NORMATIVE ANTHROPOLOGY AFTER *GAUDIUM ET SPES*: INSIGHT FOR A LIBERATIVE ETHIC

Chet Mitchell Jechura♦
Boston College, USA

The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) signalled a significant shift in the trajectory of the Roman Catholic Church. The spirit of *aggiornamento*, which effectively opened the doors of the Church to the world, had a notable impact on the way in which we think about the human person as a moral agent. The human person as a moral agent is an embodied person who lives in relationship with God and with creation, including other human beings and all living organisms on the earth. Sustained reflection on how we live in relationship to each other, to God, and to our planet lies at the heart of theological ethics. However, we know that fractures abound in these relationships, sweeping far too many persons to the margins. As a result, theological ethics must always begin from the recesses of the dominant purview. In this essay, I celebrate *Gaudium et Spes* as a point of departure and use theological anthropology and reflection on the body as two additional resources that can generate a robust liberative ethic, which has the capacity to raise our collective consciousness to hear the voices of those who inhabit the margins.

Theological anthropology is the seedbed from which a liberative ethic that is theologically informed emerges. In her newest book, Lisa Sowle Cahill affirms that theology and ethics are two mutually informing, interrelated modes of critical and creative reflection.[1]

♦**Chet Mitchell Jechura** holds the Master of Theological Studies degree from Boston College, School of Theology and Ministry. His current interests are situated at the intersection of social ethics, embodiment, and theological anthropology. Email: cjechura@gmail.com

[1]Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Global Justice, Christology, and Christian Ethics*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013, 3-4.

What we hold to be good, that which we value, our sense of what is right, and the vision that we have for the world in which we live are all informed by our faith and by what we confess as true. And our beliefs guide our actions. Thus, confessing Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour must have an impact on how we act in the world; the ways in which we act as moral agents are the basic litmus test for the validity of the gospel that we preach and live. An ethic that is informed by theology cannot be taken seriously, nor can it get off the ground successfully, if practices, lives, and social structures are not being transformed in the name of freedom and love. Indeed, this is the very purpose of theological ethics.

The dynamics, contours, and features that mark the life of the human person as a moral agent who is made in God's image and likeness and who quests to understand the created order of the universe and the source of creation itself are germane to theological anthropology, where topics such as sin, grace, creation, *imago Dei*, and eschatology are all significant foci for theological reflection. Ethics, which is theoretical praxis informed by critical systemic reflection on social relations to the extent that they promote the common good and allow for full human flourishing, can and must be informed by theological anthropology. Indeed, ethics and theological anthropology are two mutually informing modes of thinking about what it means to be human. Thus, all theoethical reflection must be situated within a specific theological anthropology if it is to remain true to its theological essence. In the following section, I indicate how the Second Vatican Council and the emergence of *Gaudium et Spes* marked a turning point in the history of the development of moral theology, thus giving rise to a liberative ethic that is anthropologically informed.

Harnessing the Spirit of Vatican II for Theological Ethics

Of the sixteen documents generated by Vatican II, perhaps the one that has the most perduring impact on both theological anthropology and ethics is *Gaudium et Spes*. What makes this document so significant is the central focus it gives to the human person. The conciliar fathers write, "[i]t is the human person that is to be saved, human society which must be renewed. It is the human person, therefore, which is the key to this discussion, each individual person in her or his totality, body and soul, heart and conscience, mind and

will."[2] In the years leading up to the council, Roman Catholic moral theology took the moral manuals as its primary point of departure,[3] but as James Keenan, SJ has noted, a profound shift occurred in light of the council from a static, rule-based moral theology to a living, dialogical moral theology which privileged communal conscience formation and individual discernment in the moral life.[4] Movement away from the manuals liberated moral theology from the crippling grip of rules and regulations that were devoid of dynamic human experience. Not only did this profound shift to the person provide a heightened impetus for reflecting on theological anthropology in light of what is good and empower right moral action, but it also provided the church with a point of entry into the close and thorough examination of human relationships in order to transform society and to promote the common good, which are the primary tasks of ethics.

If the gospel message, which is ultimately a message of good news about the "already, but not yet" reign of God, is to have any legitimacy or relevance, it must gain traction in a larger social-relational setting. This means that the church must encounter and engage with the world as the world currently is, while drawing inspiration from a theological vision of the way the world ought to be. In a recent homily delivered to commemorate UN World Environment Day, Pope Francis emphatically condemned a "culture of waste" whereby "[h]uman life, the person, is no longer perceived as a primary value to be respected and protected, especially if poor and disabled, if not yet useful – such as the unborn child – or no longer needed such as the elderly."[5] As refreshing as this message is in a time when our planet is in peril and human relations remain fractured by a money-driven, market-based economic system, Pope Francis harkens us back to a path that was forged fifty years ago at the beginning of Vatican II. This path was marked by solidarity.

A requirement of this solidarity is that the church exists in relationship with the world. As such, the church is not set apart from

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[2]Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* (hereafter GS), in Austin Flannery, O.P., ed., *Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations*, Northport: Costello Publishing, 1996, article 3.

[3]James F. Keenan, *A History of Catholic Moral Theology in the Twentieth Century: From Confessing Sins to Liberating Consciences*, New York: Continuum, 2010, 9-34.

[4]James F. Keenan, *A History of Catholic Moral Theology*, 96-97.

[5]http://www.news.va/en/news/pope-at-audience-counter-a-culture-of-waste-with-s (accessed 10 June 2013).

the world, nor is it above the world. The often quoted and much celebrated opening lines of *Gaudium et Spes* emphasize the necessity of a church that engages with the world in solidarity: "[t]he joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well."[6] As this profound sentiment indicates, the role of the church is refocused and its mission is clarified. Rather than existing independently of the world, the church is now called to live the gospel message in the world, as a vital part of the world.

This has significant implications for theological anthropology. In light of the developments of Vatican II for theological ethics,[7] the church's vision of what it means to be human can no longer be refined apart from the world, but must be gleaned through a critical and compassionate engagement that is marked by solidarity with the world. In other words, the church exists in a dialogical relationship with humanity. Just as the church has much to teach human persons, the church also has much to learn from the human community, thus giving rise to new foundations for a theological anthropology.[8] Richard R. Gaillardetz and Catherine E. Clifford emphasize this as a significant development of the council: "[h]ere we have a vision of the church unapologetic in its conviction that it had much to offer the world, yet presenting itself with humility as open to be taught by persons, communities, and movements outside the boundaries of the church."[9] As a result, the scope of the church's relevance is augmented; it has the capacity and authority to speak to human experience when its own voice is informed by the experience of all human persons.

Part and parcel of this call to solidarity with the world is the realization that human beings are inherently social. The authors of the document take careful note of this profound anthropological insight when they write, "[f]or by their innermost nature men and women are social beings; and if they do not enter into relationships with others they can neither live nor develop their gifts."[10] Indeed,

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[6]GS, 1.

[7]See Alain Thomasset, *La morale de Vatican II*, Montréal: Médiaspaul, 2013.

[8]James F. Keenan, *A History of Catholic Moral Theology*, 173-196.

[9]Richard R. Gaillardetz and Catherine E. Clifford, *Keys to the Council: Unlocking the Teaching of Vatican II*, Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2012, 92.

[10]GS, 12.

the individual person is situated within a particular community that is part of a global, kin-network. With the advent and spread of social media in the past decade, communication throughout most parts of the world is now possible at an incredibly rapid, instantaneous rate. With this increase in communication comes a heightened level of awareness, that is, a subsequent increase in the knowledge of the ways in which the decisions we make and how we live our lives have a direct and lasting impact on our planet and on the lives of other human beings. We are no longer insulated by our ignorance; the truth sets us free, but it also binds us as moral agents to the care of our neighbours and to the stewardship of our planet on a greater, more inconvenient and even unsettling scale than ever before.

One of the reasons why *Gaudium et Spes* maintains relevance nearly fifty years later is due to the fact that its drafters were so prophetic and ahead of their time. One such person who played a significant role in writing the document is the historical giant of moral theology, Bernard Häring. Keenan notes Häring's palpable influence woven throughout *Gaudium et Spes*, especially as concerns the conciliar insight of the social nature of the human being: "[t]he anthropological vision is based on the human as a social being. Moral issues are not treated as primarily individual, but rather as communal and even global."[11] Such a development enabled the church to develop a moral theology that was not impotent in the face of pressing global issues. At the same time, the bishops voice a serious concern: "[t]he world is keenly aware of its unity and of mutual interdependence in essential solidarity, but at the same time, it is split into bitterly opposing camps."[12] Class structures, ethnic categories, religious traditions, and bodily markings[13] (among countless other dynamics) all have a role to play in dividing the human community, albeit to various degrees. Instead of seeing every human being as a person of dignity, living as a vital part of a global, kin-network, and entitled to full human flourishing, certain persons and groups of persons are denied access to participation in the global community and, as a consequence, are incapable of fully flourishing as human beings. Fifty years later, it is increasingly imperative that the spirit of the council is harnessed in

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[11]James F. Keenan, "Vatican II and Theological Ethics," *Theological Studies* 74, 1 (2013) 172.

[12]GS, 4.

[13]M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being,* Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010, 56.

order to motivate the urgent task of reflecting on a theological anthropology that gives rise to a liberative ethic that is informed by the voices of those who are denied access to the human, global good of full flourishing.

Theological Anthropology for a Liberative Ethic

When engaging theological anthropology, sin and grace are two important relational dynamics in the moral life of the Christian person. When reading the signs of the times,[14] as the church is called to do in light of Vatican II, one easily comes to the fast realization that suffering pervades our post-lapsarian world. Indeed, this suffering is the direct result of human sin *tout court*. By human sin, I mean a combination of personal, social, and structural sin. Keenan notes the significance this realization had on the development of moral theology at the council: "[o]ne of the impacts of Vatican II is then clearly the irruption of suffering and the concomitant call to answer in solidarity and to alleviate the suffering wherever possible. The agenda of theological ethics is being set."[15]

In this section, I narrow my focus to consider the two dynamics of sin and grace vis-à-vis embodiment and its implications for the development of a liberative ethic.[16] To initiate this enterprise, I turn to *Gaudium et Spes*, once again, which offers the following insight about the body: "[humans] are, rather, to regard their bodies as good and to hold them in honor since God has created them and will raise them up on the last day. Nevertheless, humanity has been wounded by sin."[17] In light of this shared woundedness, I propose that the human suffering caused by racism, sexism, heterosexism, and ableism are all induced by the particular social paradigm of bodily privilege.

I name bodily stigmatization to be a social sin inflicted by those who enjoy a certain bodily privilege. To further probe the depths of this social sin, I examine the evil forces at play that perpetuate its existence in society. Here, I rely heavily on the much-needed critique levelled by womanist ethics. My use of womanist ethics is intentional, as the womanist ethic is uniquely appreciative of the intersectionality

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[14]GS, 4.

[15]James F. Keenan. "Vatican II and Theological Ethics," 182.

[16]See Miguel A. De La Torre, ed., *Ethics: A Liberative Approach*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013.

[17]GS, 14.

of multiple identities, privileges, and marginalizations that different persons are subject to endure simultaneously. In an attempt to locate grace within this particular framework, I suggest that the victims of bodily stigmatization are a (dis)grace. As a result of a personal process of appropriation, their embodied experience of stigmatization is actually a grace; it predisposes them to have access to a certain epistemological privilege, which results from a unique attachment to, investment in, and appreciation of God's experience as a scorned human being in and through the person of Jesus Christ. Such epistemological privilege has the effect of drawing the (dis)graced into an ever more deep and intimate relationship with the divine in light of the need for and purpose of salvation. Moreover, I maintain that theology is enhanced by the particular experiences and insights that those who are (dis)graced bring to the conversation. Here, I am thinking of the invaluable contributions and developments made by feminist theology,[18] black theology,[19] queer theology,[20] and disability theology,[21] among countless other contextual theologies that continue to sharpen our understanding of God in light of the shared theoethical commitment to social justice.

2.1. Bodily Stigmatization as Social Sin

Sin[22] is an oppressive, insidious, and negative dynamic in the life of the person that alienates and excludes. As *Gaudium et Spes* indicates,

> [o]ften refusing to acknowledge God as their source, men and women have also upset the relationship which should link them to their final destiny; and at the same time they have broken the right order that should exist within themselves as well as between them and other people and all creatures.[23]

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[18]Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse,* New York: Crossroad, 2002.

[19]James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power,* Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997.

[20]Patrick S. Cheng, *Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology,* New York: Seabury, 2011.

[21]Nancy L. Eiesland, *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability,* Nashville: Abingdon, 1994.

[22]See, D. Fozard Weaver, "Taking Sin Seriously," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 31, 1 (2003) 45-74; J. Fuchs, *Moral Demands and Personal Obligations*, Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1993, ch. 4 "Structures of Sin," 63-73; James F. Keenan, *Moral Wisdom: Lessons and Texts from the Catholic Tradition*, 2nd ed., Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010, ch. 3 "Sin," 45-65.

[23]GS, 13.

Sin has the effect of cutting us off from community, from God, and from the intrinsic goodness that is situated at the core of who we are. Sin is an experience just as much as it is an act. I can be the cause of sin, but I can also experience the sin that is caused by another person. If racism is the sinful act caused by racial supremacy, then racial minorities are the ones who experience, know, and feel the thrust of its egregious impact in their daily lives. Sin is individual. Examples of individual sin include, but are not limited to, the following actions: murder, adultery, cheating, and stealing. Sin is also social. Examples of social sin include, but are not limited to, the following actions: pollution, gentrification, economic exploitation, and sex trafficking.

Bodily stigmatization is a social sin. My use of the word "stigma" is intentional. The word stigma comes from the Greek word *stizein*, which means to tattoo. Like a tattoo, stigma points to something, signifies something, and does something. In his groundbreaking sociological study on stigma, Erving Goffman highlights three different types of stigma: (1) abominations of the body; (2) blemishes of individual character; and (3) the tribal stigma of race, nation, and religion.[24] For Goffman, the stigmatized are those who cannot live up to the particular expectations that the "normals" are capable of fulfilling, with the subsequent, and I think intentional, consequence that the stigmatized are denied their full humanity.[25] In this section, I am concerned with the first and third types of stigma, what I call bodily stigmatization. By bodily stigmatization, I mean the strategic marking of persons whose bodies are visibly perceived as "other" to the purportedly normative body-type of the white, heterosexual, non-disabled, male. Within this particular context, normativity gives rise to bodily privilege. The white, heterosexual, non-disabled, male is the locus of unequivocal privilege, at least in the Western imperial context that has colonized the world. It is the socially constructed allocation and circulation of bodily privilege, albeit to varying degrees among different persons, and the social-relational divisions that generate feelings of inferiority and confer a status of inequality among "others" that I find to be of significant concern within this morally bankrupt social paradigm.

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[24]Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, New York: Penguin, 1990, 14.

[25]Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, 15.

Privilege is a social dynamic that is particularly difficult to upend because those who have it cannot easily understand or recognize its advantages. For example, a white person never has to live with the legitimate fear of racial profiling in our prevailing post-colonial context where white is perceived to be right. But those who are "other" in any way, shape, or form to what has been constructed as "normal" in our world have had to carve their lives around these legitimate concerns and live in pragmatic and strategic ways so as to navigate the complex currents that swirl around them every single day.

Those who have been denied bodily privilege know exactly what privilege is, what it looks like, and what it feels like through *via negativa* epistemologies. For example, black is not-white, queer is non-heterosexual, disabled is unable, and woman is other to man. Those who enjoy total bodily privilege do not know and will never know the extent to which they are privileged because they know nothing different. Concerning white privilege, Margaret R. Pfeil advises, "…precisely because white privilege typically goes unchallenged, above all by white people, interrogating whiteness is a necessary step in identifying and then dismantling structures of white supremacy through the solidarity of Christian love."[26] Here, it is important to emphasize ignorance and unknowingness, both of which lie at the core of the evil that perpetuates the social dynamic of bodily stigmatization. This is precisely why seeing to the end of bodily stigmatization is such a difficult task. Nevertheless, isolating bodily privilege is a necessary first step in seeing to its demise.

Pfeil goes on to write that bodily privilege vis-à-vis whiteness generates what she calls "moral blindness:" "[t]hat those occupying the epistemological standpoint of white supremacy fall prey to moral blindness does not mean that whiteness is invisible. Rather, invisibility is a feature of the powerful matrices of privilege that accompany it."[27] While Pfeil's use of the word "blindness" is unfortunate, given that it has the effect of reinforcing a stigma on our sisters and brothers who are visually impaired, I believe she raises a serious consideration that must give us pause for meaningful reflection, especially in light of the prevailing power dynamics that prop up the social sin of bodily stigmatization.

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[26]Margaret R. Pfeil, "The Transformative Power of the Periphery," in L.M. Cassidy and E. Mikulich, ed., *Interrupting White Privilege: Catholic Theologians Break the Silence,* Maryknoll: Orbis, 2007, 127-8.

[27]Margaret R. Pfeil, "The Transformative Power of the Periphery," 133.

2.2. Evincing Evil, Producing Power

Privilege is power. And within a Western, imperial context, power has been used to mediate the evil of colonialism. From the commodification of black bodies through that "peculiar institution" and the subsequent carving up of Africa, to the extermination of Native Americans and the conquest of their lands, more often than not, power has been used to oppress, dominate, and generate capital. M. Shawn Copeland writes of the detrimental effects that have resulted from the ill use of power:

> The global transfer of power and resources from the natural world to human control, from local communities to transnational and neocolonial elites, from local to transnational power centers reduces life expectancy, increases infant and child mortality, compromises health care, ignores education and illiteracy, and distorts income distribution.[28]

With the emergence of post-colonial theories and theologies, theologians and ethicists alike are challenged to consider the broader, global implications that are at work within a given practice or hegemonic assumption. In light of the post-modern scepticism of an uncritical universalism and unilaterally imposed hegemony, David Hollenbach, SJ proposes that "[t]he pursuit of social ethics in the postmodern epoch, therefore, demands that we squarely face what has classically been called the 'problem of evil.'"[29]

 Nevertheless, it is not enough to just name bodily stigmatization as a social sin. *Libido dominandi* is a perduring legacy of the Fall. In the post-lapsarian situation, evil can be (and often is) the partner of power. The writers of *Gaudium et Spes* are aware of the pervasive partnership between power and evil: "[s]o it is that the earth has not yet become the scene of true amity; rather, humanity's growing power now threatens to put an end to the human race itself."[30] Following the lead of this insight from *Gaudium et Spes*, a liberative ethic must always be poised to launch a critique of hegemonic practices of power and see to its demise. Toward this end, Stephen G. Ray, Jr., writes that it is not enough to name social sin, one must also

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[28]M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010, 67.

[29]David Hollenbach, SJ, *The Global Face of Public Faith: Politics, Human Rights, and Christian Ethics*, Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2003, 60.

[30]GS, 37.

reflect on the forces that give rise to and sustain the predominance of the social sin itself: "… when [depictions] of social sin [fail] to include an accurate account of the social forces producing it, the more important social and material relations that are fundamentally unjust are left unchallenged."[31]

Not only is the normative body-type of the white, heterosexual, non-disabled, male socially constructed, but it is also maintained and perpetuated by hegemonic power structures and discourses, not unlike what the womanist ethicist Emilie M. Townes calls the "fantastic hegemonic imagination."[32] The "fantastic hegemonic imagination," which "'plays' with history and memory to spawn caricatures and stereotypes,"[33] excludes those persons whose bodies are made "other" and precludes them from access to full human flourishing in the life of the community. If bodily stigmatization is the social sin, then the "fantastic hegemonic imagination" is the very power dynamic that sees to its continual generation and perpetuation.

In order to adequately address the sin of bodily stigmatization, we must drill deep to its root and engage with the forces that sustain it, with what Townes calls the "cultural production of evil."[34] "Exploring evil as a cultural production highlights the systematic construction of truncated narratives designed to support and perpetuate structural inequities and forms of social oppression."[35] Stigmatization is the deliberate attempt to deprive another person of their agency and will to become fully who they are. Women, persons of colour, the disabled, and queer folk will never measure up adequately to the constructed norm of what it means to be fully human. Consequently, they will be deprived of the ability to participate in significant world-making projects.

Stigma leads to stereotype, stereotype leads to mockery, mockery leads to shame, and shame strips away the dignity of the human person, leaving that person in a place of disempowerment and total annihilation. Undoing the cultural production of evil in light of the

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[31]Stephen G. Ray, Jr., *Do No Harm: Social Sin and Christian Responsibility*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003, 2.

[32]Emilie M. Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, 7.

[33]Emilie M. Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, 7.

[34]Emilie M. Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, 7.

[35]Emilie M. Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, 4.

anthropological insights conveyed in *Gaudium et Spes* begins with an appeal to the embodied experience of the stigmatized: "… a key way to understand the arithmetic of misery that evil invokes and provokes is to concentrate on particularities rather than universals."[36] By listening to the particular experience(s) of the stigmatized, a deep disturbance is created. When ethics engages with embodied experience on the margins, a ripple is made that unquiets the placid waters teeming with the status quo of marginalizing behaviours. This troubling of the waters vis-à-vis particular, enfleshed experience(s) has a disruptive effect on the cultural production of evil: "[t]his focus on localized experiences of oppression in countermemory allows [us] to recentre dominant narratives into a reframing of what constitutes the universal – thus getting into the interior life of evil to unhinge its underpinnings."[37] Indeed, ethics ought to always remain poised to level a critique of the way things are, upon a careful examination of the world and through reading the signs of the times.

2.3. Bodily (Dis)Grace

While the stigmatized are the victims of a social sin that has ruptured relationships to the highest degree, they are not rendered worthless or meaningless. All humans are created in God's image and likeness and possess an innate dignity that can never be lost. And yet, Wendy Farley offers a sobering reminder that "[t]he great declaration that we are created in the divine image has done little to help us recognize the full humanity of all persons."[38] With this in mind, I suggest our reflection turn to an understanding of stigma as a source of bodily (dis)grace. While the stigmata that venerable figures of the Christian Tradition such as St. Francis of Assisi and Padre Pio have received are recognized by many ardent devotees as a mysterious grace bestowed on the pious, I understand the (dis)grace that results from the social sin of bodily stigmatization to be something altogether different. The stigma that is brought to bear on people of colour, queer folk, women, persons who are disabled, or any combination thereof is never to be exalted.

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[36]Emilie M. Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, 2.

[37]Emilie M. Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, 8.

[38]Wendy Farley, *Gathering Those Driven Away: A Theology of Incarnation*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011, 100.

In his spiritual treatise *Jesus and the Disinherited*, Howard Thurman[39] reflects on the message that Jesus Christ brings to the "disinherited," those people "who stand, at a moment in human history, with their backs against the wall."[40] Since the human being is an embodied person and we encounter our material world through our created corporeality, it is precisely those who are stigmatized by the bodies they have that stand with their backs against the wall. Yet, it is also those who stand with their backs against the wall that have access to a certain epistemological privilege. These folks are privileged epistemologically because they *know* and can *identify* with Jesus Christ on a profoundly personal level. In a recent reflection, Copeland extends this epistemological privilege to enslaved Africans in the United States: "their oppression gave them an epistemological privilege – they understood [Jesus Christ's] vulnerability and pain, they grasped his love."[41] Indeed, those who are stigmatized by their bodies know what it is like to be scorned, mocked, judged, condemned, cast out, shamed, humiliated, and brutalized. Their subjugation and suffering is attributed to a false righteousness that has always been on the wrong side of history. In short, the stigmatized *know* and *feel* the necessity of salvation; their stigma is a (dis)grace.

While sin has the effect of isolation, grace has the ability to restore. Those who are stigmatized have access to a privileged relationship with God, that is, to a unique, experiential understanding of God's experience as a scorned human being. Similarly, God has a special connection to the (dis)graced. In his monumental text, *God of the Oppressed*, the black liberation theologian James H. Cone strikes a nerve that had previously been untouched in ethics, thus shoring up the relationship between liberation theology and ethics. Aware of the nefarious consequences of an ethic that is derived from culture and not from a stringent adherence to biblical revelation which occurs within a communal-ecclesial setting, Cone observes that "[t]he problem of Christian ethics is its dependence on a theology that does

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[39]Thurman, the former dean of Marsh Chapel at Boston University, was the first African-American to be named dean of any chapel at any majority-white university in North America. His legacy remains palpable to this day, radiating from his historic pulpit.

[40]Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1996, 1.

[41]M. Shawn Copeland, "Holy Week 2013: Reflection for Good Friday," accessed 27 April 2013, http://paxchristiusa.org/category/bread-for-the-journey-blog/cope land/.

not know the God of the oppressed."[42] Whether we are talking about the oppression of the enslaved Hebrew people in Egypt or the oppression that Jesus Christ himself endured as he was humiliated, tried, and crucified before the gathered crowds, it is clear that the God of liberative ethics is a God who identifies with the (dis)graced, that is, the victimized, marginalized, and stigmatized. Cone observes that this God desires the liberation of the oppressed from injustice: "… to hear the message of Scripture is to hear and see the truth of God's liberating presence in history for those who are oppressed by unjust social structures."[43] To soothe the throbbing nerve that Cone exposes is to turn away from a God who is never satisfied with the status quo and to place the core of theological ethics in peril, undermine its liberative edge, and weaken the force of its moral critique.

Conclusion

The Second Vatican Council made a lasting impact on the development of moral theology that is still being realized by theological ethicists today, Protestants and Catholics alike. The shift from the rigidity of the moral manuals to an emphasis on conscience formation and moral discernment in light of dynamic human experience contributed, in large part, to the privileging of theological anthropology and reflection on the body in ethics. Insofar as the human being is social, all ethics are inherently social. However, *Gaudium et Spes* signalled toward the necessity of the church developing a liberative ethic, that is, an ethic that is distilled from dialogue with the world and marked by solidarity with those on the margins. As I have shown, such an achievement opened the door to envisioning a "normative anthropology"[44] that functions to upend the social sin of bodily stigmatization, whereby persons who are "other" to the normative body-type of the white, heterosexual, non-disabled, male are denied access to full human flourishing in the global community. Nearly 50 years have elapsed and the lasting impact of *Gaudium et Spes* continues to be revealed in shaping how ethicists are to live with, engage, and dismantle the injustices and evils that prevail in our post-modern world.

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[42]James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed,* Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997, 186.

[43]James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed,* Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997, 183-4.

[44]Franz Scholz, "Problems on Norms Raised by Ethical Borderline Situations: The Beginnings of a Solution in Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure," *Moral Norms*, 158.