. When virtues such as temperance and fortitude are divorced from justice and charity, these practices cannot function properly or meaningfully. As Keenan observes:

> Plato realized the inadequacy of the Socratic belief that all one needed to be virtuous was the virtue of what we today would call practical reason. Likewise, we have always understood that standing up for justice requires not only a just mind and will, but a prudential judgment, a courageous spirit, and a balanced or temperate disposition.[41]

Keenan's insight brings into clarity a fundamental truth about virtues and virtue ethics: that "our emotional, spiritual, and intellectual capabilities or powers need to be developed on a lot of levels and they cannot be developed individually…the function of the virtues is to connect."[42] In this interconnected web or constellations of virtues, we can appreciate how the virtues build and act upon one another – that certain virtues direct and channel others, or perhaps animate and deploy "all the components within us that are engaged in moral acting."[43]

This perspective is particularly apropos with respect to anger, which is prone to volatility and easily manipulated. Either in an uncontrolled rage or the corrupting effects of brooding resentment, anger on its own can wreak havoc on an individual. Building on the previously mentioned assessment of morally legitimate anger in Aquinas's ethics, Pope situates such anger always and necessarily in relation to other virtues. He contends that Aquinas's ethic "appreciates the moral legitimacy of ordered anger, but it also offers moral leverage against the disordered anger that runs throughout our public moral discourse…public expressions of anger, indignation, and resentment are increasingly crowding out empathy, mutual respect, and self-awareness."[44] When divorced from concomitant virtues such as empathy and respect, anger can become

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[41] Keenan, "Seven Reasons," 13.

[42] Keenan, "Seven Reasons," 13-14.

[43] Keenan, "Seven Reasons," 14.

[44] Pope and Geske, "Anger, Forgiveness, and Restorative Justice," 618.

vindictive, vengeful, and embittering. Pope ultimately concludes that we must insist with Aquinas that, "anger can only be good if ordered to other virtues, particularly justice, patience, and practical wisdom," and that virtue ethics remains wary of "an array of intellectual and moral vices that can ensue when we allow anger or hostility to cloud our perspectives and twist our wills."[45] Anger can potentially function as a virtue, but only in proper relation to other virtues that guide and channel its animating powers. Anger does not sit at the zenith of a hierarchy of virtues, yet it does play an auxiliary role in the realization of justice when tempered by mercy.

Such an auxiliary function is evident in anger's chastening of patience as a virtue in Martin Luther King, Jr.'s *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*. Jaycox draws liberally from this instance, using it to articulate a sense of "prophetic prudence" in line with the civic virtue of "political prudence" with respect to social anger.[46] Jaycox suggests that a prophetic form of political prudence, made manifest through virtuous anger, can serve as a cognitive interruption of prevailing discourses in moral deliberation and effect a change. In this way, "prudence" is not synonymous with "restraint," but attains to a level of prophetic witness animated by social anger.[47] King's anger shines forth in his prophetic words, impatiently addressed to the more "pragmatic" white clergy, that, "there comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over, and men are no longer willing to be plunged into an abyss of injustice where they experience the blackness of corroding despair. I hope, sirs, you can understand our legitimate and unavoidable impatience."[48] Here, while not the primary or singular virtue enacted, morally legitimate anger

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[45] Pope and Geske, "Anger, Forgiveness, and Restorative Justice," 618.

[46] Jaycox, "Civic Virtues of Social Anger," 137.

[47] Jaycox, "Civic Virtues of Social Anger," 138.

[48] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from a Birmingham City Jail," in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.,* ed. James M. Washington (New York: HarperCollins, 1986), 292-93. As cited in Jaycox, "Civic Virtues of Social Anger," 139.

nonetheless plays an essential and animating role – perhaps even a corrective role against the counsels toward greater "political prudence" or to show more "patience," counsels that would have only perpetuated injustice and structures of systemic oppression. Yet even now, as then, such a dynamic is at play in our contemporary context, as Massingale's expressions of anger against patient silence in the face of injustice make plain in the present day.[49]

Keenan similarly builds on this relational nature of virtues, noting that the virtues are not only interdependent upon one another and thus animate the various powers within an individual person, but more importantly that the virtues "are disposed…to incorporate the person within the human network. Any virtue is never solely concerned with a personal good, but always also with the common good."[50] This truth became evident in Aquinas's consideration of anger as a moral virtue, oriented toward the rehabilitation and correction of a wrongdoer out of *caritas* as well as the protection and welfare of the wider community. Similarly, the critiques of Stoicism levied by Nussbaum and further expounded by Jaycox's engagement with African American ethics of "black rage" reveal a decidedly social dimension, and concern for the common good, that a virtuous enactment of anger can entail. Keenan points out that "the more we look at the virtues and appreciate that no virtue can stand alone, the more we realize the social function and goal of virtues and their practices."[51]

In this regard, anger poses a particular problem – as noted previously, it can serve either to isolate an individual in brooding resentment, or can provide an animating energy, the impetus and the power to galvanize groups to protest for meaningful change. Virtuous anger can give rise

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[49] See above, notes 13-14.

[50] Keenan, "Seven Reasons," 14.

[51] Keenan, "Seven Reasons," 15.

to solidarity and spur a group to the pursuit of justice. Inversely, vicious anger can isolate and sow strife, rendering one "hypersensitive to offenses, given to hasty and rash judgments, and prone to bear grudges, keep score of grievances, and nurse resentments. These can trigger emotional outbursts, harden into hate, inspire revenge fantasies, and drive one to aggressive violence or even destructive rage."[52] The stark contrast between non-violent protest as resistance and destructive riots speaks, in part, to the virtuous versus the vicious manifestations of anger.

This isolation born of resentment and rage is far from virtuous; it is, in fact, quite vicious and dehumanizing. With her characteristic flair for Greek tragedy and striking imagery, Nussbaum offers two companion images of the dehumanizing, isolating, and bestial tendencies that anger and revenge can unleash: the descent into madness of Euripides's *Hecuba*, and the vengeful Furies (Erinyes) in Aeschylus's *Oresteia*. Such individualism and isolation are made manifest as the Furies appear as "strange hybrids of the human and the bestial (or bestial/divine), both in appearance and in action. Although in form they resemble human women, they also resemble dogs…thrilled by the scent of blood. Their deeper beastliness shows in their speech, rational yet solipsistic, impervious to community, obsessed with revenge."[53] Even more striking, Nussbaum highlights the descent into an inhuman or bestial madness characterized by the desire for revenge and the isolation of a "solitary scheme of vengeance" in Euripides's *Hecuba*:

> Stricken by betrayal, immured within her solitary scheme of vengeance, cut off from all love and trust for others, Hecuba becomes, morally, a dog. The forecast that she will become a bitch with fiery eyes has already, in its deeper meaning, been fulfilled. For to become a being who trusts nobody, who accepts no promise and hears no persuasion, is already to be something other than human.[54]

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[52] Pope and Geske, "Anger, Forgiveness, and Restorative Justice," 613.

[53] Martha C. Nussbaum, "Aristotle on human nature and the foundations of ethics," in *World, Mind, and Ethics: Essays of the Philosophy of Bernard Williams*, eds. E.J. Altham and Ross Harrison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 97.

[54] Nussbaum, "Aristotle on human nature and the foundations of ethics," 97-98.

The contrast of the socially oriented, virtuous anger from that of the isolation wrought by vicious rage, "immured within her solitary scheme of vengeance," could not be clearer. Be it through the positive social-orientation of morally justified, virtuous anger as seen in Aquinas – or the negative portrayal of the isolating and dehumanizing trajectory of revenge and vicious rage – the inherently social nature of virtues provides a helpful and more authentic lens through which to consider the function of anger as a virtue.

Finally, the role of exemplars in a system of virtue ethics is critical. This is not an abstract theory or a theoretical rumination of unlikely ethical quandaries – rather, virtue ethics presupposes a lived reality and the enactment of virtue in real circumstances. Perhaps the concrete particularities of a specific situation or context will not be replicated exactly, but there are lessons to be modeled and learned through exemplars, whom Keenan describes as the "heroes and heroines, significant figures bearing characteristic virtue traits that the culture recommends to be emulated."[55] Instances of prophetic prudence, justified social anger, or morally legitimate anger at large-scale oppression can be found in numerous exemplars who stood up to racially-motivated injustices and systemic oppression, as was the case of Martin Luther King, Jr. mentioned above, or the examples of Mohandas Gandhi in British India and Nelson Mandela in South Africa under apartheid.[56] Yet even more so, from the faith perspective, we find the exemplars with respect to anger in the religious tradition, from depictions of YHWH and the pathos of the prophets in the Hebrew Bible to Jesus Christ himself. Such figures were slow to anger, though not devoid of anger in an overly permissive, apathetic manner. The sight

[55] Keenan, "Seven Reasons," 12.

[56] Gandhi and Mandela, in addition to King, are prominent exemplars highlighted by Nussbaum in her *Anger and Forgiveness* (2016).

of injustice and the prevalence of social abuses, oppression, and marginalization stirred up their anger – in the service of truth and justice, and without abandoning the fundamental disposition of charity, *caritas*, even to the offenders.

While the Western philosophical and theological traditions rightly view anger with caution and suspicion, when properly cultivated in tandem with other virtues a breed of righteous indignation stands as a potentially productive, animating moral virtue. The vindictive passions elicited at the experience of injustice or even the sight of harm speaks to a recognition of the intrinsic moral worth of an individual, reaffirms common human dignity, and upholds respect for the moral order. Morally legitimate anger can deepen a felt sense of solidarity with the oppressed, animate social movements for change, and serve as a corrective against permissiveness, apathy, or lack of recognition in the face of injustice.

Furthermore, in a process of forgiveness, the suppression of all anger or a denial of its root causes can be a dangerous and unreasonable demand – a claim that merits further attention in the subsequent chapter on memory, resentment, and trauma. And yet, as Pope and Geske contend, "forgiveness does not morally oblige us to cease feeling angry at our wrongdoers, but as a Christian commitment it does require us to view them fundamentally as neighbors who are loved by God…even in depraved moments, the most vicious malefactors are not monsters."[57] Anger that is acknowledged but not stoked, that is felt but not all-consuming, that is neither suppressed nor denied can prove therapeutic and productive. Anger that is channeled toward justice does not seek revenge or nurse hatred, but it does not blithely pretend that no offense has taken place. Forgiveness need not imply the suppression of anger, but its proper recognition and channeling toward justice, tempered by charity.

[57] Pope and Geske, "Anger, Forgiveness, and Restorative Justice," 624.

Chapter Two

Traumatic Truths and the Healing of Memory:
Remembering Rightly, without Revenge

"The past… has an embarrassing and persistent way of returning and haunting us. Unless we look the beast in the eye, we find it has an uncanny habit of returning to hold us hostage."
– Archbishop Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* [1]

"I thought to myself that she was a better Christian than I was,
if she could entirely forgive him. I cannot say, with truth,
that the news of my old master's death softened my feelings toward him.
There are wrongs which even the grave does not bury.
The man was odious to me while he lived, and his memory is odious now."
– Harriet Ann Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* [2]

Introduction

While anger may be the more immediate reaction to injustice, the temporal extension of forgiveness as a process opens onto the delicate questions of memory and forgetting, speech and silence, truth and trauma. Furthermore, and especially in the face of grave injustices or crimes against humanity, concerns over collective memory, history, and memorialization vastly expand the scope of these questions into the public sphere – extending well beyond one's particular community, geographic location, and even time period (as past generations are called to mind and future generations affected). Yet much like the consideration of anger in the previous chapter, memory similarly occupies a necessary albeit precarious place in the path to forgiveness. Be it personal or communal, the remembrance of past injustice can become a roadblock to obstruct forgiveness, a grudge to nurse, an unbearable burden both inescapable and

[1] Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 28.

[2] Harriet Ann Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (New York: Clydesdale Press, 2016), 191.

impossible to ignore. And yet without memory of the offense, there is nothing to forgive. Without memory in the face of wrongdoing, an essential part of one's identity or a group's history becomes repressed and denied, and a fragile, false conciliation is "foolishly built upon sandy ground" (Matt. 7:26) through a failure to recognize and grapple with the past. Such a failure leads to a repression or denial which, in Tutu's words, will inevitably return to haunt us, to "hold us hostage" unless we "look the beast in the eye."[3] Worse still, as Miroslav Volf contends, "if no one remembers a misdeed or names it publicly, it remains invisible. To the outside observer, its victim is not a victim and its perpetrator is not a perpetrator. Both are misperceived because the suffering of the one and the violence of the other go unseen."[4] Volf describes such a failure to remember or a lack of recognition as a type of "double injustice…the first when the original deed is done and the second when it disappears."[5] This recurring theme of double injustice, coupled with the duty to remember and the ethics (despite dangers) of remembrance shall be the focus of the present chapter.

The task of forgiveness condones neither the repressive denial of memory nor the obsessive dwelling on hurt and resentment (or guilt and shame) that remembrance can bear. Rather, taking a cue from both Catholic and Protestant theological reflections as well as the direct experiences of survivors responding to concrete instances of injustice (in particular, the Shoah and South African apartheid), I argue for the necessity of memories to be healed and

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[3] Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness,* 28.

[4] Miroslav Volf, *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2006), 29. Volf's writings on reconciliation, forgiveness, and encounter span decades and continue to develop and shift. His 1996 *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* is perhaps his best-known work but is by no means his last word on the matter. His earlier contributions are included below, though my primary engagement with Volf on the question of memory and remembrance in the present chapter is his 2006 *The End of Memory*.

[5] Volf, *The End of Memory*, 29.

purified – transformed so as to be remembered without being relived, cast in a new light that frees memory from its accompanying resentment, and which opens the path for mutual recognition and acknowledgment. Such a healing and transformation must prudently navigate the pitfalls and dangers of memory, speech, and memorialization, conscious of the many manipulations and abuses that may occur and the ways in which "remembering wrongly" can serve to perpetuate – even deepen – injustice. Ultimately, I argue that to remember rightly requires not strong, definitive accounts or fixed narratives, but the fragile speech of wounded words – those of testimony, protest, lamentation, and even art – by which the tensions of speech and silence, memory and forgetting can be embraced and lived out.

Memory and Forgetting: Healing Transformation and the Purification of Memories

The process of forgiveness must overcome the obstacles posed by resentful memories without denying the memory entirely. Pope Saint John Paul II advocates for the "healing" or "purification of memories" without denying their necessity in both interpersonal and communal forgiveness.[6] Consequently, the Catholic Church's responses to grave injustice hold fast to the duty for proper remembrance – a duty which Holocaust Remembrance Day messages of

[6] Avery Cardinal Dulles surveys the numerous instances of John Paul II on the healing and purification of memories. See Avery Dulles, "When To Forgive?" in *Church and Society: The Lawrence J. McGinley Lectures, 1988-2007* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 386n16. This notion of purification as a painful yet necessary process that opens onto a "new stage of intimacy or relational identity" is prominent in the Christian mystical tradition, especially in the works of John of the Cross. See Constance FitzGerald, O.C.D., "John of the Cross and Prayer," in *Prayer in the Catholic Tradition: A Handbook of Pastoral Approaches,* ed. Robert J. Wicks (Cincinnati, OH: Franciscan Media, 2016), 335-51. As she relates the experience of purification to memory and transformation: "the pain of transition and emergence to a deeper love and life in God go hand in hand…only occasionally receiving hints of the more intense purifications and more profound transformations yet to come" (340). As in the spiritual life, the purification of memory as a means to transformed relationships may be a painful and extended process, yet one which holds the promise of yielding great fruits. Fitzgerald specifically identifies the purification of memory and its "mysterious unravelling" as "*the key* to the deepest dimensions of the dark night transition" (342, emphasis original).

subsequent pontiffs annually advocate.[7] Protestant theologian Miroslav Volf adopts a more radical (and, in some cases, ambivalent) position on memory, one which recognizes the need for a "transformation" yet also an eschatological hope for a "letting go," conscious of the fact that memory functions as both "shield and sword."[8] For Volf, the memory of a grievance that reinforces narratives of victimization and victimhood leave the *victim* as the most dangerous agent in the process of forgiveness, leading them to hijack the notion of justice with disguised drives for revenge.[9]

Consequently, Volf draws from the recognition of Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel in his advocacy for the "redeeming" of memory – conscious of the historical tendency that "the negative use of memory has loomed larger throughout history than has its positive use."[10] Indeed, memory is malleable and easily manipulated, prone to abuse and can even perpetuate

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[7] John Paul II's successors, Benedict XVI and Francis, are no exception to this and annually hold addresses to mark Holocaust Remembrance Day on or around 27 January. These messages emphasize the necessity of remembrance as a human act of love, of a duty to the victims, and as a warning for the future. As shall be explored further in the pages that follow, Pope Francis notably expands these upon these themes of forgiveness and the duty to remember in his most recent Encyclical Letter, *Fratelli Tutti* [On Fraternity and Social Friendship], promulgated 3 October 2020.

[8] Miroslav Volf, *The End of Memory,* 19-35. Elsewhere Volf nuances his position by noting that he is "not arguing against memory and for amnesia. Memory is so fundamental to our being human that we would not be able to function without it," and that it is fundamental not only to actions, but identity: "it is as simple as that, no memory, no human identity" (147). And yet, as he elaborates, "Not only am I in favor of remembering, I also *dis*favor ascribing equal importance to remembering and non-remembering, as though their supposed parity meant that we should strive to maintain a happy balance between them," yet he nonetheless recognizes that in the eschatologically hoped-for world-to-come, "my argument is not that memory is bad and amnesia good…but rather than under certain conditions the absence of memory of wrongs suffered is desirable" (148).

[9] In this regard, Volf does not diverge too far from the Catholic perspective as presented in John Paul II's 1980 encyclical letter on mercy, *Dives in Misericordia* ("Rich in Mercy"), where the pontiff writes: "Although they continue to appeal to the idea of justice, nevertheless experience shows that other negative forces have gained the upper hand over justice, such as spite, hatred and even cruelty. In such cases, the desire to annihilate the enemy, limit his freedom, or even force him into total dependence, becomes the fundamental motive for action; and this contrasts with the essence of justice, which by its nature tends to establish equality and harmony between the parties in conflict. This kind of abuse of the idea of justice and the practical distortion of it show how far human action can deviate from justice itself, even when it is being undertaken in the name of justice." John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia* (30 November 1980), §12.

[10] Volf, *The End of Memory*, 34.

injustice through revenge. Thus Volf cautions that, in the case of memory, we must never lose sight of the proper goal and appropriate end of memory, "the formation of the communion of love between all people, including victims and perpetrators."[11] His nuanced position on the redemption of memory, the necessity of remembrance and yet the desirability of non-remembrance in certain cases can never be separated from its eschatological hope for transformation in Christ. Memory both grounds and threatens such a project, and so must be navigated prudently and prayerfully. Without lapsing into either an unqualified endorsement or a fearful denial of memory, this chapter considers the potential pathways to the transformation, healing, and proper role of memory in forgiveness.

From a Catholic perspective, Avery Cardinal Dulles expounds on these themes drawing primarily from the pontificate of John Paul II, although concerns for right remembrance continue to characterize Catholic teaching under the papacies of Benedict XVI and Francis. Noting that the healing of memories cannot be simply to "draw a veil" over past hurts or misdeeds, Dulles contends that the process of forgiveness must rather "face them with perfect honesty, in the hope that each group will listen sympathetically to the stories of the other, overcome misunderstandings and exaggerations, recognize its own misdeeds, and begin to forge a common fund of shared memories."[12] Indeed, as noted earlier in the introduction to this project, Dulles is highly critical of the "gross misunderstanding" that Christianity enthrones an unqualified, automatic, and universal forgiveness in the face of wrongdoing.[13] The forgiveness of sins and the healing effected by Jesus in the Gospel stories time and again emphasize the recognition of

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[11] Volf, *The End of Memory,* 232.

[12] Dulles, "When to Forgive?" in *Church and Society*, 384.

[13] Dulles, "When to Forgive?" in *Church and Society,* 377.

wrongdoing, confession of sin, and plea for help – and that these occur in an *encounter* and a *restoration* to community. Automatic forgiveness dispensed on demand would be an insult to hurting victims and a threat to the stability of the community as appropriate recognition of both one's wrongdoing and the suffering of another is glossed over or denied entirely. Indeed, as John Paul II contends, "in no passage of the Gospel message does forgiveness, or mercy as its source, mean indulgence toward evil, toward scandals, toward injury or insult."[14] Healing and forgiveness deny neither the wrongdoing nor the pain it caused, but rather recognize both in humility and a desire to set things right.

Burdened with pain or ridden with shame, memories cry out to be heard and, in being vocalized and recognized, open a space for potential healing and transformation. There is a hope for healing that does not sublimate entirely but can transform, for "though your sins be like scarlet, they may become white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they may become white as wool" (Isaiah 1:18). Scripture and tradition both testify to the notion that the vestiges of sin may not disappear entirely, but through the mercy and power of God can be transformed and given new meaning. Even the Risen Christ continues to bear the wounds of the Cross, although as the story of doubting Thomas reveals, they have been transformed by God's grace from a site of pain into a space of recognition and an invitation to encounter (John 20:24-29).[15]

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[14] John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia*, §14.

[15] Elsewhere, Church doctors such as Augustine, Aquinas, and Bede considered the question of whether Christ and even the martyr-saints would continue to bear the gruesome wounds of their executions in the risen body. Drawing from both Augustine and Bede, Aquinas notes that "It was fitting for Christ's soul at His Resurrection to resume the body with its scars. In the first place, for Christ's own glory. For Bede says on Luke 24:40 that He kept His scars not from inability to heal them, 'but to wear them as an everlasting trophy of His victory.' Hence Augustine says (*De Civ. Dei* xxii): 'Perhaps in that kingdom we shall see on the bodies of the Martyrs the traces of the wounds which they bore for Christ's name: because it will not be a deformity, but a dignity in them; and a certain kind of beauty will shine in them, in the body, though not of the body.'" Aquinas, *ST* III, q. 54, a. 4.

Pope Francis takes up this theme of appropriate remembrance in the process of forgiveness in his social encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, placing a positive emphasis on the powers and scope of forgiveness despite horrors that cannot (and should not) be effaced. What change are neither the facts of the past nor the hurts that has been suffered, but the victims' perspectives on their suffering and their choices in responding. Of the transformative power of forgiveness even in the face of unforgettable evils, Francis writes:

> Forgiving does not mean forgetting. Or better, in the face of a reality that can in no way be denied, relativized, or concealed, forgiveness is still possible. In the face of an action that can never be tolerated, justified or excused, we can still forgive. In the face of something that cannot be forgotten for any reason, we can still forgive…those who truly forgive do not forget. Instead, they choose not to yield to the same destructive force that caused them so much suffering. They break the vicious cycle; they halt the advance of the forces of destruction.[16]

The power of forgiveness does not efface the past; quite the contrary, it requires remembrance. But the choice to exact revenge, to respond in kind, to dwell hurtfully on an unchanging past is foresworn in favor of a new perspective – one which actively chooses to "break the vicious cycle," to opt for the possibility of healing over cycles of vengeance and violence.

Even more secular approaches to forgiveness and memory grasp this fundamental need to preserve past memory and yet effect some change in our relationship to it. Charles Griswold situates this as a task of forgiveness through narrative (or, as we shall consider below, through testimony and fragile speech). He notes that forgiveness, whether it be interpersonal or in the wider social-political realm, "confronts in a particular way the brute metaphysical fact that the past cannot be changed."[17] Nonetheless, the task of narrative and forgiveness "helps to explain

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[16] Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti* (3 October 2020), §§250-51.

[17] Charles Griswold, *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 100.

just how the past can nonetheless change without pretense to undoing it, or ignoring, avoiding, rationalizing, or forgetting it. One may adopt a different *perspective* on it, attach a different meaning to it, respond to it in a different way," and in doing so open a space for healing.[18] This "change without pretense to undoing," or the adoption of a new perspective may not come easily, or immediately. Yet hope remains for such a transformation to be effected, even in the face of some dire situations and horrendous evils. Some concrete and successful examples, particularly of racially motivated injustices, will prove helpful to ground our consideration of these more theoretical and idealized visions.

Therapeutic Truths: Liberation from Pain and Shame

Drawing from his personal experience in establishing and chairing South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), Archbishop Desmond Tutu speaks passionately about the need for truth and remembrance through testimony, a third way of remembrance between simple amnesty and amnesia that also avoids the "Pyrrhic" victory of a retributive justice that sought to document and to punish every transgressive action through a court of law.[19] Indeed, Tutu himself recalls the delicate political debates surrounding the formation of the TRC, a middle-ground approach that avoided the shortcomings of absolute amnesty without any acknowledgement of wrongdoing, but which equally eschewed the inevitably destructive results of pursuing retributive justice, unrelenting punishment, and even revenge.[20] In his later writings,

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[18] Griswold, *Forgiveness,* 100.

[19] Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, 23.

[20] Tutu describes the need to balance the demands of justice, accountability, stability, peace, and reconciliation. He acknowledges the less-than-desirable alternatives to the TRC as the potential pursuit of retributive justice "and had a South Africa lying in ashes," or a general amnesty which was no different than a forcible national amnesia (Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness,* 23-28). Either process would have, understandably, left one side or the other with "simmering resentments" (20). The TRC provided a way in which acknowledgement and truth telling were fostered, cycles of revenge and retribution limited, and a peaceful path to national reconciliation at least rendered possible.

Volf concedes this point more generally, arguing that forgiveness is a Christian duty over retributive justice since, inevitably, "consistent enforcement of justice would wreak havoc in a world shot through with transgression. It may rid the world of evil, but at the cost of the world's destruction."[21] Such is far from a worthwhile gamble, especially when avenues of peace-building and reconciliation could be pursued through the hard work of truth and reconciliation. This is not to say that the TRC provided a panacea to solve all of South Africa's problems – indeed, many still exist to the present day.[22] But it did provide a forum for the toil of acknowledgement and truth telling, for reconciliation and a stable peace. Importantly, Tutu's witness helps to bring these considerations from abstract or theological assessments of memory into concrete, historical, and personal experience. He thus provides a hopeful model for the potentially healing effects of a certain type of remembrance on both victims and victimizers.

Such a forum for personal truth through testimony, "to tell their stories in their own words," was not the forensic factual truth of a trial but the "personal truth, the truth of wounded memories…a healing truth," that emerged in the process.[23] Tutu importantly distinguishes this

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[21] Miroslav Volf, *Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 160. Volf draws from St. Paul's Letter to the Romans to justify this point, noting how "in trying to overcome evil by enforcing justice, there is always the danger that we may be 'overcome by evil' ourselves (Romans 12:21). Wreaking destruction upon the world while potentially succumbing to the power of evil ourselves are two reasons we should not repay the evildoer in kind, with 'evil for evil' (Romans 12:17). John Paul II's *Dives in Misericordia* §12 makes a similar point on how readily calls for justice can be corrupted by spite, hatred, and revenge. See above, page 35, note 9. Volf's theological claim and Tutu's more practical-political observation both bolster the observations made by Jean-Luc Marion that evil, while commonly misperceived as illogical and irrational, actually operates according to a highly rigorous logic aimed at self-perpetuation and magnification: the logic of revenge, for "iniquity spreads forth a rigorous injustice, ordered and irremediably logical" with an "indisputable rigor." See Jean-Luc Marion, "Evil in Person," in *Prolegomena to Charity*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 1.

[22] Charles Villa-Vicencio highlights the necessity of a TRC despite its limitations and shortcomings. He points specifically to the need for much more work in South Africa "to promote participatory democracy, to fight crime and corruption, to enhance economic equality, and to deliver on the ideals of the Constitution," and yet the TRC made this possible in the first place since "without qualified amnesty, the advances in political change and structural transformation would not have been possible." Charles Villa-Vicencio, *Walk With Us and Listen: Political Reconciliation in Africa* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2009), 2.

[23] Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, 26-27.

process from that of a court of law, the examination under which "would have left many of those who came to testify…bewildered and even more traumatized than before," yet the space of the TRC "had had a marked therapeutic effect on them."[24] The task at hand was not to set a definitive record in a court of law beyond all reasonable doubt (strong speech and fixed narratives "for the record" under pain of perjury), but to open a space for victims and victimizers to disclose their experiences and to have them acknowledged. This recognition – an "acknowledgment…essential to personal and social healing" – constitutes an act of justice itself, in Volf's estimation, for it responds to a strong urge and need for victims to "make known what they have suffered."[25] A similar space opens for the victimizers, where amnesty was not automatic and the acknowledgement of wrongdoing could liberate from shame and guilt, and even the victims could recognize how atrocious acts of dehumanization led to the dehumanization of the victimizer, as well. Volf similarly notes, in line with many in psychoanalytic and contemporary trauma theory, the observation that deep-seated psychological wounds and scarring "caused by suffering can be healed only if a person passes through the narrow door of painful memories."[26] Simply letting "bygones be bygones" or attempting to "forgive and forget" leaves unresolved wounds that can fester and haunt.

Perhaps one of the most striking and controversial (and yet also hopeful) claims of Tutu and the TRC is how testimony and acknowledgment led even the victims to see their victimizers

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[24] Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, 27.

[25] Volf, *The End of Memory*, 29.

[26] Volf, *The End of Memory*, 27. Here, Volf draws from Freudian psychoanalysis in comparing an unexpressed traumatic experience and its unaddressed memory as "an invasive pathogen" which "long after its entry must continue to be regarded as an agent that is still at work." Sigmund Freud, *Studies in Hysteria,* vol. 2 of *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: Hogarth, 1955), 6. As cited in Volf, *The End of Memory,* 27n12.

as fellow victims of a vicious system, arguing that in our interconnectedness any act of dehumanization dehumanizes the agent inflicting the damage and not simply the one who suffers it. He recalls the experience of the TRC acknowledgments in raw detail, observing:

> In a real sense we might add that even the supporters of apartheid were victims of the vicious system which they implemented and which they supported so enthusiastically. This is not an example for the morally earnest of ethical indifferentism…our humanity was intertwined. The humanity of the perpetrator of apartheid's atrocities was caught up and bound up with that of his victim whether he liked it or not. In the process of dehumanizing another…inexorably the perpetrator was being dehumanized as well. I used to say that the oppressor was dehumanized as much as, if not more than, the oppressed….[27]

Tutu faced harsh pushback, even vitriol, for making such a claim though defended this notion of a common suffering, mutual dehumanization by virtue of a common humanity and interconnectedness. The TRC thus accomplished far more, in the eyes of many, than providing a forum for airing grievances and speaking one's own wounded truth. Yes, therapeutic and cathartic truth telling led to the unburdening of victims and victimizers alike, but more profoundly an acknowledgment of the hurts and a mutual recognition of wrongdoing, of mutual humanity, and of mutual suffering (although disproportionate) also emerged.

Such a process of mutual listening, of testimony through wounded words, succeeded in effecting what Volf had described, in his earlier writings, as an "enlargement of thinking," the "reversal of perspectives," a "double vision," by which one breaks free from the myopic vision of "looking at each other through the sights of our own guns" in which "we see only the rightness of our own cause…[and] strive to eliminate others from our world, not to grant them space in ourselves."[28] Instead, a forum was opened in which a formal – even ritualized – means

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[27] Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness,* 103.

[28] Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 215.

recognition and listening could occur; a space which provided the conditions for the possibility of mutual recognition and acknowledgement *as well as* therapeutic benefits of slackening the burdens weighing down all parties involved. Responding to critics that this is an all-too-easy means of superficial healing, or one which denies the demands of justice, Tutu emphasizes how such healing actually enables growth closer toward the emulation of divine compassion, an even more demanding and difficult task than mere juridical law and punitive justice:

> Those who think this opens the door for moral laxity have obviously never been in love, for love is much more demanding than law…as I listened in the TRC to the stories of perpetrators of human rights violations, I realized how each of us has this capacity for the most awful evil – every one of us. None of us could predict that if we had been subjected to the same influences, the same conditioning, we would not have turned out like these perpetrators. This is not to condone or excuse what they did. It is to be filled more and more with the compassion of God, looking on and weeping that one of His beloved has come to such a sad pass. We have to say to ourselves with deep feeling, not with a cheap pietism, "There but for the grace of God go I."[29]

A sense of compassion, sympathy, and fellow-feeling can be born out of these testimonies, a healing encounter of mutual recognition through personal, wounded words – not fixed narratives that seek to demonize one group and extol another.[30] In doing so, memory can be transformed, purified, and healed, and the isolating burdens of shame and guilt or resentment and pain can be

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[29] Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, 85-86.

[30] For a more philosophical treatment rejecting the credibility of fixed narratives, the incredulity of "grand narratives" and the demise of all "metanarratives," see Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge,* trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1984). Beyond Lyotard's more theoretical approach, efforts at "strong" or "definitive" historical narrative/memory can prove dangerous, inadequate, and easily manipulated. Charles Griswold demonstrates the failure of memorial in his assessment of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. as an attempt at an incomplete yet purportedly definitive means of dealing with the tremendous grief of a lost war in "Truth, Memory, and Civic Reconciliation without Apology," in *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 195-210. Susan Neiman similarly highlights the problem of fixed accounts, noting not only their inadequacy as Griswold emphasizes, but their danger for manipulation and abuse. She considers the erection and power of Confederate monuments constructed throughout the Southern United States "some fifty years after the war" to solidify the myth of the "Lost Cause," and again in the 1960s as a backlash against the Civil Rights Movement and desegregation efforts. As Neiman notes, "monuments are not about history; they are values made visible. That's why we build memorials to some parts of history and ignore others…what is at stake is not the past, but the present and the future." Susan Neiman, *Learning from the Germans: Race and the Memory of Evil* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019), 261-63.

alleviated without being denied. "The black person entered…weighed down by the anguish and burden of oppression, with the memory of being treated like rubbish gnawing away at her vitals like some corrosive acid," while, "the white person entered…burdened by the load of guilt for having enjoyed the fruits of oppression and injustice," and both left as "someone new," with burdens lifted and made "free, transfigured, made into a new person."[31] Without truth, this space for forgiveness remains closed, for in Tutu's estimation only with truth and remembrance can there be the space for forgiveness and reconciliation:

> Forgiving and being reconciled are not about pretending that things are other than they are. It is not patting one another on the back and turning a blind eye to the wrong. True reconciliation exposes the awfulness, the abuse, the pain, the degradation, the truth. It could sometimes make things worse. It is a risky undertaking but in the end it is worthwhile, because in the end dealing with the real situation helps to being real healing. Spurious reconciliation can bring only spurious healing.[32]

The risky business of truth-telling and remembrance speaks to the very precarious position of memory in the first place, but without acknowledgement and recognition such memories cannot be transformed. And such a remembrance bears consequences not merely for the individuals who experienced or inflicted the suffering, but for future generations and humanity more broadly. Tutu concludes,

> In forgiving, people are not being asked to forget. On the contrary, it is important to remember, so that we should not let such atrocities happen again. Forgiveness does not mean condoning what has been done. It means taking what happened seriously and not minimizing it; drawing out the sting in the memory that threatens to poison our entire existence.[33]

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[31] Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, 7-8.

[32] Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, 270-71.

[33] Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, 271.

Drawing out this poison alleviates the burden and the dehumanizing threat that resentments pose within the victim. It is a loss, but a liberating loss.[34] And so to counter the "double injustice" about which Volf warns we see rather a "double benefit" in this process of remembrance: liberating loss and healing from a poison to one's "entire existence" while providing a warning and testimony for future generations, so that "we should not let such atrocities happen again."

Such an experience is not just a singular stroke of luck in the South African context. Mutual recognition in other contexts also bears witness to the oft-quoted adage that "to forgive is to set a prisoner free, and discover that prisoner was you."[35] On this point, the experience of Immaculée Ilibagiza provides a rather poignant and incredulous account from a different context – that of the 1994 Rwandan genocide – in which she encounters and forgives the man who killed her family and had even attempted to kill her. Strikingly, for all her suffering and grief at so immeasurable a loss, Ilibagiza here focuses more on the burden borne *and suffered* by her victimizer, Felicien. Ilibagiza writes of the encounter, "The battered man remained hunched and kneeling, too embarrassed to stand and face me…I wept at the sight of his suffering. Felicien had let the devil enter his heart, and the evil had ruined his life like a cancer in his soul. He was now the victim of his victims, destined to live in torment and regret."[36] And yet, remarkably, she speaks of the burden being lifted through forgiveness: "I was overwhelmed with pity for the man…I could feel his shame. I reached out, touched his hands lightly, and quietly said what I'd come to say. 'I forgive you.' My heart eased immediately, and I saw the tension release in

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[34] "Forgiving means abandoning your right to pay back the perpetrator in his own coin, but it is a loss that liberates the victim." Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, 272.

[35] See the work of Calvinist theologian/ethicist Lewis B. Smedes, *Forgive and Forget: Healing the Hurts We Don't Deserve* (New York: HarperOne, 2007).

[36] Immaculée Ilibagiza, *Left to Tell: Finding God Amidst the Rwandan Holocaust* (New York: Hay House, 2006), 203-4.

Felicien's shoulders."[37] Without wishing to romanticize such a shocking and admirable account, here stands an astonishingly true example in which forgiveness liberates both the victim and the victimizer, leads to a mutual recognition and pity, and testifies to the dehumanization suffered by both parties in the wake of tremendous evil. His tension and burden releases, her heart eases immediately; the weight of a mutually burdensome past is lifted and allows for contact and recognition. This forgiveness which liberates, touches, and embraces recalls that of the Loving Father toward the Prodigal Son, as contrasted to that of the older brother: as the Father holds close and clings to his youngest son in forgiveness and mercy, the Prodigal Son is unburdened of his shame and regret while the other brother clings to his resentments and anger, weighed down by the nursing of grudges and clinging to the memory of (his brother's) past sins (Luke 15:11-32). The Wisdom of Sirach similarly testifies that only sinners cling to the abominations of wrath and anger, that the vengeful will face the Lord's vengeance, and yet for those who forgive their sins shall likewise be forgiven (Sir. 27:30-28:7). Clinging to wrath and anger, resentment and pain, shame and guilt: such are the burdens that need healing and transformation, a "liberating loss" to which Tutu and Ilibagiza witness.

It is here that we see a concrete manifestation of the dangers of memory, and yet with hope for its transformation: for where resentment and a refusal to recognize remain stuck bitterly in the past without hope for a new future, simply forgetting only serves to deny the past entirely and live in a present perpetually haunted by the shadows of what it futilely seeks to repress. Beyond these two destructive approaches emerges a third way: right remembrance, in which truth is acknowledged through wounded words and a forgiveness which can bear the weight of the past while opening onto the possibility of a future with hope is made possible.

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[37] Ilibagiza, *Left to Tell,* 204.

Hope for Non-Remembrance: Aspiring to Divine Mercy?

And yet, for all the apparent benefits and even necessity to remember (or, to remember rightly, to transform memories and purify them from resentment and pain), certain theological notions of divine forgiveness further complicate this task. Indeed, while the Catholic position is quite consistent on the need for remembrance and recognition, Volf's position is far more nuanced and ambivalent (and continues to develop over time), though his approach in many ways mirrors the eschatological hope of a divine form of forgiveness to which we ought to aspire. Such a view of forgiveness allows not only for the transformation of memories, but of a "letting go," setting so far aside the resentment and hurt to the point of a non-remembering.

Volf's ambivalent position on memory – through transformation and letting go – adopts a decidedly eschatological tone that aspires to a divine, grace-filled and grace-enabled notion of forgiveness and non-remembrance. He asks that although "we can let go of memories of wrongs suffered…should we?"[38] Unlike some other perspectives (and despite his previous writings on the role of memory and redeeming memories), Volf does endorse forgetfulness and non-remembrance in a qualified manner. Yet such a qualification hinges upon an unrealized eschatological hope: he carefully clarifies the extent to which non-remembrance is a good, "the not-coming-to-mind of wrongs suffered *after* justice has been served and *after* entrance into a secure world of perfect love."[39] Thus it is only "after Christ has completed the eschatological transition through us, both [my offender] and I will be able to let the memory of wrongdoing slip into oblivion – a memory whose help as my guardian and servant of justice will no longer be

[38] Volf, *The End of Memory,* 203.

[39] Volf, *The End of Memory,* 203.

needed."[40] Volf unabashedly emphasizes the perfection of non-remembering in the eschatological world-to-come: "Memories of suffered wrongs will not come to the minds of the citizens of the world to come, for in it they will perfectly enjoy God and one another in God."[41] Yet such a view ultimately rests upon the grace and transformation effected by God, one which in many ways we remain unable to craft or to attain this side of the eschaton.

Nonetheless, for Volf, this does not mean we cannot aspire to and look toward a transformation so radical as to enable that letting go. Alexander Pope's famous adage, "to err is human, to forgive, divine,"[42] finds renewed expression in Volf's advocacy that:

> We make our own God's miracle of forgiveness. Echoing God's unfathomable graciousness, we decouple the deed from the doer, the offense from the offender. We blot out the offense so it no longer mars the offender. That is why the non-remembrance of wrongs suffered appropriately crowns forgiveness. Grace-filled forgiveness and the non-remembrance of offenses is scandalous.[43]

Such is the exceedingly radical demand laid upon us in the injunction to "forgive and you shall be forgiven," or in the oft-broken promise that we pray by begging of God to "forgive us our trespasses *as we forgive those who trespass against us*" (Matt. 6:12-14). While we may have become accustomed to making such pleas in our daily prayer, we must not become desensitized to the very scandalous nature of the mercy of God itself! This is the scandal of a God who takes on and conquers the sins of humanity as a whole, a God who willingly suffers and dies for the salvation of those who rejected, scorned, tortured, and killed the same God who so desperately sought them out. Scandalous, indeed – "but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block for

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[40] Volf, *The End of Memory,* 181.

[41] Volf, *The End of Memory,* 177.

[42] Alexander Pope, "An Essay on Criticism: Part II," in *Essay on Man and Other Poems* (Mineola, NY: Dover Thrift Editions, 1994), 17.

[43] Volf, *The End of Memory,* 208.

Jews and foolishness for Gentiles" (1 Cor. 1:23), for "God, who is rich in mercy, because of the great love he had for us…brought us to life in Christ" (Eph. 2:4), "for God so loved the world that he gave his only Son…not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him" (John 3:16-17). Without disregarding the necessary and valuable efforts at forgiveness and reconciliation, the ultimate hope for its fullest realization comes through the grace of God.

To complicate matters further, one cannot deny that scriptural depictions of divine mercy include many instances of forgetfulness or non-remembrance. Time and again in scripture, God's dealing with the memory of sinfulness goes beyond the mere healing/purification of memory that the Catholic position advocates (and which, ultimately, preserves the now-transformed memory). For indeed, "as the heavens tower over the earth, so God's mercy towers over those who fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has God removed our sins from us" (Ps. 103:11-12). God sets such an unfathomable distance between us and our sins that even the memory of them is "tread underfoot and cast into the depths of the sea" (Mic. 7:19), the God who declares that "for my own sake I wipe out your offenses; your sins I remember no more" (Isa. 43:25). Such a hope is not just a divine declaration, but an urgent plea for mercy made in prayer by sinners, "remember your compassion and mercy, for they are ages old. Remember no more the sins of my youth, remember me according to your mercy" (Ps. 25:6-7), a plea that God seems content to answer, "for I will forgive their iniquity and no longer remember their sin" (Jer. 31:34) and "having forgiven us all our transgressions, obliterating the bond against us, he also removed it" (Col. 2:14). For even those who are thoroughly wicked, should they repent and do what is right, "none of the crimes he committed shall be remembered against him; he shall live because of the justice he has shown," (Ezek. 18:22) a non-remembrance born through a love which "keeps no record of wrongs" (1 Cor. 13:5).

Volf recognizes that such a radical form of non-remembering, desirable though it may be, is only realizable through the transformation of God's grace. It is ultimately a task of God's grace breaking upon us and beyond our ability to attain on our own. While a complication for these reflections on the role of memory, it proves important to keep us grounded in the realization that ultimately the true healing of forgiveness is not a purely political, social, or uniquely human task – it is one that looks to and is enabled by God's grace, and that its fullest realization awaits transformation in God.[44]

Speaking of the Monstrous: A Duty and a Warning for Humanity

The task of memory and remembrance relates closely to the tension between speech and silence in the public sphere – moving us from consideration of memory as a personal or interior burden to the external forum of history, remembrance, memorialization, and humanity more broadly. In considering a crime against humanity or grave injustices, the necessity of right remembrance extends beyond the direct, personal experience of victims and victimizers. There is a duty and a value imposed on all of humanity, including future generations. A seemingly universal recognition emerges regarding the value of remembrance so as to avoid repeated injustices – a remembering of the "monstrous" that warns (*monere*) and shows (*monstrare*) so as to avoid being doomed to the repetition of historical atrocities.[45] Indeed, a debt of humanity and

[44] It is important to qualify that such an eschatological hope is not an invitation to complacency or inaction, faithfully presuming in God the "realization of things hoped for" (Heb. 11:1) without any human undertaking or response. The work of German theologian Johann Baptist Metz proves instructive on this point, articulating the need for a theology that provides a "hermeneutics of eschatological transformation," one that "does justice to humanity, to the matter at hand, and to the times," and yet which also has the task of "mediating between an eschatological concept of transformation and that concept of transformation shaped by technological and instrumental reality." See Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology,* trans. J. Matthew Ashley (New York: Herder & Herder, 2007), 107-8.

[45] Richard Kearney, *Strangers, Gods, and Monsters: Interpreting Otherness* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 5-6.

a duty to remember exists, but it also bears practical benefits that the repression of memory would deny. Pope Francis notes the multifaceted nature of the duty to remember, looking not only to the individual victim, but common bonds of humanity and the dangers of repetition for future generations to come:

> We commemorate the victims of the Shoah and all the people persecuted and deported by the Nazi regime. Remembering is an expression of humanity. Remembering is a sign of civilization. Remembering is a condition for a better future of peace and fraternity. Remembering also means being careful because these things can happen again, beginning with ideological proposals that claim to save a people and ending by destroying a people and humanity. Be aware of how this road of death, of extermination and brutality began.[46]

Once again, the pontiff here emphasizes that an ethics of remembrance struggles with the past and honors the pain of victims and survivors, yet such a task remains inseparable from the duty to warn and thereby to safeguard the future.[47] The world, in its past sinfulness and evils as well as its uncertain future, stand in need of salvation and redemption – a redemption held latent in painful yet instructive memories. Drawing from atrocities as far ranging as the slave trade, ethnic killings, the Shoah, and the use of atomic weapons, Pope Francis elaborates further in *Fratelli Tutti* on the critical need of remembrance and speech for the sake of deceased victims, present witnesses, and unborn generations to come, writing:

> We cannot allow present and future generations to lose the memory of what happened. It is a memory that ensures and encourages the building of a more fair and fraternal future. Neither must we forget the persecutions, the slave trade and the ethnic killings that

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[46] Pope Francis, "General Audience from the Vatican: Holocaust Remembrance Day," 27 January 2021.

[47] Once again, it is important to note the consistency and continuity across the pontificates of Francis, Benedict XVI, and John Paul II on this front. Perhaps of greatest significance stands the famous 1998 "Vatican Apology" to the Jewish people for the Church's failure to oppose more publicly the Nazi Reich. John Paul II's introductory letter to the CDF statement, "We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah," speaks of his hope that the document "enable memory to play its necessary part in the process of shaping a future in which the unspeakable iniquity of the Shoah will never again be possible," as well as an encouragement for the Church's "sons and daughters to purify their hearts through repentance of past errors and infidelities," and to recognize that "there is no future without memory." See John Paul II, "Letter on the Occasion of the Publication of the Document 'We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah.'" 12 March 1998.

> continue in various countries, as well as the many other historical events that make us ashamed of our humanity. They need to be remembered, always and ever anew. We must never grow accustomed or inured to them. Nowadays, it is easy to be tempted to turn the page, to say that all these things happened long ago and we should look to the future. For God's sake, no! We can never move forward without remembering the past; we do not progress without an honest and unclouded memory. We need to keep alive the flame of collective conscience, bearing witness to succeeding generations to the horror of what happened, because that witness awakens and preserves the memory of the victims, so that the conscience of humanity may rise up in the face of every desire for dominance and destruction.[48]

Indeed, a perennial demand for remembrance "always and ever anew" can never be completed but stands as a constant duty for the sake of humanity – past, present, and future. Such a remembrance holds protective and salvific effects. As Elie Wiesel testified before the German Reichstag, "We remember Auschwitz and all that it symbolizes because we believe that, in spite of the past and its horrors, the world is worthy of salvation; and salvation, like redemption, can only be found in memory."[49] Or even more bluntly, the famous declaration of Theodor Adorno that, "the premier demand upon all education is that Auschwitz not happen again."[50] This cry of "never again!" encompasses all three temporal extensions and value of memory – recourse to the past, instructive in the present, with hope for the future.

Concern here immediately emerges as to whether such an approach relegates past victims, especially the deceased, to merely instrumental objects whose "purpose" is to warn and admonish future generations. Survivors, historians, and future generations must also navigate the delicate questions of the moral and legal standing to speak on behalf of the victims – namely, who has the right to speak on their behalf, must one have suffered directly in order to have

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[48] Francis, *Fratelli Tutti,* §§248-49.

[49] Elie Wiesel, *From the Kingdom of Memory: Reminiscences* (New York: Summit, 1990), 201. As quoted in Miroslav Volf, *The End of Memory*, 19.

[50] Theodor W. Adorno, "Education After Auschwitz," in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords,* trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 191-204.

credibility, and what care must be taken to avoid an unjust appropriation of the plight of others? Such are appropriate cautions and critical observations, even for the writing of this thesis itself.[51] In the face of abject suffering and loss, the ability for those far-removed from the plight of others to reflect upon these events – comfortably distanced from both the physical pain and spiritual anguish experienced – can become something of a trivialization, if not an outright scandal. Such a concern is a valid question to critique the way in which memory is appropriated – is it a legitimate remembering, or merely an appropriation for our own purposes? Volf proves instructive on this point, noting that while "for almost half a century we have stressed the overarching importance of remembering for the sake of victims," we must let go of the "cherished notion" that we remember wrongs "solely out of concern for the victims."[52] He rightly advocates a more expansive understanding of the purview of memory – one which must show concern for perpetrators as well. Furthermore, the very notion of a "crime against humanity" bears upon the whole of humanity by virtue of that common connection – a crime

[51] While many prominent works on forgiveness and reconciliation have been written by survivors and victims of terrible atrocities (Levinas, Ricoeur, Volf, Ilibagiza, Tutu, Jankélévitch, Wiesel, etc.), the topic has nonetheless received considerable attention in recent years from academics and those with a comfortable distance from any experience of true victimization. Jeffrie G. Murphy notes the importance of admitting and recognizing such a distance when appropriate, and quips that his work *Forgiveness and Mercy* "should be subtitled, 'An Outsider's View,'" adding that he must be clear that "my current views are essentially intellectual and theoretical rather than autobiographical in nature. Although I have over the years suffered my share of petty slights and insults, I have led an astoundingly fortunate life in the realm of victimization. I have experienced some small scale immorality, but nothing that I would identify as evil." Jeffrie G. Murphy, "Forgiveness, Reconciliation and Responding to Evil: A Philosophical Overview," in *Fordham Urban Law Journal* 27, no. 5 (1999), 1355-56. Similarly, Richard Kearney notes the need always to consider and keep in mind the hermeneutic grounding of the subject, recalling the perennial question of Paul Ricoeur, "*d'où parlez-vous?*" ("From where do you speak?"). See Richard Kearney, "Where I Speak From: A Short Intellectual Autobiography," in *Debating Otherness with Richard Kearney: Perspectives from South Africa*, ed. D.P Veldsman and Y. Steenkamp (Cape Town: AOSIS, 2018), 36-37. While suffering atrocities and evil is not a precondition to reflect upon forgiveness and reconciliation, it is necessary to admit that, even in the writing of this thesis, the author does enjoy a comfortable distance from first-hand experiences of victimization, evil, and suffering.

[52] Volf, *The End of Memory*, 231.

whose impact extends (by definition, albeit to varying degrees) beyond any one ethnic group, geographic situation, and temporal location.

German theologian Dorothee Soelle argues from a more radical position, claiming that an instrumental use of the memory of the victims is in some ways unavoidable, and in many ways ethically necessary: "there is no way for us to love them other than to incorporate them into our work at living," and so all remembering of the dead is a "double need" that recognizes their "being used…to help us, to change us," but that we have no other way to love them independent of this.[53] As Soelle asks, "is any other relationship with the dead conceivable? Doesn't all remembering of them and all praying for them, all eating in remembrance of them have this character, that we 'need' the dead in a double sense, of wanting them and making use of them?"[54] The fact that memory of the sufferings and deaths of the victims can serve a useful purpose for future generations is not grounds to refuse such memory, unless we reduce such memory to purely self-serving instrumental value. Soelle concludes, "through our behavior we can turn them into 'the devil's martyrs' posthumously, who confirm the eternal cycle of injustice under the sun and bring ourselves to speechlessness; or we can use them for praise to God."[55] Without appropriating the memory of the deceased or of suffering *simply* for educational and preventive value, we must also recognize that a wider duty to speak and to remember are enjoined upon humanity as a whole. Such a duty rightly bears multiple and intertwined obligations and consequences.

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[53] Dorothee Soelle, *Suffering,* trans. Everett R. Kalin (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 149.

[54] Soelle, *Suffering*, 149.

[55] Soelle, *Suffering*, 150.

The Need to Speak

In contemporary considerations of forgiveness, and more broadly in any response to horrendous evils and atrocities suffered, a cautious consensus has emerged around the "need to speak" – namely, that an obligation exists not only on the part of victims and survivors, but even on the part of bystanders and future generations, to *say* something. Indeed, while "forgive and forget" may be a popular mantra in common parlance, any attempt at simply "forgetting" or remaining silent would be antithetical to forgiveness itself. The ethics of remembrance explored above in the previous section bears upon humanity as a whole – even those who may have no "remembrance" of the particular events due to geographic or temporal distances. Nonetheless, an ethical imperative emerges to remember and to speak out. In more striking terms than Volf's admonition against a "double injustice," Paul Ricoeur famously declared in the wake of the Shoah that, "to remain silent is effectively to kill the victims twice," an admonition that Richard Kearney similarly takes up and expands in his work on "the immemorial," and an echo of Emmanuel Levinas's chilling claim that "if we remain silence about the Holocaust, the SS have won."[56] Such admonitions are neither exaggerated nor reserved simply to the deceased victims, but to any who have suffered injustice without even the slightest recognition of their plight. Desmond Tutu, at the outset of the TRC, defended its use over and against any program of blanket amnesty, for "to accept national amnesia would…in effect be to victimize the victims of apartheid a second time around. We would have denied something that contributed to the identity of who they were."[57] If future generations and the survivors were to purge the events from the

[56] Paul Ricoeur, "The Memory of Suffering," in *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination,* trans. David Pellauer (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 290. See also Richard Kearney, "Evil, Monstrosity and the Sublime," and "The Immemorial," in *Strangers, Gods, and Monsters,* 95-96; 179-90.

[57] Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, 29.

collective social memory and historical accounts, then the persecutors' goal of not merely physical destruction but complete metaphysical annihilation would be achieved through the abolition of memory, not to mention the pursuit of justice would be impossible if memory were denied and repressed – the realization of the "double injustice" against which Volf warns. Be it through unwitting ignorance, spiteful refusal, unconcerned apathy, or even understandable fear, to remain silent accomplishes the task that even the perpetrators of genocides and the Shoah failed to achieve: the complete metaphysical annihilation of the victims, a systemic erasure of both their physical bodies as well as their memory and heritage. An imperative to speak out and to remember emerges on ethical grounds, looking simultaneously into the past to the victim *and* toward the future for the sake of education and admonition of subsequent generations.

Many in trauma theory also endorse this need to speak as a means of catharsis or therapeutic healing, a process of healing and empowerment for victims and survivors.[58] As noted above, such can be therapeutic rather than retraumatizing for victims to ease their burdens and to find recognition of their suffering. Volf similarly outlines how the public recognition of painful experiences can provide personal healing, acknowledgement of wrongdoing, solidarity among

[58] While psychoanalysis endorses a talking cure more broadly, trauma theory specifically recognizes the need to witness and speak in order to reassert control, create meaning, or facilitate integration in the wake of disruptive, overwhelming traumatic experiences. This does not imply a comprehensive and complete accounting of the traumatic episode, but more importantly provides an opportunity (and confirms one's ability) to respond at all, to be able to put words and some response to that which overwhelmed in the first place. On the value of such speech as initial response in the wake of trauma, see Shoshana Felman, "Education and Crisis, or the Vicissitudes of Teaching," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory,* ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 13-60. Susan Brison presses this further and argues how the response of narrative and speech not only proves therapeutic for the meaning-making of the individual, but also allows for the establishment (or restoration) of disrupted communal bonds and relationships when undertaken in dialogue with others (i.e., fellow victims and survivors, or with a therapist). See Susan Brison, *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of the Self* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002). The influential work of Bessel A. van der Kolk is attentive to the physiological effects of trauma, and potential therapeutic pathways through not only speech but also embodied approaches to recovery in Bessel A. van der Kolk, "Pathways to Recovery," in *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Penguin Books, 2014), 205-348.

the victims, and protection from future violence.[59] Philosopher of religion Tamsin Jones has done considerable work on trauma theory and the reclamation of personal narratives in the wake of violence, noting the need for empowerment and coping, healing catharsis, and meaning making on the part of the survivor – as well as a means to find affirmation and support by the surrounding community.[60] The ability to speak and to give voice to one's experience of victimization can prove critical to meaning making and personal coping strategies in the wake of significant trauma.[61] Beyond mere recognition, speech and narrative provide a healthy and stabilizing means of "meaning making" or "sense making" of uncontrollable and decentering traumatic events. The experience of trauma necessitates that identities (both individual and of groups) be sorted out — that they be established or redefined, bolstered, and protected. Especially in the wake of traumatic violence or catastrophic disaster, a cohesive narrative identity and a coherent worldview can be salvaged after the traumatizing and destructive effects of horrendous evils. The drive to silence out of fear of retraumatizing victims may, in fact, achieve quite the opposite: for while in the face of the traumatic and the horrendous we approach the limit of what can be said, thought, articulated, and arguably even experienced, such meaning

[59] Volf, *The End of Memory*, 27-34.

[60] Tamsin Jones, "Making Sense of Traumatic Violence," plenary session address at the *International Network of Philosophy of Religion (INPR)* colloquium (Paris, France), 20 June 2019. On catharsis and decathexis, Melissa Kelley provides a helpful overview of the developments in trauma theory and responses to grief in *Grief: Contemporary Theory and the Practice of Ministry* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 33-40.

[61] In recent years, trauma theory and trauma studies have emerged as useful hermeneutic lenses to interpret otherwise horrifying accounts in even scripture itself – those which detail violence, death, destruction, and even rape in the scriptural texts. When seen through the lenses of meaning making and a community attempting to find sense or meaning in the midst of chaos and loss, the performative speaking or recounting enables meaning making rather than historical recounting, provides a space of healing and recognition for a community rather than the mere documentation of events or theological claims. See Kathleen M. O'Connor, "Reclaiming Jeremiah's Violence," in *Aesthetics of Violence in the Prophets,* editors Chris Franke and Julia M. O'Brien (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 37-49. See also Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette, *Bible through the Lens of Trauma* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016).

making is a necessary working through for healing and restoration, an empowerment in the face of utter futility.

A number of personal memoirs capture this need to speak quite forcefully — both for personal therapeutic reasons, meaning making within a more coherent worldview, as well as one's ethical obligation to past victims and future generations. Ilibagiza's memoir of the Rwandan genocide, *Left to Tell,* emphasizes her understanding that her very survival places a moral obligation on her to continue to speak, to keep the story alive, so that others learn from the events.[62] Primo Levi's *The Black Hole of Auschwitz,* adopts a similar approach, as a "safeguard against the loss of a collective memory" about some of the horrors that happened.[63] And while no amount of speech can undo the tragedies or bring back the dead, silence will only further kill the victims by erasing their memory. As Vladimir Jankélévitch laments in his searing indictment of the German people following the loss of his family and millions of Jews in the Shoah:

> Only one resource remains…here where we can 'do' nothing we can at least *feel,* inexhaustibly…. Today when the sophists recommend forgetfulness, we will forcefully mark our mute and impotent horror before the dogs of hate; we will think hard about the agony of the deportees without sepulchers and of the little children who did not come back. Because this agony will last until the end of the world.[64]

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[62] Ilibagiza, *Left to Tell*, xvii; 208-09. Ilibagiza bookends her memoir with faith-filled convictions about a reason or purpose for her survival – to bear witness to the fact that "our lives our interconnected, that we're meant to learn from one another's experiences" (xvii), and to be a witness to "God's power at work…God saved my soul and spared my life for a reason: He left me to tell my story to others and show as many people as possible the healing power of His love and forgiveness…God's message extends beyond borders: anyone in the world can learn to forgive those who have injured them, however great or small that injury may be" (208-09).

[63] Primo Levi, *The Black Hole of Auschwitz,* trans. Sharon Wood (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005). Elsewhere Levi discusses his initial desire that any remnants or touchstones of memory of the Nazi regime ought to be torn down, destroyed and replaced, though later became convinced of their preservation when he recognized their value was monuments of warning (*monere*, *monstrare*). As Levi writes, "They teach better than any treatise or memorial how inhuman the Hitlerite regime was." See Primo Levi, "Revisiting the Camps," in *The Art of Memory: Holocaust Memorials in History,* ed. James Young (New York: Prestel Press, 1994), 185.

[64] Vladimir Jankélévitch, "Should We Pardon Them?," trans. Ann Hobart, *Critical Inquiry* 22 (1996), 554, 572.

The experiences and memories of victims and survivors need not only remembrance but articulation, as well – a working through that honors the victims, preserves their memory, and yet also warns all of humanity. In Jankélévitch's estimation, any advocacy to the contrary of forgetfulness and silence – even if well-intentioned – is the deceptive allure of a sophistical trick.

Despite this, a tension exists with the need for (and in some cases, the inevitability of) silence. Kearney criticizes heavily such positions in the work of Theodor Adorno and Jean Francois Lyotard and what he labels as their "post-poetics of silence" which sees silence as the only possible response to a travesty such as the Shoah, "because the terror of the Holocaust has become absolutized, by virtue of its singularity…it cannot be said or represented. Qua unspeakable trauma, it warrants not a 'talking cure', nor language of protest, but silence."[65] Resignation to silence as the only possible response leaves humanity, in Kearney's estimation, "helpless before the genuinely moral claims of certain historical *realities*."[66]

Sacred Silence?

And yet, for all the apparent consensus on the ethical need to speak, silence has its value and its place – even, perhaps, a power.[67] Problems quickly begin to arise if one overemphasizes speech and narrative in coming to terms with horrors of the past. Namely, can words ever do justice to the event — and, if they can, what words are to be used, and who has the right to speak? What sense can be made of contradictory positions or statements made by different

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[65] Kearney, *Strangers, Gods, and Monsters,* 94-95.

[66] Kearney, *Strangers, Gods, and Monsters,* 94.

[67] A common demonstration of the natural human recourse to, and the power of, silence appears in the tendency to adopt "moments of silence" as appropriate spaces of prayer, commemoration, reverence, and remembrance of those who have died. The power of silence extends beyond the realm of religion and remembrance, as well. The artistic use of silence in the performances of mimes, in silent films, and frequently in museums speaks to the power of silence not only where speech would be inadequate but would fail entirely or even detract from the remembrance.

victims? Further concerns arise when asking whether excessively speaking about something renders it trivial, or desensitizes the general public to the event itself. Such a concern haunted Jankélévitch who, in an impassioned polemic and lament about the atrocities of German war crimes, opens his "Should We Pardon Them?" with the observation that, "It is sometimes said that the deportees…begin to tire their contemporaries by too often invoking Auschwitz and Oradour. Our contemporaries, it seems, have had enough of it."[68] Such an observation seems strangely prophetic in the present day, when comparisons to Nazi Germany appear as a commonplace (and oftentimes exaggerated) means to disparage political figures, in a time when casual jokes about the Holocaust elicit laughter rather than horror and scorn, and when advocates for racial justice or reactionaries against racial injustice are frequently dismissed through accusations of simply "playing the race card." Whether through excessive speech or as a convenient excuse to be dismissive, trivialization and desensitization remain points of concern.

Some strands of trauma theory itself also caution against excessive speech or forced remembrance of an event.[69] When we speak and commemorate, do we run the risk of re-traumatizing the victims, as Tutu noted is a very real possibility in critical examination through courtrooms and news reporting? The concern remains over whether forcing or requiring speech demands that the survivors *relive* rather than merely *retell* their experience. Such an approach can be imprisoning rather than empowering, despite the good intentions motivating the need to speak and to remember. And as far as collective identity is concerned, labeling a whole class of people or an ethnic group as "victims" and another as "perpetrators" can prove alienating, stigmatizing, or destructive for the personal and collective identities of all involved.

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[68] Jankélévitch, "Should We Pardon Them?," 552.

[69] Jones, "Making Sense of Traumatic Violence," 20 June 2019.

Furthermore, I criticize what seems to be a misguided bias against silence, considering it solely as born out of ignorance or rejection: namely, the view that either (1) one remains silent out of apathy or fear, and is thereby complicit through inaction; (2) one chooses silence out of a spiteful or willful decision to deny the experience; or (3) one remains ignorant of the event, and is thereby unwillingly and unknowingly complicit. Yet such a framework denies different types or styles of silence, some of which are more "active" recognitions than a manifestation of apathy, spite, or ignorance. For example, there is the silence born out of awe and respect, of being moved beyond words and the ability to articulate oneself. Some horrors and tragedies defy words, and to try to put them into words or into speech invariably trivializes the event or fails to do it justice. Or, more positively, silence can be a manifestation of true intimacy and shared empathy — there is no need to speak, simply the desire to be with and to recognize the suffering of another in a compassion that is beyond words. Consider the Book of Job, for example, in which the titular character quickly emerges as a paradigm of human suffering. It is remarkable and yet often overlooked that, once Job is smitten with tragedy through incomparable losses in family, wealth, and health, before either Job's lament or his three friends' responses (by Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar) collapse in contradictions, silence is the only appropriate response. The friends initially arrive and yet before they can utter a word they "raised their voices and wept aloud; they tore their robes, and threw dust in the air upon their heads. They sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great" (Job 2:12-13).

As evidence of such a tension between speech and silence even within the duty to remember, contrast Pope Francis's address for Holocaust Remembrance Day 2020 with his words, cited above, from 2021. While the 2021 text unequivocally advocates remembrance as an

act of shared humanity and its necessity, just one year prior he criticized the tendency of our society to "squander words," writing:

> How many unhelpful words are spoken, how much time is wasted arguing, accusing, shouting insults, without a real concern for what we say. Silence, on the other hand, helps to keep memory alive. If we lose our memory, we destroy our future. May the anniversary of unspeakable cruelty…serve as a summons to pause, to be still and to remember. We need to do this, lest we become indifferent.[70]

Far from a denial of the event or a refusal to recognize, the silence and stillness endorsed by Francis enables us to remember in reverence, to remember rightly, to steer clear of facile or empty words. In the face of horrendous evils, we can be moved to a place beyond words where shock and horror, lament and tears, and the stillness of reverent silence may be the only appropriate responses. Beyond the more comfortable yet thoughtless reaction to "squander" words in cheap solutions and empty platitudes, sitting in the silence challenges us to be more engaged, less indifferent, and fully present. Benedict XVI made a similar connection during his pilgrimage to the Holy Land, which included a visit to the Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem. He noted that the "cry raised against every act of injustice and violence…a perpetual reproach against the spilling of innocent blood," arises and echoes within our hearts only "as we stand here in silence."[71] Far from a silence of indifference and apathy, such a silence forces us to confront reality deeply and to be shaken to the core – a silence far more attuned to truth than the wasted words "without a real concern for what we say."[72]

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[70] Pope Francis, "Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to a Delegation of the 'Simon Wiesenthal Center,'" Consistory Hall, 20 January 2020.

[71] Pope Benedict XVI, "Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI during His Visit to the Yad Vashem Memorial," Jerusalem, Israel, 11 May 2009.

[72] Apathy, indifference, or a failure to bother are all helpful ways of reconstruing "sinfulness" and "sin" in moral theology. Pope Francis rails against such a globalization of indifference and a lack of concern in numerous homilies and codifies them more formally in his encyclical letter *Fratelli Tutti,* §30. Helpfully, moral theologian James Keenan, S.J., redefines sin as "the failure to bother to love," a definition that liberates our concept of sin from strident individualism and extends into the social sphere. See James F. Keenan, *Moral Wisdom: Lessons and Texts*

Living Out the Tension: Fragile Speech and Wounded Words

Artistic expression provides one such means of embracing and incarnating this tension between speech and silence, memory and forgetting. Toni Morrison's poem addressed to the victims of September 11, 2001 captures this tension well, conveying the need to express the inexpressible, the drive to suspend all speech and to "purge my language of hyperbole; of its eagerness to analyze the levels of wickedness."[73] She continues to grapple (paradoxically, through words) on the desire and need to speak that is overpowered by the heavy pall of silence, and yet which reveals the very opposite of indifference:

> But I would not say
> a word until I could set aside all I know or believe about
> nations, wars, leaders, the governed and the ungovernable;
> all I suspect about armor and entrails. First I would freshen
> my tongue, abandon sentences crafted to know evil…
> To speak to you, the dead of September 11, I must not claim
> false intimacy or summon an overheated heart glazed
> just in time for a camera. I must be steady and I must be clear,
> knowing all the time that I have nothing to say – no words
> stronger than the steel that pressed you into itself; no scripture
> older or more elegant than the ancient atoms you
> have become.
> And I have nothing to give either – except this gesture,
> this thread thrown between your humanity and mine:
> *I want to hold you in my arms* and as your soul
> got shot of its box of flesh to understand, as you have done, the wit
> of eternity: its gift of unhinged release tearing through
> the darkness of its knell. [74]

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from the Catholic Tradition (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 42. Importantly, this sinful apathy or the failure to bother need not be synonymous with silence; quite the contrary, they can be revealed through unreflective and excessive words. As Pope Francis rightly points out, such wasted words without concern betray a level of disinterest or disengagement far more than a silence that stands aghast and in heartbreak.

[73] Toni Morrison, "The Dead of September 11," in *The Source of Self-Regard: Selected Essays, Speeches, and Meditations* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2019), 3.

[74] Morrison, "The Dead of September 11," 3-4.

Perhaps it is where speech and narrative fail that the fragile speech of poetry mirrors those wounded words of testimony seen above – once again enabling a survivor to straddle the divide and live out the tensions between speech and silence, memory and forgetting. These words which betray an inability to speak, a fragile and tentative witness given through words can offer nothing "except this gesture, this thread thrown between your humanity and mine." And herein lays the power of poetic language to speak about the world in a more authentic manner – one which affirms a common humanity and gestures toward a reality which defies direct description.[75]

This fragile speech, grounded in reverent silence and moved to recognition, can provide a framework for moving forward – one which lives out of the tension of speech and silence, memory and forgetting. Without denying the necessity of truth, fragile speech aims not for the disinterested, critical distance of history but above all for acknowledgement and recognition. Indeed, such fragile speech and wounded words have a particular heritage in identifying and resisting racial injustice. As noted above, the powerful testimonies of the victims of apartheid proved transformative for black and white South Africans alike by opening a space for mutual recognition and truth telling, but without collapsing under the weight political struggles linked to crafting a definitive historical record. Similar endeavors through testimony and witness were also helpful for the healing of victims of the Shoah and the establishment of memorials.[76]

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[75] See Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 37. As Ricoeur observes, "in one manner or another, poetic texts speak about the world. But not in a descriptive way…[the poetic text] liberates a power of reference to aspects of our being in the world that cannot be said in a direct descriptive way, but only alluded to, thanks to the referential values of metaphoric and, in general, symbolic expressions."

[76] Beyond the first-hand accounts of Tutu following his work chairing the South African TRC, the space for narrative testimony has been studied extensively in the wake of the Shoah and the atrocities of the Nazi regime. Dennis B. Klein offers an in-depth assessment of the different types of speech, their functions, the relationship between memory, history, and truth, as well as the effects of testimony for survivors in his *Survivor Transitional Narratives of Nazi-Era Destruction: The Second Liberation* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018).

In addition to artistic expression and the power of testimony, the biblical practice of lamentation provides a particularly striking example of the attempt to embrace and incarnate these tensions, crying out for recognition and response. Unlike historical accounts, the language of lament is performative and not merely descriptive; it asks questions of God, of the experience, and of others, and cries out of pain born through the experience of injustice or grievous loss.[77] Lamentation is itself a dramatic interplay of speech and silence – a cry which struggles to find the right words and fumbles in its attempt to say the unsayable. And yet, despite the oppressive weight of the pain and grief, lamentation also includes an element of hope and is oriented outward toward transformation and justice. Despite the unbearable pain it seeks to articulate, lamentation is neither a resigned pessimism nor a defeatist attitude, as it anticipates (even beseeches) some future transformation. Specific to the plight of racial injustice, Bryan Massingale points to the tradition of lamentation as a potentially transformative way forward:

> Lamenting holds together both sorrow and hope in ways that defy easy rational understanding. Laments honestly name and forthrightly acknowledge painfully wrenching circumstances…[it] thus facilitates the emergence of something new, whether a changed consciousness or a renewed engagement with external events.[78]

The lament is not divorced from reality and truth, but it is no mere epistemological endeavor. It does not seek to craft a strong fixed narrative and definitive historical account – it cries out and demands recognition; it incarnates hope for future transformation and justice.

These methods of fragile or wounded speech recognize the dangers inherent in the construction of a collective consciousness or memory of an event, how such accounts and

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[77] While lament may include elements of recollection or retelling events, this is not the primary purpose of lament itself. Lament is also addressed outward, crying out in desperation, exasperation, and pain. It is not mere soliloquy or self-serving commiseration – such a cry seeks to "pierce the clouds" and "rise to the heavens" (Sir. 35:20-21).

[78] Bryan Massingale, "The Systemic Erasure of the Black/Dark-Skinned Body in Catholic Ethics," in *Catholic Theological Ethics Past, Present, and Future: The Trento Conference,* ed. James F. Keenan (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 121.

memories can all be easily manipulated, and that such narratives almost always include a cast of marginalized or forgotten characters. The construction of a grand historical narrative can emphasize certain aspects of suffering or select events at the expense (even the forgetting or erasure) of others — and such narrative histories can distort realities in favor of a particular ideology or group, and can be a powerful weapon for marginalization.[79]

The preceding considerations highlight the essential tension that characterizes attempts at forgiveness — how the process must grapple with the weight of the past offense in all its pain and shame, and yet also must look forward to future obligations and responsibilities with hope. Overemphasizing one pole (speech and memory) at the expense of the other (silence and forgetting) — or vice versa — will lead to harm and render the process unjust and unethical, if not preclude the possibility for forgiveness outright. Be it through the disregard for past suffering, the re-traumatization of the victims, the marginalization of some stories and experiences, or even the ultimate annihilation of the victims in a "second killing" of a "double injustice," the stakes run high in the tension between speech and silence, memory and forgetting. The fragile speech of art, testimony, protest, and lamentation can embrace and live out of this tension – and ultimately beget recognition and a renewed sense of responsibility. Such would be a responsibility that looks forward to the future rather than sits paralyzed by the past – a mutual recognition that brings victims and survivors, perpetrators and victimizers, bystanders and even the innocent together in a collective responsibility to build a future full of hope.

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[79] Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting,* trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 56-92. The question of marginalization or forgetting emerges both within (*intra*) the narratives of victimization (e.g. which victims receive attention, and which are forgotten), as well as between (*inter*) narratives of different events (e.g. why the Holocaust receives attention, and yet the Armenian genocide receives comparatively little — if it is even recognized as a "genocide" at all).

Chapter Three

Beyond Guilt and Innocence:
Recognition, Responsibility, Solidarity

"Racism can often be found in our hearts – in many cases placed there unwillingly or unknowingly by our upbringing and culture…the cumulative effects of personal sins of racism have led to social structures of injustice and violence that makes us all accomplices in racism."
– The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), *Open Wide Our Hearts*[1]

"To cleanse our hearts, we need to dirty our hands, to feel accountable and not to simply look on as our brothers and sisters are suffering."
– Pope Francis[2]

Introduction

On March 20, 2021, Wilton Cardinal Gregory, Archbishop of Washington and the first African American cardinal in the Catholic Church, delivered an impassioned plea for the pursuit of forgiveness, reconciliation, and dialogue in response to the pervasive sin of racism in the United States. Following yet another year of racially motivated violence and injustices, as well as the Covid-19 pandemic which further exposed the many racial inequalities plaguing the nation, his speech proved remarkable not only for its exigency but also for its optimism and honesty. Racial harmony and healing, he noted, are not just a "gracious hope" but the "only way that our nation will continue to advance toward its own constitutional ideals."[3] Further still, the very

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[1] United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), *Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love – A Pastoral Letter Against Racism* (November 2018), 5.

[2] Pope Francis, "Homily of the Holy Father: Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Pope Francis to Iraq," Franso Hariri Stadium, Erbil, Iraq, 7 March 2021.

[3] Wilton Cardinal Gregory, "Seeing with the eyes of Christ," Arlington Diocese conference on confronting the sin of racism. 20 March 2021. Conference: Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love." Nativity Parish, Burke, VA. Full transcript of Cardinal Gregory's remarks accessible in Wilton Cardinal Gregory, "'Seeing with the eyes of Christ': Text of Cardinal Gregory's talk at Arlington Diocese's conference on confronting the sin of racism," *Catholic Standard,* March 20, 2021, https://cathstan.org/news/local/seeing-with-the-eyes-of-christ-text-of-cardinal-gregory-s-talk-at-arlington-diocese-s-conference-on-confronting-the-sin-of-racism.

future of the nation depends upon "the establishment and fostering of a human respect for diversity," an active respect that requires sustained engagement and not merely the passive tolerance fostered by a disinterested "*laissez faire* way of surviving."[4] Such is an obligation and a duty of all Catholics, a responsibility that the faithful bear "because we are Catholic…to call all of our people to see with the eyes of Christ. We are obliged to challenge our society and any institution within society that supports, defends, or promotes racism or inter-cultural hostility," and that the very credibility of the Christian witness and identity hinges upon "our ability to be peacemakers."[5] The faithful Christian cannot stand blithely unaware of racism; active anti-racism is an integral piece of the Christian vocation to love.

Despite this, even among people of good will a sense of awkwardness, isolation, or cynicism in the face of so great a challenge paralyzes the nation. The past looms heavy, both in the atrocities of history but also in the structures and legacies that such history bears upon the present. Suspicion and distrust, pain and anger, fear and guilt mark many attempts at encounter and dialogue, while elsewhere in the hearts of many apathy, indifference, and disconnection stymie any motivation or felt need for such dialogue.[6] But Cardinal Gregory makes clear that the

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[4] Gregory, "Seeing with the eyes of Christ."

[5] Gregory, "Seeing with the eyes of Christ." Gregory's challenge addresses all Catholics and Christians to recognize that anti-racism and the imperative to challenge racist structures flows from our faith and our identity. In a similar, though more specific vein, a similar conversation has been unfolding within the academy for Christian theologians, and specifically Christian moral theologians and ethicists. James F. Keenan, S.J. provides an ample survey of these calls in his recent article, "The Color Line, Race, and Caste: Structures of Domination and the Ethics of Recognition," *Theological Studies* 82, no.1 (March 2021): 69-94. Specifically, he notes that the "credibility of Christian theological witness depends significantly on the quality of theology's response to anti-black racism" (71), and surveys the works of theologians such as Andrew Prevot, James H. Cone, Bryan N. Massingale, M. Shawn Copeland, Jamie T. Phelps, Cyprian Davis, and Diana Hayes, amongst others.

[6] Despite his optimism and hope, Gregory underscores the pervasive and oftentimes daunting scope of racism in American life and society: "There are few, if any, areas in American life that are not influenced or shaped by the issue of race…still we find that ours is not yet a story of unity and mutual respect as often as it is a cacophony of interests and claims, of accusation and stereotype, of bigoted declaration and hostile retort." Gregory, "Seeing with the eyes of Christ."

past must neither determine the present nor preclude a brighter future, and that only through forgiveness can such healing be achieved. Warning against the temptation to resignation and despair, he calls for forgiveness and healing:

> It is a common tendency to limit our tomorrows because of our yesterdays. Every sentence that I hear that begins with a sordid story of yesterday often ends with a reason that the future is already determined. The issue of race will never be advanced as long as people believe that yesterday has already completely determined both today and tomorrow. And that fact is equally challenging for all Americans of every racial heritage…How are we to be true to what has taken place and yet move beyond the framework of yesterday? In a word, we need a national reconciliation – a healing of America's soul from the torment of oppression and hatred. We need to forgive one another for all of those things that belong to the past so that we can move into a better, more hopeful tomorrow.[7]

Gregory looks with hope and healing to the future and, without denying the past, refuses to be beholden to its paralyzing grip. As explored in previous chapters, a proper space for righteous indignation and the realization of a generative justice is required, the transformation and healing of memories is called for, and an honest acknowledgment and recognition of the past is necessary. These tasks are not the exclusive domain of any one group or community – as Gregory notes, this fact is "equally challenging for all Americans of every racial heritage." But the call to forgive one another in a national reconciliation raises the particularly thorny (and perennially complex) issue of responsibility: of culpability, blame, and guilt. Even without direct moral culpability, the legacy of race and racism within the United States nonetheless continues to raise questions of liability, complicity, and enablement, and what (if anything) the future beneficiaries owe to the marginalized – even if such benefits be derived unwillingly or unintentionally.

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[7] Gregory, "Seeing with the eyes of Christ."

This thesis project has defended two central contentions throughout: (1) that the temporal extension of forgiveness necessitates that it bears the weight of the past, is effected in an ongoing present process, and opens onto a renewed future of hope; and (2) that an ethically just process of forgiveness must embrace and live out of tensions that commonly arise rather than rush to resolve them in an unjust and hasty manner. The preceding two chapters considered these claims in the context of *how* to forgive and the ethical demands in the process – balancing the vindictive passions with the demands of mercy and justice, and navigating the ethics of remembrance and the healing of memories. The present chapter shifts to consider not the methods and manner of forgiveness, but the agents: *who* can forgive, *whom* to forgive, and *whether* such forgiveness is possible and appropriate. Drawing from the resources of Catholic Social Teaching and Magisterial documents, recent contributions to Catholic moral theology regarding racism and social/structural sin, and developments in phenomenological ethics of alterity and recognition, this chapter ultimately argues that when assessing collective responsibility, the distinction between guilt and innocence is necessary though inadequate. Ascriptions of guilt and innocence at a collective social level requires further nuance, attention to the influence of social structures and historical legacies, and both concepts require supplementation by a more robust understanding of responsibility marked by solidarity.

This chapter proceeds in three parts: (1) an assessment of the complexity of ascribing guilt and innocence when considering collective, social, structural, and heritable sin – in particular for future generations; (2) an expansion of responsibility through the ethics of recognition and a phenomenological ethics of alterity; and (3) a defense of the virtue of solidarity as a more hopeful and effective means forward.

"You ask: 'Why is not the son charged with the guilt of his father?'" (Ezek. 18:19)

At first glance, guilt and innocence seem straightforward and simple enough to ascribe, and that their respective roles in a process of forgiveness are clearly defined: the guilty perpetrator(s) should seek and receive forgiveness from the innocent victim(s). Yet such a clear-cut distinction is deceptively simple even in individual cases of interpersonal forgiveness[8] – and the complexities are further compounded when expanded into the realm of collective responsibility or social sin. Certainly, degrees of guilt must be assessed in cases where free moral agency is exercised and moral culpability is established, but how ought one speak of "guilt" and "innocence" in relation to sins for which one may be liable but not culpable, for which one may be a beneficiary but does not bear moral responsibility, or for which one had no direct moral agency and yet is shaped by and lives out of its effects? Structural or systemic injustices, particularly around race and racism, raise the issues of complicity and enablement, of beneficiaries and bystanders. The issue grows even more intricate when considering future generations removed from yet nonetheless still impacted by the vestiges, structures, or legacies of sins from previous generations (an "inherited" sin or situation which precedes and exceeds any one individual's free choice: in many ways a function of the "moral luck" of one's facticity whether they are an unwitting and unwilling beneficiary, or an unwitting and unwilling victim).[9]

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[8] Even at the individual, interpersonal level, determining the depth of one's guilt can become a rather complex affair. Recall J.G. Murphy's distinction between questions of forgiveness from other responses to wrongdoing, which remains instructive on this point. See above, page 5, note 3. Catholic moral teaching similarly allows for the consideration of mitigating factors and circumstances that may diminish guilt or culpability without ignoring or condoning the wrongdoing entirely (and, equally important, without dismissing all moral agency through some form of psychological determinism). See, notably, *Catechism of the Catholic Church,* §§1857-60 on the free and voluntary nature of sin and the potential diminishment of one's freedom or mitigation of circumstances.

[9] See above, in chapter one of this project, pages 19-20, notes 25-28.

Accurately ascribing guilt is necessary, for otherwise the wrongdoing and its effects go unrecognized, justice is foresworn, and a relativistic attitude prevails. Yet indiscriminately applying guilt or maximizing it to an entire collective is equally offensive and counterproductive to the pursuit of justice on many levels. Simply displacing guilt to a collective anonymizes the wrongdoing and dilutes personal responsibility. Accusing a collective also denies the reality that sinfulness and wrongdoing are personal acts, that only moral agents can bear moral responsibility or culpability for sinfulness (not a political entity, social structure, or impersonal conglomerate).[10] On both of these points, Hannah Arendt famously and repeatedly criticized the collective ascription of guilt in the wake of Nazi war crimes as a meaningless and convenient denial of personal responsibility, observing that "when all are guilty, none is."[11] As Arendt rightly emphasizes, merely identifying a collective as guilty of wrongs "obscures the fact that such wrongs are only possible through the particular actions (and inactions) of individuals."[12] There is little to no risk for individual moral agents in the process of admitting collective guilt, since such an admission transposes responsibility into the realm of abstraction and generalization, and the "theory of collective guilt has the effect of making judgment of particular acts and events superfluous…[it] suggests the inevitability of events, retrospectively removing

[10] *Catechism of the Catholic Church* §1868; see also Daniel J. Daly's treatment of the development of Catholic Social Teaching on social or structural sin, specifically the contributions of Pope Saint John Paul II to the question of moral agency, in Daly, "Structures of Virtue and Vice," *New Blackfriars* 92 (May 2011): 346-48. Daly points to John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortation *Reconcilatio et paenetentia* (1983), §16, which condemned "any definition of social sin that 'contrasts social sin and personal sin.' [John Paul II] noted that such a dichotomy enervates, and possibly destroys the concept of personal sin, and replaces it with a theory of sin that was reduced to structurally determined social guilt and responsibility" (Daly, 347).

[11] Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 278.

[12] Andrew Schaap, "Guilty Subjects and Political Responsibility: Arendt, Jaspers and the Resonance of the 'German Question' in Politics of Reconciliation," *Political Studies* 49 (2001): 752.

outcomes in human affairs from the influence of individual action."[13] Individual moral agents are hastily exonerated as collective guilt becomes a scapegoat for personal wrongdoing, or the perpetrators themselves become the victims of an overarching system that determined their inevitable actions – victims of their own circumstances and situations. Furthermore, displacing guilt to a broader, more anonymous plane strips moral agents of any power or agency to respond and to rectify a situation, thus breeding indifference and apathy, or cynicism and resignation, against which Pope Francis similarly cautions.[14]

This tendency to displace guilt from the individual to some external entity is especially evident when a temporal distance is factored into the question – namely, when the sins of previous generations and individual persons have accumulated over time to form structures, systems, or legacies into which future generations are born and live without choice.[15] The question of a subsequent generation's guilt surrounding "heritable" or "original sin" in these cases is not the individual *actions* of past injustice (e.g. chattel slavery, Jim Crow policies, disproportionate direct community investment and government spending, and racial discrimination in the workplace), but that the *effects* of these sins have accumulated into very

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[13] Schaap, "Guilty Subjects and Political Responsibility," 752.

[14] Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti* §30. See also "Homily of the Holy Father Francis: Visit to Lampedusa," Arena Sports Camp, Salina Quarter, Lampedusa, Sicily, Italy (8 July 2013). A maximized yet anonymized guilt diminishes any felt connection and contributes to the "globalization of indifference" by which we are less and less able to recognize and respond to the sufferings of others. Specifically as applied to the Mediterranean migrant crisis, but indicative of many structural moral conundrums, the Pope asks who is responsible: "Everybody and nobody! Today too, the question has to be asked: Who is responsible for the blood of these brothers and sisters of ours? Nobody! That is our answer: It isn't me; I don't have anything to do with it; it must be someone else, but certainly not me."

[15] See Kenneth Himes, "Social Sin and the Role of the Individual," *Annual of the Society for Christian Ethics* 6 (1986): 187. Himes recasts the understanding of original sin through the language of social sin: "What is inherited is not the actual sin of another but the negative determination of an individual's situation. By that is meant the diminishment, due to sin, of God's grace which is historically mediated by community. What is passed on, then, is a social disorder that becomes an intrinsic condition of the person irrespective of free choice" (187). Himes is clear to note, however, that since original sin "requires no element of voluntariness it is inappropriate to ascribe an element of moral responsibility or culpability," but that liability is nonetheless still appropriate (187).

real (albeit impersonal) structures into which subsequent generations are born (e.g. intractable cycles of poverty and rampant economic inequality).[16] It can be tempting, especially in conversations of structural or social sin, once again to displace responsibility to the past or to resign oneself to the "way things are." Especially in regard to large-scale or structural sin, another convenient path to self-exoneration is to blame the wider context in which one lives – the misguided claim that although the structure or system is inherently sinful, I remain an innocent individual at the mercy of a system over which I had no choice and bear no responsibility.[17]

Such a denial or resignation can only serve to perpetuate injustice; this apathy is, in itself, a choice to continue the oppression. Mature moral reflection demands that a person move beyond the stage of such "uncritical naivete" surrounding social sin and to awaken the "dormant

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[16] One of the dangers of structures that promote injustice, sin, and vice is the tendency for these structures to "become fixed and fossilized as mechanisms relatively independent of the human will, thereby promoting or paralyzing social development and causing either justice or injustice." See Daly, "Structures of Virtue and Vice," 354. Daly helpfully defines a structure as "an institution, a practice, a value laden narrative, or a paradigmatic figure that people find already existing or which they create on the national and global level, and which orientates or organizes economic, social, and political life" (354). The "relative independence" from the human will does not imply that the structure itself holds moral agency, though even without bearing moral agencies in themselves these structures still exert enormous influence on the formation and behavior of moral agents operating within them, whom they shape and constrain.

[17] Such a claim promotes a superficial and inaccurate understanding of moral agency, for structures shape and influence but do not predetermine the moral agent's action. Keenan advocates for a more inclusive rather than singular perspective on sin, one which holds together a "more robust notion of personal/social sin" that situates individual sin and agency in the context of structural sin without denying either. See James F. Keenan, S.J., "Raising Expectations on Sin," *Theological Studies* 77, no.1 (2016): 165-80. For a fuller treatment of the relation of non-determinative but nonetheless influential structures on moral agency (and a discussion of the "viciousness" of structures in a more metaphorical sense), see Daniel J. Daly, *The Structures of Virtue and Vice* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2021), 169-70. Daly notes, "Structures are only metaphorically virtuous or vicious. Only persons have moral agency and are capable of acquiring moral character. Structures do not act; instead, they exist in and through the actions of persons. However, structures have a moral character because of how they enable and constrain personal agency. Slavery is an unjust structure because it enables persons to own each other and harms the life, health, education, and relationships of the enslaved. The structure of slavery played a causal role in the abuse of others. Because the social structure of slavery lacks moral agency, it is metaphorically, not literally, vicious. Slavery provides an example of a wholly evil structure. It has no redeeming qualities." Daly's analysis maintains the insistence of John Paul II and Catholic moral theology that sinfulness is personal and rooted in the moral agent, but provides an analysis of the moral character of structures that takes seriously their influence, and potentially corrupting nature.

conscience" of one who fails to recognize racial injustice.[18] The notion that silence implies consent or inaction amounts to enablement remains prominent in protests against racial injustice in the United States; or, as Desmond Tutu once declared, "if you are neutral in a situation of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor."[19]

Can a level of guilt or complicity nonetheless be acknowledged in a reasonable and appropriate manner? A clarification of terminology, many of which are treated synonymously in common parlance, will be necessary.

In a seminal assessment of social sin and its implications for individual moral agents, Kenneth Himes helpfully clarifies terms and separates notions of liability from culpability, guilt, and moral responsibility. Similar to both Hannah Arendt[20] and Karl Jaspers[21] in the post-war

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[18] Himes, "Social Sin and the Role of the Individual," 193; see also James F. Keenan, S.J., "The Color Line, Race, and Caste: Structures of Domination and the Ethics of Recognition," *Theological Studies* 82, no.1 (March 2021): 72.

[19] The idea that "silence is violence" or "silence means consent" in the face of racial injustice factored prominently in American protests throughout the Summer 2020 in the wake of the George Floyd killing in Minneapolis, MN. Tutu's adage similarly highlights how the choice not to be involved (either an active choice to absent oneself or the failure to be bothered through apathy) enables the oppression to continue and, thereby, is a choice *for* the oppressor. Tutu, as quoted in Robert McAfee Brown, *Unexpected News: Reading the Bible with Third World Eyes* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1984), 19. As noted previously, Keenan identifies the failure to bother as sinfulness, and the theme of indifference or apathy has been treated repeatedly by Pope Francis in *Fratelli Tutti*. One of the most damning expositions on the consequences of such neutrality or indifference comes from the former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Samantha Power's assessment of American (and Western) foreign policy in the face of genocides and ethnic cleansings in the past century. Power labels Western nations as simply "bystanders to genocide" whose self-interest / apathy enabled millions of deaths. Samantha Power, *"A Problem from Hell": America and the Age of Genocide* (New York: HarperPerennial, 2003).

[20] Arendt's notion of responsibility maintains a clear distinction between collective responsibility as a political reality from the legal or moral notion of personal responsibility; as such, for Arendt, personal responsibility cannot be transferred or inherited; but political responsibility is exercised in both a vicarious and involuntary manner. "It is vicarious because a citizen may be held liable for things he or she did not do and it is involuntary because it results from his or her (typically not chosen) membership in a political community." See Schaap, "Guilty Subjects and Political Responsibility," 752. See also Hannah Arendt, "Collective Responsibility," in *Amor Mundi: Explorations in the Faith and Thought of Hannah Arendt,* ed. James W. Bernauer (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), 43-50.

[21] Karl Jaspers, *The Question of German Guilt,* trans. E.B. Ashton (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 25-27. Jaspers draws a distinction between four types or kinds of guilt, two of which (political and criminal) are externally judged and can be collectively ascribed, while two others (metaphysical and moral) are determined interiorly or in relation to the Divine judge. As Jaspers contends, "this differentiation of four concepts of guilt clarifies the meaning of the charges. Political guilt, for example, does mean the liability of all citizens for the consequences of deeds done by their state, but not the criminal and moral guilt of every single citizen for crimes committed in the name of the state. The judge may decide about crimes and the victor about political liability, but

German context, Himes contends that liability can be transferred while culpability and causal responsibility cannot, for "guilt entails action and intention and if these are missing it is wrong to ascribe guilt to a party."[22] Furthermore, and of critical importance, Himes distinguishes multiple meanings of "responsibility" and notes that one can be responsible *without* necessarily being blameworthy.[23] Thus, one can be exonerated of guilt, blameworthiness, and moral culpability while nonetheless bearing liability or responsibility – in other words, one can be held liable vicariously, and one can have a causal link to some negative reality without the judgment of being blameworthy or culpable for it. Concrete examples will help to flesh out these claims.

Himes specifically turns to racism as an example, which proves instructive for these reflections, as his analysis bears upon the liability of beneficiaries who may not be morally culpable for the "institution" of racism but are nonetheless shaped by and are complicit in it (by enabling, participating, and perpetuating racist elements or institutions in a society). Obviously, and quite abhorrently, there are still explicit instances of racism that are both intended and acted upon, such as hate crimes and the deliberate targeting of an individual based on race. Such would be a case of direct moral culpability, of blameworthiness and guilt. While still racially motivated, the perpetrator is nonetheless in a different moral category from the individual who benefits from

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moral guilt can truthfully be discussed only in a loving struggle between men who maintain solidarity among themselves" (26-27). The consequences or response to each of these is also different for Jaspers: crime and moral culpability is met with punishment; political guilt is met with liability as determined by the victors or a legitimate tribunal; moral guilt results in penance and renewal from personal insight; and metaphysical guilt results in a transformation of consciousness before God (Jaspers, 30).

[22] Himes, "Social Sin and the Role of the Individual," 190.

[23] Himes, "Social Sin and the Role of the Individual," 189. Himes clarifies four different meanings of being "responsible" – (1) being reliable and conscientious; (2) having a duty to fulfill some expectation; (3) being the cause of an event; and (4) being blameworthy, which beyond causal relationship also implies judgment. Himes clarifies his notion of responsibility aligns most with the third meaning (a causal link) while moral responsibility or culpability signifies the fourth meaning (blameworthiness). These two latter definitions differ sharply from the more Levinasian/phenomenological notion of responsibility for which I advocate below, and which aligns more closely with Himes's second definition of "responsible" in the sense of having a future duty or expectation to fulfill.

unearned privilege at the expense of others based solely on race – for example, discriminatory practices in a job interview process. In the latter case, the beneficiary need neither intend nor participate in the enactment of the racist act, though a clear benefit is enjoyed. Even in the absence of formal cooperation (the intention to cooperate in an act of racial discrimination), the individual nonetheless appropriates the evil as a benefit to herself.[24] There is no malicious intent on the part of the individual who does benefit, and it is entirely possible that she remains ignorant of any racial biases that may be at play in the company's hiring processes. Nonetheless, she still has a clear and vested interest in the perpetuation of that system, benefits directly from it, and yet may remain ignorant of the connection between society's wider economic inequality and racist hiring practices. Guilt in this instance is distinct from the perpetrator of a hate crime, but how ought her complicity in an unjust system from which she benefits directly be assessed?

Himes's distinction of liability from guilt is instructive on this point. As for liability, Himes questions how to view and to assess one's obligation "to make reparation for the harm caused to a victim of social sin," and in this context he articulates a form of liability called "strict liability."[25] Strict liability consists of an individual's contributory fault but a contributory fault

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[24] M. Cathleen Kaveny articulates the need for a "mirror image" concept to supplement traditional notions of cooperation with evil, which she calls "appropriation of evil." Catholic moral theology distinguishes between the always-forbidden category of "formal cooperation" with evil, which involves the intentional evildoing on the part of the cooperator (e.g., a medical student who assists in an abortion in order to complete degree requirements) from "material cooperation," in which the cooperator does *"not* intend the morally objectionable actions of the principal agent," and the permissibility of such cases depends on a number of external factors, including but not limited to the potential for causing scandal and thereby leading others to illicit activities, or the degree of suffering/loss that one's refusal to cooperate might create (284-85). Nonetheless, Kaveny asserts that such a distinction is inadequate since "as important as cooperation problems are, they do not cover the whole range of ways in which the actions of an agent who is trying to be virtuous can intersect with the morally objectionable acts of others. The category of cooperation covers cases in which agents worry about whether they may morally perform an action that in some way *facilitates* someone else's morally objectionable activity," but it does not address agents who can "take advantage of the fruits or byproducts of someone else's wrongful acts in order to facilitate their own morally worthwhile activity." See M. Cathleen Kaveny, "Appropriation of Evil: Cooperation's Mirror Image," *Theological Studies* 61, no. 2 (2000): 286.

[25] Himes, "Social Sin and the Role of the Individual," 211.

that is indirect (thus distinct from common liability, which is both direct and contributory, as well as from vicarious liability, in which one is liable for the contributory fault of another). Concrete examples will be instructive to distinguish common, vicarious, and strict liability. Consider, for example, the case of Derek Chauvin, George Floyd, and the City of Minneapolis over the course of the past year:

Common liability, as both direct and contributory, can be assessed to determine the specific, individual moral agent or group directly responsible for wrongdoing: notably, the trial and conviction of Derek Chauvin in the George Floyd murder trial. Furthermore, it is also appropriate to ascribe moral responsibility and culpability in this case. While racialized policing policies and wider instances of racism are operative in this situation, it is nonetheless appropriate and necessary to ascribe culpability since moral responsibility can be determined. Common liability, in this instance, is "to be held answerable for another harm we directly caused by ourselves or in conjunction with others."[26] The actions of the police officer were direct and contributory to the death of a man, and a murder conviction followed.

Vicarious liability has also been assessed in this case, notably in a settlement by the City of Minneapolis to the family of the deceased. Here, contributory fault is ascribed to one person (the police officer), and yet the City of Minneapolis and the Police Department settled the civil lawsuit for $27 million, an amount that will not be paid directly by the officer(s) on the scene. This entails a "vicarious liability based on authorization" and being "held to account for the action/inaction of one's duly authorized agent."[27] The liability of the City (and taxpayers and insurance companies) is distinct from that of the police officer, though it is nonetheless real and

[26] Himes, "Social Sin and the Role of the Individual," 209.

[27] Himes, "Social Sin and the Role of the Individual," 210.

vicarious. Yet in addition to the contributive liability of the police officer and the vicarious liability of the City/Police Department, racism also carries a sense of the strict liability that exceeds both of these categories and can apply to the citizenry at large. As Himes notes:

> Here the thorny topic is racism, deeply embedded in a culture that is largely accepted by the majority. Once more the issue is not moral responsibility since it can be proposed that the majority does not see the racism of the society and/or does not deliberately intend its presence in the culture. Yet the majority unconsciously encourages the social sin through a variety of folkways and social institutions.[28]

Even if unaware or unintentional, there exists a contributory fault on the part of individuals who accept and enable racism within the structural or institutional society. Blameworthiness or moral culpability for the social sin does not need to be meted out in order to recognize that liability and an obligation to work toward rectification exist. Himes proceeds to consider theoretical cases of differentiated liabilities for individuals within a collective (e.g., the financial reparation owed by the descendant whose family wealth was inherited from the work of slave-traders versus the descendant of an abolitionist), but before such practical questions can be considered the mere *recognition* of one's complicity and liability is necessary.[29]

The recognition of complicity, the admission of responsibility, and the acceptance of liability are all difficult yet honest pathways forward, though which are oftentimes rejected on account of their conflation with unqualified notions of guilt or blameworthiness. The seemingly simple notions of "guilt" and "innocence" can paralyze the conversation and alienate the moral agents.[30] Himes once again is careful to note that indiscriminately laying the blame for social

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[28] Himes, "Social Sin and the Role of the Individual," 211.

[29] Himes, "Social Sin and the Role of the Individual," 212-13.

[30] While the preceding assessment looked specifically at notion of guilt and innocence on the part of beneficiaries, enablers, perpetrators, or inheritors, the question of innocence is also a dangerous and complex matter. Marion's analysis of the "rigorous" logic of evil and its method of self-perpetuation and growth through cycles of revenge relies upon one's "protestation of innocence," for it is through the protesting or claiming of one's innocence that the need to enact revenge or to transmute the guilt/accusation is realized. In what Marion describes as "unjust

injustices against an individual can be counterproductive to the cause of addressing those very injustices, as it can "easily produce anger or anxiety," eliciting either a "defensive hostility" or despairing resignation that can paralyze the moral agent.[31] Schaap's assessment of Arendt and Jaspers leads to similar conclusions, that a conflating or confusion of moral and political notions of guilt leads to "common responses of denial or inertia."[32]

The conflation of moral and political guilt, or of one's liability and responsibility with *moral* responsibility and blameworthiness, has stymied conversations on collective guilt and posed a stumbling block for national conversations on the legacy of race and racism. The ascription of collective guilt poses significant problems that can impede the process of forgiveness and healing, trapping the discussion in squabbles and denials over the past rather than movement toward to the future. Such problems include (1) the exoneration of individual actions by displacing all guilt to an anonymous collective; (2) diluting any felt sense or awareness of guilt by individual moral agents; (3) excusing personal moral responsibility for actions by emphasizing too strongly social or structural sin, which can mistakenly lead to a mechanistic or psychological determinism rather than recognizing one's free moral agency; or (4) breeding inertia, cynicism, or denial as the response of an overwhelmed or antagonized subject.

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innocence," he observes that, "this is where evil wins its first decisive victory: it compels the sufferer to maintain his innocence by an accusation, to perpetuate suffering through the demand for another suffering, to oppose evil with a counter-evil…if the innocent was, by extraordinary chance, authentically so, there is no doubt that as soon as he endures the suffering of a counter-evil, he will himself immediately want to exert a counter-counter-evil against his accuser." See Jean-Luc Marion, "Evil in Person," in *Prolegomena to Charity*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 5-8. Marion's more theoretical (and philosophically dense) assessment nonetheless supports the claim by Miroslav Volf as examined in the previous chapter – namely, that no one is more dangerous than the victim who remains in the role of the victimized, for such is the breeding ground of revenge. See also Pope Saint John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia*, §12 on the corruption of "justice" into "revenge."

[31] Himes, "Social Sin and the Role of the Individual," 193-94.

[32] Schaap, "Guilty Subjects and Political Responsibility," 760.

Whatever the result, each of these contribute to a sense of torpor and indifference, of denial and complicity, and ultimately of a perpetuation and enablement of racial injustice. Rather than being locked down in the past, a renewed understanding of recognition and responsibility may provide a path forward – one which allows for the admission of responsibility and complicity without the damning (and unreasonable) weight of undue moral culpability and blameworthiness for the woes of the world.

A Call to Recognition and Responsibility

Be it through inertia or denial, through apathy or ignorance – by scoffing at guilt or protesting one's innocence – a spiritual torpor has set in from which present generations must be awakened. While brief flashes in the news may occasionally prick the consciences of many to consider the issue, the default natural attitude is increasingly one of a "cool, comfortable, and globalized indifference" that begets cynicism and distance – ultimately leading to isolation and a comfortable complacency.[33] As Pope Francis repeatedly urges, a heartfelt awareness of our common humanity can rouse even the most complacent of hearts from this inertia – through closeness and a culture of encounter, constantly impelled "to set out anew, to pass beyond what is familiar, to the fringes and beyond."[34]

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[33] Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti* (3 October 2020), §30. See also Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate* (19 March 2018), §137: "Complacency is seductive; it tells us that there is no point in trying to change things, that there is nothing we can do, because this is the way things have always been and yet we always manage to survive. By force of habit we no longer stand up to evil. We "let things be", or as others have decided they ought to be. Yet let us allow the Lord to rouse us from our torpor, to free us from our inertia. Let us rethink our usual way of doing things; let us open our eyes and ears, and above all our hearts, so as not to be complacent about things as they are, but unsettled by the living and effective word of the risen Lord."

[34] Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, §135: "God is eternal newness. He impels us constantly to set out anew, to pass beyond what is familiar, to the fringes and beyond. He takes us to where humanity is most wounded, where men and women, beneath the appearance of a shallow conformity, continue to seek an answer to the question of life's meaning. God is not afraid!" See also *Fratelli Tutti*, §30.

Pope Francis links these concerns specifically to the threat of racism, a perennial and pervasive sin that is now beginning to receive more sustained attention. The insidious issue of racism presents a particular challenge, one to which all hearts must be awakened and impelled to action. The comfortable complacency of "the way things have always been" fails to reckon with the repeated (and increasingly publicized) instances of racism which "continue to shame us, for they show that our supposed social progress is not as real or definitive as we think."[35] A spiritual sickness and global pandemic in its own right, racism is enabled by complacency and denial, or simply by the myth that we have somehow moved beyond or addressed the issue, for racism is "a virus that quickly mutates and, instead of disappearing, goes into hiding, and lurks in waiting."[36] A constant vigilance and renewed awareness are necessary to prevent sliding back into complacency, for any justice and solidarity "are not achieved once and for all; they have to be realized each day," and even for future generations far removed from the initial causes of this plague, "each new generation must take up the struggles and attainments of past generations."[37]

A renewed sense of responsibility which is forward-looking toward duties and obligations for the future, built upon common humanity and the virtue of solidarity, is my proposed path forward. It is neither a panacea nor a definitive solution, and I by no means believe that a general amnesia and lack of acknowledgement of past guilt is a viable option (as the previous chapter and the lessons of the South African TRC reveal).[38] I contend that legitimate

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[35] Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, §135; *Fratelli Tutti,* §20.

[36] Francis, *Fratelli Tutti,* §97.

[37] Francis, *Fratelli Tutti,* §11.

[38] It is worth reiterating the limitations of the TRC and to caution against finding in its example a definitive singular solution. Nonetheless, it does have value in fostering mutual recognition, acknowledgment of the past, healing of memories, and a cessation of retribution. Villa-Vicencio observes that while reconciliation "does not provide an immediate or quick solution to the social, economic, political, and other causes of conflict," it does provide a viable basis for long-term "social cohesion." He further notes that this is a process which "ebbs and flows. It often begins

ascription of guilt and innocence are necessary, but insufficient when transposed into the realm of collective responsibility and future generations. Yet I do contend that when a strictly past-oriented, retrospective sense of responsibility dominates the conversation and thereby reduces any notion of "responsibility" to the mere measure of efficient causality (culpability, blame, and guilt), it prevents the conversation from moving toward a constructive and hopeful future. Without forgiveness, there is no just way to break free from the bondage of the past and move forward.[39] With forgiveness, degrees of varying degrees of responsibility, complicity, and even appropriation of evil for one's benefit can be acknowledged, but more importantly the conversation can focus on a future-oriented notion of responsibility – one that emphasizes interpersonal duties, moral obligations, and human solidarity.

Recognition is an essential first step in being awakened from complacency and the realization of responsibility. This recognition, however, runs deeper than a mere epistemological awareness or a passing glance, as common parlance may imply. Rather, it is an affirmation of common humanity and fellow-feeling and lays the groundwork for the virtue of solidarity (examined further at the conclusion of this chapter).

Drawing from a central concept in the works of Paul Ricoeur and Charles Taylor (among others), Jesuit moral theologian James Keenan has reinvigorated interest in an "ethics of

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with little more than a cautious openness toward others," though as trust and confidence can grow "the possibility of a deeper and more honest relationship may develop," providing a more stable foundation in which contention and conflict can be managed more healthily. From Villa-Vicencio's experience, "reconciliation is often the only realistic alternative to escalating social conflict and political violence." Charles Villa-Vicencio, *Walk With Us and Listen: Political Reconciliation in Africa* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2009), 5.

[39] Unjust pathways do exist, however, and the previous chapter speaks to such alternatives. The formation of the South African TRC recognized and eschewed such options, either (1) a national amnesia and a failure to acknowledge the past that amounted to an unqualified, total, blanket amnesty, and thereby the "double injustice" against which Volf warns; or (2) unending cycles of violence and revenge spurred on by an unrelenting retributive justice, or what Tutu described as the "Pyrrhic victory" by which South Africans would only stand to inherit a country in ashes. Volf, *The End of Memory,* 29; Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness,* 23.

recognition" in Catholic theological ethics. While originally developed in relation to his work on university ethics and an ethics of vulnerability more broadly, Keenan has more recently applied this concept of recognition to the question of racial injustice and racism.[40] He argues for the necessity of recognition as an "awakening move from a tendency to condescend or to overlook or ignore others who have been harmed and not yet been given their social due," an awakening that is "the first act of conscience; without it, conscience lies dormant."[41]

As Keenan notes, "when we fail to give due recognition, we often add to the oppression of the other…recognition becomes then a moment not only of the other's situation but also of my relationship to that other and her or his or their situation."[42] Furthermore, drawing from the work of Reinhold Niebuhr and Isabel Wilkerson, Keenan identifies the many ways in which unjust structures and powerful social forces conspire to prevent such recognition, to train our eyes and to prevent "reverting our gaze and discovering a mutual recognition in the other *whose condition we are socially trained to ignore.*"[43] Powerful social forces, structures and customs collude to prevent such recognition – even on an unconscious or unwitting level, such as the unconscious racism of "implicit attitudes" created by "deep negative associations [that] form a hidden level of preferences…directed against stigmatized racial groups."[44] Importantly, a mutual recognition is

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[40] Keenan, "The Color Line," 72.

[41] Keenan, "The Color Line," 72.

[42] Keenan, "The Color Line," 72.

[43] Keenan, "The Color Line," 74. Emphasis added. The declaration from the USCCB, *Open Wide Our Hearts,* quoted at the outset of this chapter, diagnoses a similar underlying cause: "Racism can often be found in our hearts – in many cases placed there unwillingly or unknowingly by our upbringing and culture…," United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), *Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love – A Pastoral Letter Against Racism* (November 2018), 5.

[44] For more on the sociological/psychological debates surrounding the existence and prevalence of "unconscious racism," see Lincoln Quillian, "Does Unconscious Racism Exist?," *Social Psychology Quarterly* 71, no. 1 (2008): 10.

prevented – these constraints certainly harm the oppressed by perpetuating their plight or refusing to afford "a vital human need."[45] But the agent in his or her complacency is diminished and trapped as well, with a "dormant conscience" and a lack of concern.

To demonstrate this insight more concretely, I think of the biblical account of Jesus and the unnamed woman of ill-repute (Luke 7:36-50).[46] The story of the grateful woman, weeping before Jesus and bathing his feet with her tears and her hair, demonstrates the transformative power of recognition and contrasts it with the consequences of its refusal quite forcefully. As Jesus dines at the house of Simon the Pharisee, the Pharisee sees in Jesus a teacher to criticize – a hypocrite, even – believing in his heart that "if this man were a prophet, he would know who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, and that she is a sinner" (Luke 7:39). Simon the Pharisee looks neither with love upon the woman nor with hospitality and friendship upon Jesus. He holds scorn for the sinner and seeming contempt for Jesus. Yet Jesus and the woman of ill-repute look with love, and there is a mutual recognition that occurs that remains inaccessible to Simon the Pharisee in his haughty self-assurance. As Jesus looks upon this woman with love, he sees not a sinner but the precious child of God trapped and tainted by sin, a sullied reputation, the scorn of a wider community, and perhaps shame and desperation. But his look of love sees beyond the past, looking to the future of the disciple that she can become. And so in asking Simon the Pharisee, "Do you see this woman?" (Luke 7:44), Simon's response can only be a

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[45] Keenan, "The Color Line," 72.

[46] An expanded version of this brief reflection on Luke 7:36-50 appeared in a paper of mine previously presented in a directed readings tutorial last year: William Woody, S.J., "Through the Lenses of Tears: An Invitation to Divine Compassion," TMST-7101: Theology of Tears (paper presentation, Boston College School of Theology and Ministry, Brighton, MA, December 11, 2020), 9-15. The paper argued for a reclamation of weeping and compassion as necessary lenses for an authentic epistemology of the other – especially the suffering other -- and draws from the work of Jean-Luc Marion to articulate love (*caritas*) as the highest form of knowledge. While tangential to the larger concerns of the present chapter, these themes of love as a form of knowledge and the necessity of compassion for authentic knowledge of the other color my reading of an ethics of recognition.

resounding "No," for he saw only "that she is a sinner." Jesus sees a woman; Simon sees a sinner. Jesus encounters her humanity, her pain, her desperation, and her love; Simon dismisses her as a problem, a nuisance, and a source of pollution.

Pope Francis notably draws from another story in the Gospel of Luke, that of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), to demonstrate not only the power of such recognition but its *necessity* in addressing the pain, suffering, and woundedness of the world. Complacency and indifference – or really, any decision aside from recognition and solidarity – would amount to identifying with "either one of the robbers or one of those who walked by without showing compassion."[47] Strikingly, Francis draws little distinction between the violence of the robbers which caused the situation and "those who think only of themselves and fail to shoulder the inevitable responsibilities of life as it is."[48] Importantly, these *responsibilities* of life are not strictly grounded in past measures of blame and culpability, of proximate causes and causality. Rather, such responsibilities include recognizing the humanity of our suffering sisters and brothers, being moved with compassion, and responding in solidarity and care. Being "innocent" of moral culpability for the situation and being temporally removed from the instigating events are no legitimate excuse for the abdication of responsibility to the other.

This radical expansion of responsibility beyond my own culpability finds similar expression in the phenomenological ethics of alterity pioneered by Emmanuel Levinas, an ethics of self-other relations further refined by figures such as Paul Ricoeur, Jean-Luc Marion, Richard Kearney, Christina Gschwandtner, Julia Kristeva, and others.[49] Levinas dramatically expands the

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[47] Francis, *Fratelli Tutti,* §67.

[48] Francis, *Fratelli Tutti,* §67.

[49] Levinas's two central works include *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority,* trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969) and the more mature (and radical) *Otherwise than Being: Or Beyond Essence,* trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1981). For responses and

scope of responsibility to the point of its inversion – no longer concerned with the past actions of a self-determined and autonomous subject, Levinas pushes responsibility to the realm of a duty or obligation to which the moral agent cannot *not* respond, even if the response may be to ignore. While Levinas's thought is met with much criticism and resistance, his radical expansion and recasting of responsibility provides a striking alternative to the debates in which responsibility is mired in past ascriptions of guilt and causal relationships.[50]

Levinas's extreme ethics of alterity exerted great influence on the trajectory of much ethical reflection in the wake of the Shoah and the latter-half of the 20th-century, but his work is not without its problems or, as noted above, ample critics. Nonetheless, his dramatic expansion of responsibility as something that precedes and exceeds my own choices – of a responsibility that is "unlimited" and goes beyond my freedom and is oriented toward future obligations – is a helpful foil against which to show the limitations of a strictly causal, retrospective measure of responsibility in moral discourse. It is through an expansive notion of responsibility that a response to racial injustice emerges – through solidarity.

Solidarity and Healing

Returning to Pope Francis's assessment of the Good Samaritan, he also highlights the hopeful possibilities presented by the parable, especially for the rebuilding of a community by those "who identify with the vulnerability of others, who reject the creation of a society of

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subsequent appropriations/critiques of Levinas's thought, which embraced self-other ethical relations as a primary point of reflection for phenomenology, see Richard Kearney, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters: Interpreting Otherness* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Christina M. Gschwandtner, *Postmodern Apologetics? Arguments for God in Contemporary Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012); Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); and Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

[50] Simon Critchley describes Levinas's *Otherwise than Being* as a work that "could feature on a list of horror literature." As quoted in Richard Kearney, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters,* 71.

exclusion."[51] The parable speaks with hope to future possibilities that touch on our common humanity, on social ethics and responsibility, but most importantly as a call to recognition that breaks free from complacent indifference and opens onto a more hopeful and generative future:

> The parable clearly does not indulge in abstract moralizing, nor is its message merely social and ethical. It speaks to us of an essential and often forgotten aspect of our common humanity: we were created for a fulfillment that can only be found in love. We cannot be indifferent to suffering; we cannot allow anyone to go through life as an outcast. Instead, we should feel indignant, challenged to emerge from our comfortable isolation and to be changed by our contact with human suffering. That is the meaning of dignity.[52]

This recognition of another, especially when evoked through indignation and above all as compassion in the face of another's plight, displaces the complacent indifference of an unmoved heart and returns the human being to her ultimate fulfillment: love. In doing so, recognition opens the door to not only the realization of her highest purpose, but to the rebuilding of community, the restoration of relationships, and the generation of new possibilities.

Again, such a recognition entails more than a general awareness or epistemological knowledge about someone or something. It is a recognition that impels outward toward others, in compassion for their plight and in recognition of mutual bonds of connection. This move toward solidarity has received renewed emphasis in Catholic Social Teaching in recent years. Presented frequently as a sign of interdependence and a commitment to those connections, solidarity emerges as a virtue that resists the cool indifference that can mark the common response wider social problems for which an individual may not feel morally culpable or blameworthy but is nonetheless complicit.[53] Solidarity provides an appropriate remedy to the denial, inertia, apathy,

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[51] Francis, *Fratelli Tutti,* §67.

[52] Francis, *Fratelli Tutti,* §68.

[53] Pope Saint John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra,* §157. See also Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, §66.

or cynicism that notions of collective responsibility or guilt can breed. And in the face of racism, specifically, solidarity moves peoples toward the encounter and connection, toward compassion and to action, about which Cardinal Gregory speaks in his call to "see with the eyes of Christ."

If, as the USCCB notes, "the cumulative effects of personal sins of racism have led to social structures of injustice and violence that makes us all accomplices in racism," then the virtuous path of resistance to such complicity is through solidarity.[54] As John Paul II writes, this solidarity "is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people…on the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good," because "we are all really responsible for all."[55] Stirred beyond such "vague compassion," the genuine recognition of another in his or her plight evokes an awareness – and acceptance – of a wider responsibility marked by "openness to others and service of them…because God entrusts us to one another."[56] Particularly in response to intractable social injustices or seemingly insurmountable systemic causes, solidarity stands as a "proposed antidote to the structures of sin," and as, "the virtue by which the structures of sin were 'conquered.'"[57] This is particularly true of intractable social problems that transcend any one individual's power to address or to remedy: only through interdependence and collaboration can the collective move beyond diagnosing the issue as a "personal" or "individual" problem (a sure recipe for cynicism, disenchantment, and burnout). Rather, solidarity enables moral agents to see these issues rightly

[54] USCCB, *Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love – A Pastoral Letter Against Racism* (November 2018), 5.

[55] Pope Saint John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei Socialis*, §38.

[56] Pope Saint John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae,* §19.

[57] Daly, "Structures of Virtue and Vice," 348. Daly continues that this solidarity "diametrically opposed" the attitude toward structures of sin "insofar as it directed the person to commit herself to the common good…like solidarity, structures of sin were moral attitudes, akin to vices, that were willingly appropriate by the agent, from society."

as communal problems requiring communal responses. In this light, Daly draws from John Paul II to affirm solidarity as a "paradigmatic virtue for our age," through its affirmation of interdependence and orientation toward the common good – it is a virtue "whose time has come. Given that structures are significant causal factors in the suffering of so many people, virtuous agents will need to cultivate and practice solidarity."[58]

Solidarity stands in contrast to complicity. It actively resists the passive perpetuation or unwilling enablement of injustice. As such, solidarity is the only appropriate and hopeful response to structures and legacies of injustice by a free moral agent who is willing to recognize his complicity, humbly embrace responsibility, and is impelled toward others in compassion. Such can seem a daunting task and a call that exceeds any one individual's ability.

By focusing exclusively on ascriptions of moral culpability, on blame and causal relationships, the questions of guilt versus innocence and the redress of grievances remain paralyzed in the past. While ascriptions of guilt and innocence are necessary to assess specific instances of evil and wrongdoing, they prove inadequate when assessing something as complex as collective guilt or a structural sinfulness that precedes and exceeds the freedom of any one individual moral agent. Furthermore, an overemphasis on the individual moral agent proves wholly inadequate when facing up to the more daunting and intractable reality of social structures and systems that promote vicious activity. A reawakening of collective responsibility, through the ethics of recognition, can provide a means through which to move the problem from a mere question of past grievances to a future-oriented approach. And it is here, in the expansion of responsibility and through recognition, that solidarity can be born: a solidarity that is perhaps the only hope for facing up to structural sins too great for any one individual to address.

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[58] Daly, *Structures of Virtue and Vice,* 210-11.

Conclusion:

Will and Grace

This project has sought to articulate forgiveness as a responsible, honest, and hopeful pathway forward in the struggle against grave social injustices and systemic sinfulness. Retaliation condemns the future to vengeful cycles of violence, a tragic past that will only repeat itself endlessly. Yet denial and repression of past wrongdoing, the adage to "forgive and forget," prove equally disastrous and are affronts to justice. Forgiveness alone provides a pathway for acknowledgment, recognition, and deeper bonds of solidarity and commitment to one another – forgiveness alone is capable of giving a future to a wounded past.

Yet as the preceding chapters examined, forgiveness is not some facile solution or an easily enacted panacea. It demands the difficult task of working through pain and anger, perhaps even trauma and shame; it requires the courage for honesty and acknowledgement, recognition and the ability to listen. Its hope hinges upon an appropriate admission of liability and guilt, and the willingness to accept the demands of a forward-looking, future-enabling responsibility.

This project takes seriously the necessity for a just forgiveness to bear the weight of past wrongs without either denying or being paralyzed by them. Such forgiveness also opens onto a future full of hope, though which is cognizant of ongoing responsibilities and duties to one another. At its best, forgiveness can breed a solidarity that can face up to otherwise overwhelming issues of structural sin and the collective weight of past sinfulness – to respond to the legacy of evil and wrongdoing that is perpetuated in unjust social realities.

As I have sought to demonstrate, the work of forgiveness lives out of tensions and seeming contradictions – neither repressing anger nor denying mercy in the pursuit of justice;

navigating the delicate demands of an ethics of remembrance and the healing of memories; and moving beyond a past-oriented culpability to an expansive and forward-looking responsibility.

The pursuit of forgiveness stands not only as the most hopeful means of addressing such grave social injustices, but also as a divine injunction for the Christian life: "As the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive" (Col. 3:13); "Be merciful, just as your heavenly Father is merciful…Forgive, and you will be forgiven" (Luke 6:36-37). This forgiveness, however, is neither automatic nor passively permissive. It requires firm commitment to an arduous task – yet such may be the only hope for genuine healing and peace.

But God does not abandon us to an impossible task. God provides a model, the exemplar, of forgiveness as a transformative means to a different future. And the work of forgiveness takes place with the aid of divine grace. Furthermore, in the face of daunting sin and vice, "let us remember that where there is sin, there is grace; where there is vice, there is virtue; where there is curse, there is beatitude…Our hope in the face of sin is found in standing firm in our relatedness to one another."[59] It is through solidarity cultivated and enabled by God's good grace that such a healing and transformation can take place – as Pope Francis exhorts:

> To cleanse our hearts we need to dirty our hands, to feel accountable and not to simply look on as our brothers and sisters are suffering. How do we purify our hearts? By our own efforts, we cannot; we need Jesus. He has the power to conquer our evils, to heal our diseases, to rebuild the temple of our heart.[60]

By God's grace and with firm commitment to one another, such solidarity can take root and displace complacency and complicity, offering healing to countless wounds and leading to a more hopeful future.

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[59] Keenan, "Raising Expectations on Sin," 180.

[60] Pope Francis, "Homily of the Holy Father: Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Pope Francis to Iraq," Franso Hariri Stadium, Erbil, Iraq, 7 March 2021.

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Forgiveness sits at the heart of the Gospel message and the Christian vocation. More than a mere theoretical reflection, it is a hallmark of the Christian life and our only hope for the future. I am grateful to my brothers Danny, Mike, Steve, and Zach, who have taught me that time and again.

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