

IMPASSE AND SOLIDARITY IN THEOLOGICAL ETHICS

I want to begin with a personal experience of impasse in my own life and the attendant lessons I have learned, particularly the intrinsic healing value of solidarity.

It starts in 2006 when my dermatologist found a mark on my back. She biopsied it and called me two days later, saying, "I've got good news, you have a very thin melanoma." I fell out of my chair. While I was stunned, she was relieved. The melanoma was later removed and the borders showed no trace of cancer. She assured me that they got the cancer before it had spread.

Last July I convened the planning committee for the next international conference of Catholic Theological ethicists, to be held in July 2010 in Trent, Italy. After the meeting, I remained in Europe for a few more days. One morning I woke up and discovered a lump, just below my waist. I was alarmed. It was clearly a swollen, rather large lymph node. Since I was heading home in three days, I called my physician to ask if I could see him upon my return.

My primary care physician examined me, confirmed it was a lymph node, but was convinced that it was a mischievous but not dangerous one. Still, he arranged for me to see a surgeon to biopsy it. When I met the surgeon the next day, he said that he was convinced that the node held a melanoma tumor.

At this time, I was scheduled to fly to Manila to co-chair a conference of moral theologians from East Asia. The meeting would be the first of its kind in East Asia and was an outgrowth of the 2006 conference of moral theologians held in Padova. Besides being co-chair, I was the conference plenary speaker and I had been invited to lecture elsewhere in the city. Moreover, many of the theologians coming to the conference were young and new and travelling considerable distances to be there. Since my doctors were in disagreement about whether I had cancer or not, they decided I could go to Manila and that the day after my return I would have surgery.

Flying those thirty hours to Manila were probably the most destabilizing hours of my life, but I became convinced that if I did have cancer, I needed to take it in stride and to trust in God that everything would eventually work out.

I had been to Manila on four previous occasions, always to teach at the Ateneo. This time was different. I remember sitting in a cab at an intersection on Katipunan Avenue wondering whether I had cancer. Sitting alone in that cab, I was pretty anxious but I looked out the window and saw teems of Filipinos there at that intersection. A full twelve hour time difference from Boston, I was alone in a cab on the exact other side of the world, and Katipunan was no Commonwealth Ave. I was literally and figuratively at the furthest point I could possibly be from my home, friends and family. And I was wondering, do I have cancer?

That's when I saw the beggar children, the shirtless workers, and the women carrying their children. Seeing them, I realized how vulnerable life is, how fragile the wall between life and death is for hundreds of millions of people, how transient good fortune, good health, and the good life can be. I wondered how the beggar children lived and how long they would live. I wondered about the mothers' grief and the exhaustion of the workers, who realized they would never, ever have a decent wage and that their families would always be in destitute poverty. Wondering whether I had cancer, I found myself thinking of all these people whose own health and well-being was easily as precarious as my own. They lived in impasse; I was experiencing it. The worker knows there is no way out; the mother has no relief of her concerns for her children, and the beggar children will never get beyond their situation.

For the first time in my life I felt that I was not living my life by my expectations. My life was at a crossroads, and I would have to live with far less certitude, stability, and confidence. Yet, at that traffic intersection, the horizon of my life expanded enormously. I thought I am not alone. I have friends and family certainly, but on the other side of the world, I belonged where I was. I began to enjoy the present and the unfamiliar with far greater ease than ever before.

The conference and lectures went well.¹ I returned to the States, had surgery and learned that I had a malignant tumor. Manila prepared me for the months to come: major surgery in September, a month of daily infusions of interferon in November, a host of side effects, and now an eleven month maintenance which requires me to administer interferon every Monday, Wednesday and Friday. I still have another five months to go, fittingly finishing on, of all days, Halloween.

I share all this because I have been affected by the complaint of the New Wineskins members that we need to be more confessional, more expressive of the way Jesus Christ enters our life, and more embracing of Christian holiness.² So I tell you how these recent months have been my impasse and my Kairos. I also do this because it would be incongruous for me to talk about impasse and not say anything about my own somewhat known situation. Finally, all my life I have tried to be in solidarity with the marginalized and alienated. But this experience was different. I felt solidarity not only as a principled stance, foundational to justice. Rather I experienced solidarity as a personal union; I felt that I was personally transformed emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually. There I discovered the intrinsic worth and healing nature of solidarity. Whereas often we think of solidarity as an action of extending ourselves to the marginalized and alienated, who in turn benefit from this inclusive stance, I found instead that solidarity

¹Agnes Brazal, Aloysius Cartagenas, Eric Genilo, and James Keenan, eds., *Transformative Theological Ethics: East Asian Contexts* (Quezon City: Ateoneo de Manila University Press, 2009).

²William Mattison III, ed., *New Wine, New Wineskins: A Next Generation Reflects on Key Issues in Catholic Moral Theology* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005).

was a virtue honing in me my openness and commitment to others. Moreover, like most virtues I found this experience of solidarity to be reflexive: as I sought to be in greater solidarity, I became in turn better incorporated and better able to face my own impasse.

Now nine months later, I find myself experiencing something akin to William James' twice born person. Despite the sustained and compelling depression and fatigue as well as the nightly sweats and the low grade, and sometimes spiked, fevers which I get from interferon, I am experiencing a new and reconciled peace in my life that I never knew before I became ill. In my recovery I am discovering a new found ability to appreciate the present (I always aimed for the future), to attend to those whose lives are far more in jeopardy than my own, to appreciate more deeply the humanity of the people I meet, to sense the abiding presence of the Lord, to be far less trapped by my own fears, and to stand in hope, not despite, but because of the ambiguity with which I live. Though these sentiments are still in their early stages, all of this is very reconciling and I find that the more I identify with others' suffering, the more able I am to bear mine, though with others. I think this is a lesson that we need to constantly reiterate.

James distinguished between the healthy soul and the sick soul. The healthy soul is a person who is able to pursue her or his own desires; the sick soul has conflict, struggle, and frustration throughout life and knows a great deal about evil and sin. Because of this striving only the sick soul can become a twice-born person. The healthy soul has a superficiality that could never experience rebirth.

This rebirth resonates with my own experience. James writes: "The process is one of redemption, not of mere reversion to natural health, and the sufferer, when saved, is saved by what seems to him a second birth, a deeper kind of conscious being than he could enjoy before."³

I know that many, many here have had similar experiences of the sick soul: whether from disease, alcoholism, drug addiction, betrayal, censure, job loss, the death of a spouse, child, or loved one. I am deliberately trying to tap into your experiences of the sick soul as well, because I think the key to advancing solidarity in the face of impasse is an ability to live cognitively, emotionally and spiritually with one's own suffering while being in union with others' in theirs. We know the healing power of solidarity and we can talk about it from our own experience. We know, or at least I believe, we stand in solidarity with others who face impasse precisely because we have faced our own. We enter solidarity, then, not

³William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (London: Routledge, 2002), 157. In a similar, but more confessional vein, James Alison tells his painful story of having been "caught and held through the depths in which the utterly terrifying and yet completely gentle, unambiguous 'yes' of God to suggest into being the consciousness of a son, to bring forth the terrifying novelty of an unbound conscience." He learns of a new faith beyond resentment. James Alison, *Faith Beyond Resentment: Fragments Catholic and Gay* (New York: Crossroad, 2001), 95.

from a condescending position of strength but from the vulnerable position of being human.

Solidarity is not first and foremost a principle for action; solidarity is affective and spiritual union with others whose life situations are also being challenged and compromised. From that union we are called to act in justice. Solidarity is then first a fundamental, existential, deeply felt sense of union; but secondly it is a call to engage in certain moral practices to better the life situation of the other.

Christianity offers us a way to allow our suffering, especially through solidarity with others, to generate a new, never lived life. And that rebirth occasions a new empathy and a new credibility. Again, James writes: "No prophet can claim to bring a final message unless he says things that will have a sound of reality in the ears of victims such as these."⁴

Being able to acknowledge one's suffering in the context of others' suffering is a key to the mystery of Christianity; it is the great inversion: by thinking on others, we are healed. Lisa Cahill writes about this when she links personal suffering to redemptive and communal understandings of solidarity in her recent research on the ethics of the Kingdom of God and the option for the poor.⁵

With an attentiveness to suffering now, let us look at the impasse that many people today suffer. And let us look at how as theologians we respond.

We have seen throughout the world a growing inclination in the industrialized world to distance itself in the name of institutional stability from those whose lives are vulnerable and unstable. A new quarantining happens as we send migrating boat people back out to sea, build national fences, finger print visitors, deny visas to those who are HIV positive, and strategically keep poorer persons from infiltrating local venues. These more belligerent actions are coupled by silent practices that stigmatize the poor, the sick, the homeless, and the unemployed and make their marginal access to the goods of the world even more difficult. In poorer countries the results of this global isolationism has led to enormous refugee movements, forced migration and limbo-like camps where people are held as in transit forever.

The experience of the widening gulf between the wealthy and the poor was frequently addressed when four hundred Catholic ethicists from over sixty countries met in July 2006 in Padova at the first international cross-cultural conference of theological ethicists. At the opening session, Antonio Papisca, the UNESCO Chair of Human Rights, gave a devastating assessment of the state we are in, clearly a state of radical impasse: "The grave dangers of the present hour include infinite war, permanent political destabilization in many regions of the world, the praxis of falsehood and cynicism, the insolent violation of the rule of law, homicidal and suicidal terrorism, the impudent practice of torture, indifference

⁴James, 162.

⁵Lisa Sowle Cahill, "The Atonement Paradigm: Does It Still Have Explanatory Value," *Theological Studies* 68 (2007): 418-432.

and even contempt vis-à-vis the poor, the destruction of the natural environment, and the deployment of dehumanizing biotechnologies.”⁶

At the heart of Papisca’s argument is the exposure of indifference and even contempt for the poor coupled with the isolationists’ disregard for moral standards.

Another speaker Ronaldo Zacharias with near brutal honesty provided a picture of such alienation in his homeland Brazil, but he added that often theological ethics fails to recognize and respond adequately to such alienation. He writes about “a rampant insensitivity to social exclusion, cultural uprootedness, dehumanizing poverty, with the attendant emergence of religious fundamentalism. Theological ethics is in the meantime often distant from reality, parsing unobserved norms, and needing to find greater interdisciplinary engagements.”⁷ In this critique, Zacharias suggests that often theological ethicists live and write in a conceptual world of their own.

From Chile, Tony Mifsud names the phenomenon of a growing asocial individualistic mentality as his country’s most formidable identity challenge. “The problem is not so much the loss of old social models, but rather the weakness of the new imaginary collectives which fail to shape a shared *we*.”⁸ Mifsud reflects on life in Chile and finds a progressive individualization that resists the claims of tradition (moral, familial, religious, and social) and attempts to forge new conditions for possible relatedness, predominantly through consumption. Like Giacometti figures, Chileans are seen as no longer connected to the common good or more specifically to the poor neighbor; likewise their only association with the Church is in its spiritual sustenance but not in its moral or social claims. Mifsud proposes that we forge a renewed sense of Christian identity that helps individuals to see their incorporation into the Body of Christ.⁹

In each of these instances, the lack of sympathy for those alienated in poverty is coupled with an isolationism by those fearful of the risks of contact with them. At the same time, theologians seem not yet able to provide a bridge of solidarity between the two.

While it is evident that those alienated from the world’s goods suffer, we cannot overlook the fear and suffering of those who tend to isolationism. Marianne Heimbach-Steins sees these tensions exacerbated in her native Germany. She calls the search for isolationism: “a deeply rooted insecurity of the individual and

⁶Antonio Papisca, “The Needs of the World and the Signs of the Times,” in *Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church*, edited by James F. Keenan (New York: Continuum, 2007), 11-19, at 11 (hereafter, *CTEWC*).

⁷Ronaldo Zacharias, “Dreaming of a New Moral Theology for Brazil,” *CTEWC*, 116-123, at 120.

⁸Tony Mifsud, “Moral Reflection in Latin America: Challenges and Proposals within the Chilean Reality,” *CTEWC*, 131-137, at 131.

⁹Mifsud, “Moral Reflection in Latin America,” 136-137.

the collective level caused by *political change, growing economic pressure, and social disparities.*” But she notes that rather than achieving isolationism, working and middle class groups discover “an *increasing cultural and religious plurality* which forces different identities to meet and interact within one and the same society.”¹⁰

In short those seeking to protect themselves from the instability of the developing world find themselves being manipulated and coerced into relationships that they would rather forego. These are hardly conditions then for promoting solidarity; they more likely produce resentment.

These testimonies resonate with our own experiences in the United States and Canada. As in Brazil, Chile, Germany and Italy, we see that notions of the common good become fragmented and a new subjectivity emerges, all too universal, of persons defining their communities’ teachings not according to the traditions but according to their insulating imaginations.

For this reason the call to solidarity and the promotion of justice is extraordinarily urgent today. From Argentina, Miguel Yáñez proposes a solidarity to incorporate the marginalized, humanize economic and social structures, and temper competitiveness and individualism.¹¹ Another Argentinean, Aldo Marcelo Cáceres argues that religious traditions offer an essential awareness of our humanity that promotes a solidarity across national frontiers.¹² Pope John Paul II’s encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis* provides the most commonly cited reflections on solidarity; there the late pope discusses interdependence as “a *system determining* relationships in the contemporary world” and solidarity as the “correlative response as a moral and social attitude, as a ‘virtue’.”¹³ Daniel Groody cites the pope’s “globalization without marginalization” or “a globalization of solidarity,” which ought to be the ultimate *telos* of globalization.¹⁴ Finally David Hollenbach

¹⁰Marianne Heimbach-Steins, “Political-Ethical Challenges in Europe: A Christian Socio-Ethical Perspective,” *CTWEC*, 101-107, at 101.

¹¹Humberto Miguel Yáñez, *Esperanza y Solidaridad* (Madrid: Comillas, 1999).

¹²Aldo Marcelo Cáceres, *Una ética para la globalización* (Buenos Aires: San Augustin, 2005).

¹³John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis* no. 38. (December 30, 1987). <http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis_en.html>. See Charles Curran, Kenneth Himes, and Thomas Shannon, “Commentary on *Sollicitudo rei socialis*,” in *Modern Catholic Social Teaching*, ed. Kenneth Himes (Washington: Georgetown University, 2005), 415-35, esp. 426-30. Kenneth Himes, “Globalization with a Human Face: Catholic Social Teaching,” *Theological Studies* 69 (2008): 269-289.

¹⁴Daniel Goody, “Globalizing Solidarity: Christian Anthropology and the Challenge of Human Liberation,” *Theological Studies* 69 ((2008): 250-269, at 267. Groody refers us to John Paul II, *Ecclesia in America* no. 55 (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1999). See Groody, *Globalization, Spirituality, and Justice: Navigating the Path to Peace* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2007).

argues that, since globalization structuralizes inequality and marginalization, we need to establish normative standards of solidarity that are as sophisticated and as interlocking as the network of globalization itself.¹⁵

These writings have forged a consensus within theology, the church and the academy that has established solidarity as a pivotal agenda for the twenty-first century. Moreover, the writers themselves have worked actively to promote solidarity for the marginalized. Hollenbach for instance has founded at Boston College, The Center for Human Rights and International Justice and has promoted a wide array of collaborative efforts dealing with refugees, forced migration, and deportations.¹⁶

I believe, however, that what remains outstanding is the need to move other audiences to understand within our societies and within our churches the need for an affective solidarity that leads to practices of justice. I think we need to expand our circle of readers and we cannot do that through the same style of writing that is cultivated in and for the academy. We need to ask ourselves after all our writing on alienation and solidarity have we touched the average Catholic citizen from Canada and the United States to move toward a stance of greater proximity and concern? Is there any effective history, what the Germans call, *Wirkungsgeschichte*, to our writing on solidarity that extends into the world of ordinary people? Or have we made an argument for the academy and for church offices? Other than our colleagues and students has anyone moved toward the alienated other?

In the first phase of the promotion of solidarity and justice, church leaders and theologians developed inter-departmental bonds so as to fix the agenda of solidarity. Now, however, we must move beyond the chancery and beyond the academy. I believe we need better rhetorical strategies so as to prompt others to stand in solidarity and to promote justice for the alienated. If we were to sympathetically tap into the suffering of the isolationists, if we were to address the experiences that they have, we might awaken those who in effect squander the common good.

But we need to ask ourselves, are we inclined to do this and are we able to do this? Why do we so often overlook these more public, less academic audiences? We resonated with this audience on two occasions: First, during the critical response to *Humanae vitae* the laity knew, for instance, who Charles Curran was and they knew what he was saying and why. Later, during the sexual abuse crisis, many others wrote about it not only in academic journals but more public publications as well.

¹⁵David Hollenbach, *The Common Good and Christian Ethics*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 220-244. Christopher Vogt provides a ground-breaking essay on common good and virtue ethics, using solidarity, compassion, and hospitality as foundational sources, Vogt, "Fostering a Catholic Commitment to the Common Good: An Approach Rooted in Virtue Ethics," *Theological Studies* 68.2 (2007): 394-417.

¹⁶<http://www.bc.edu/centers/humanrights/>

But in both these instances we resonated with the stance of this public lay audience. We were sympathetic to the consciences of married laity looking to birth control as an ethical remedy and to lay movements as they responded to the sexual abuse scandal. What happens when we do not resonate with the public audience and when this audience shows little interest in our positions: as for instance, immigration reform, prison reform, or in solidarity with the poor throughout the world? Think for instance of Bryan Massingale's argument that during the civil rights movement, the *Catholic Theological Society of America*, *Theological Studies* and most theological ethicists evidenced little interest in the fifteen years of the greatest struggles in the US over race relations.¹⁷

His lament was that we did not write any essays for the academy on civil rights. Imagine if we had written during those years in academic journals and presented research at the CTSA *but also* wrote public pieces and engaged those who feared and labored against any civil rights. We could have also written for clergy, religious, and lay people to help them as they courageously marched, preached, and protested.

One of the most exciting events this year was to see a number of Catholic theologians like Vince Miller, Shawn Copeland, Cathy Kaveney, Lisa Cahill, and Dave Hollenbach rallying around the Obama campaign, giving specific political, ethical and ecclesiological advice. That type of practical imagination is what we need to cultivate, but we need to cultivate it with a broader audience and we need to do it more than every four years.

We can only address these audiences if we know them. Certainly one of the main reasons for the worker priest movement years ago was to live and labor with the oft-overlooked and rarely adequately educated working class. But, without that movement, how do we address the working class, the middle class, or those with greater assets who like others hunger for some theological voices that are understandable and practical? Do we know how to speak to them, to resonate with them, and to engage and move them? Have we cultivated a style with them?

Here I use the word "style" that John O'Malley has used in order to convey a resonance with a particular type of culture.¹⁸ Do we develop a style with people who are not academics, that is, with the vast majority of the continent? One example of developing that style is the recent work of Joe Fahey and Tom Massaro and others in forming *Catholic Scholars for Social Justice* and writing for *America* on this very topic.¹⁹

¹⁷Bryan Massingale, "The African American Experience and U.S. Roman Catholic Ethics: 'Strangers and Aliens No Longer'?", in *Black and Catholic: The Challenge and Gift of Black Folk: Contributions of African American Experience and World View to Catholic Theology*, ed. Jamie Phelps (Milwaukee: Marquette University, 1997), 79-101.

¹⁸John O'Malley, *Four Cultures of the West* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2006).

¹⁹<<http://www.catholicsscholarsforworkerjustice.org/index.html>>; Thomas Massaro, "More Perfect Unions: Violations of workers' rights cannot go unchallenged," *America* (March 9, 2009), 9.

If we want to talk with more than ourselves, then we must develop more embodied, relational, practical, and narrative-based arguments to offer effective ways of addressing impasse in the world, the church and the academy today. We need to develop strategies that are more affectively evident, more emotionally resonant, more imaginatively developed, and more liberating for both the marginalized and the isolationist. We must therefore be suspicious when as academics we think that concepts and good critical thinking are rhetorically sufficient for addressing the challenges of the day.

I believe also that it would be helpful if we look within ourselves to find our own narratives of suffering and seek to relate those narratives with those of people in fearful isolation. If we can develop empathy between ourselves and average North American Christians we might in turn prompt them not only to stand in solidarity but to actually promote justice. The call to solidarity and the promotion of justice are the remedies for addressing those who are profoundly alienated and trapped in impasse. But *how* do we raise consciousness in others, when as Mifsud, Zacharias, Papisca and Heimbach-Stein noted, people are not at all inclined to consider those in need. Granted that people *should* be in solidarity with the alienated, do we not need to *do* something that prompts interest in the impasse in which others live daily? Do we not need to develop a more compelling yet attractive style when there is deep fear-based protectionism and cynical resentfulness arising from so many average citizens?

At present a number of our colleagues are writing about affect and the emotions; here I think of Diana Fritz Cates, Edward Vacek, Patricia Beattie Jung and Stephen Pope. They each argue that the emotions are not antithetical to human knowledge but constitutive of it and that previous models of intellectual objectivity that focused on “cool, detached reason” were actually detrimental to practical wisdom rather than conditions for it. But do we adequately incorporate their research into our own intellectual arguments? Could we not integrate our emotions better into a new style, into more readable works, that are not “dumbed down,” but that summon Catholics across the continent to realize that the moment of *kairos* is now?

While we develop this style, we could learn to write more appealingly not only for others, but even for one another. We could make the academic style more humane, no? Could we not use more narrative, say a story of a union worker in North America coupled with one about the struggling laborer from Africa or Latin America? Could we not use scenes from movies or theater, from poetry or songs, from journals or even a case history, to make our arguments more specific and more concrete but also more rhetorically engaging?

There is evidence of such developments. Black Catholics like Shawn Copeland, Bryan Massingale, and Jamie Phelps do this very effectively; I think we are seeing it in the writings of Latino scholars like Maria Pilar Aquino and Miguel Diaz. Feminists like Margaret Farley, Chris Gudorf, Cristina Traina, Mary Jo Iozzio, Carolyn Sharpe, Patti Jung, and Anne Patrick bring in narratives, cases, poetry, and films in their writings. Newer scholars like Maureen O’Connell

and Rachel Bundang turn to the photo and the mural, while Christopher Vogt turns to the concrete case of the intravenous drug user.

Two ethicists have cultivated much broader audiences through their own creative columns: Patrick McCormick reviews films at *U.S. Catholic* and Cathy Kaveney brings in television, the most pedestrian of artistic communication, at *Commonweal*.

But these are only incipient developments. So we need to ask, what's really holding us back? Are we fundamentally held hostage in our professionalism by a frigid, conceptual, abstract, though well-documented style? Does our own commitment to academic excellence inhibit us from writing in a style that has more capability of serving the broader church and the world? Even in my preparation for this talk, colleagues warned me against referring to my own experience of impasse, particularly with cancer, lest some members of the CTSA dismiss the paper as lacking intellectual rigor. But an academic style is no guarantee of intellectual rigorism.

This critique of academic prose is nothing new. It was after all in the writings of Desiderius Erasmus and Martin Luther. Erasmus was appalled at academic writing; he came "to see the academic culture as the natural enemy of literature."²⁰ In the prefatory letter to Paul Volz, Erasmus explained the value of his *Enchiridion militis christiani*. Among a variety of contrasts, he commented on the literal and figurative weightiness of the scholastic tomes:

There are almost as many commentaries on the *Sentences* as you can name theologians. Of makers of summaries there is no end.... How can a mass of such volumes ever teach us how to live, when a whole life time would not suffice to read them?... Furthermore, suppose that they have defined everything truly and correctly, not to mention the tedious and frigid style in which they deal with these questions, how few men have the leisure to read through so many tomes? Who can carry the *Secunda secundae* of Aquinas round with him?²¹

He admonished theologians for their squabbles and insists: "The good life is everybody's business, and Christ wished the way to it be accessible to all men, not beset with impenetrable labyrinths of argument but open to sincere faith, to love unfeigned, and their companion, the hope that is not put to shame." Finally, he reminds Volz that in all this the scholastics have abandoned the "unlettered multitude, for whom Christ died."²² These people must receive the wisdom of God.

Luther too was critical of the academy. "My advice has been that a young man avoids scholastic philosophy and theology as the very death of his soul... In all these hundreds of years up to the present, the courses at the universities have

²⁰O'Malley, *Four Cultures*, 104.

²¹Desiderius Erasmus, "Enchiridion Militis Christi," *Collected Works of Erasmus: Spiritualia*, ed. John O'Malley (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988) LVI, 9.

²²Ibid.

not produced, out of so many students, a single martyr or saint to prove that their instruction is right and pleasing to God.”²³

Still there are significant examples of such diversity of style and purpose in theology today. One is found in the writings of an African theologian who in the past four years has authored three books aimed to serve the broader church. In *From Crisis to Kairos: The Mission of the Church in the Time of HIV/AIDS, Refuges and Poverty*, the Nigerian Agbonkhanmeghe Orobator demonstrates how the sociological category of crisis correlates with the theological conception of kairos. Wanting to demonstrate that the church “operates at a very concrete and experiential level,” he argues that “when it comes to understanding the community called church in Africa, we derive considerable benefit by situating it in relation to the social contexts and conditions that shape its function, meaning and theology.”²⁴ Later, in order to accompany this project more practically Orobator co-authored with Elias Opongo a manual for parish communities to help parishes deal with local, contextual issues, bringing the issues of analysis, social teachings and justice to instructive purpose. Using simple, sample cases, for example, the right to land and housing, standing up against corruption, encountering ethnic discrimination, the authors lead local communities of faith to understand how they can consider their challenges, analyze them, and act to resolve them. It is a paradigm for moral formation of the ordinary working Christian community.²⁵ Finally, in *Theology Brewed in an African Pot*, Orobator uses African narratives and prayer to explain basic Christian beliefs on God, trinity, Mary, grace and sin.²⁶ These works convey styles of writing that are broader, less academically oriented, but clearly intellectually rich.

In North America, one important development has been the work of newer scholars who have written textbooks for undergraduate students. These works are written with an engaging style, are personally revealing, well narrated, and pedagogically rich. This started I think before them with Russell Connors and Patrick McCormick’s *Character, Choices and Community* (1998) and later their “workbook,” *Facing Ethical Issues* (2002)²⁷ which together helped us to teach with greater attention to not only an understanding of the moral tradition, but also to appreciating its practices. More recently, David Matzko McCarthy and M. Therese

²³Martin Luther, “Against Latomus,” in *Luther’s Works* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1958), Volume 32, 258.

²⁴Agbonkhanmeghe Orobator, *From Crisis to Kairos: The Mission of the Church in the Time of HIV/AIDS, Refuges and Poverty* (Nairobi: Paulines Africa Publications, 2005), 18.

²⁵Elias Opongo and Agbonkhanmeghe Orobator, *Faith Doing Justice: A Manual for Social Analysis, Catholic Social Teachings and Social Justice* (Nairobi: Paulines Africa Publications, 2007).

²⁶Orobator, *Theology Brewed in an African Pot* (Maryknoll: Orbis Press, 2008).

²⁷Russell Connors and Patrick McCormick, *Character, Choices and Community* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1998); Connors and McCormick, *Facing Ethical Issues* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2002).

Lysaught coedited *Gathered for the Journey* (2007);²⁸ Jozef Zalot and Benedict Guevin coauthored *Catholic Ethics in Today's World* (2008);²⁹ David Cloutier wrote *Love, Reason, and God's Story* (2008)³⁰ and William Mattison wrote *Introducing Moral Theology* (2008)³¹ Finally one of the most passionate yet intellectually illuminating works for undergraduates has been Mark Allman's provocative, *Who Would Jesus Kill?*³² The style of these authors is relevant to my argument and could be extended to cultivate a broader audience.

But they are still limiting themselves to undergraduates and that does not yet get us out of the academy and into the "real world." And we need to get out of the academy.

I want to close on this note: that just as we should be suspicious of the academic style, there are many reasons, as we work for the promotion of solidarity and justice, that we need to be suspicious of the academy. As its writing style inhibits solidarity, so do its institutional structures.

Notions of the common good are not only fragmented in large sectors of the industrialized world; they are also evidently diminished in the university. In an essay entitled "Collegiality as a Moral and Ethical Practice," M. Shawn Copeland writes about a young black woman theologian who finds that her white colleagues are as strikingly naïve about their privilege as they are about her own challenges.³³ But Copeland focuses not only on the so-called "innocent" self-understanding of racists, but on the isolating character of our training and of our working in the academy.

In the academy we function very much as individuals from doing our own doctoral studies to teaching in the classroom. We cannot underestimate the individualism of our scholarly formation and our professional lifestyle. What other field of work requires its professional formation to be at least five years of working alone on one's own project with the last two years spent in solitary confinement? Why is the highest form of learning so individualistic and isolationist?

The structures within which we work often undermine rather than encourage us into greater sociability. Not only are our professional lives highly individualistic, we train our students in similar ways, by admissions programs, testing,

²⁸David Matzko McCarthy and M. Therese Lysaught, ed., *Gathered for the Journey* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

²⁹Jozef Zalot and Benedict Guevin Winoma, *Catholic Ethics in Today's World* (Winoma: St. Mary's Press, 2008).

³⁰David Cloutier, *Love Reason, and God's Story* (Winoma: St. Mary's Press, 2008).

³¹William Mattison *Introducing Moral Theology* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2008).

³²Mark Allman, *Who Would Jesus Kill?* (Winona: St. Mary's Press, 2008).

³³M. Shawn Copeland, "Collegiality as a Moral and Ethical Practice," in *Practice What You Preach*, ed. James F. Keenan and Joseph Kotva (Franklin, WI.: Sheed and Ward, 1999), 315-332.

grading, recommendations and other evaluations that rarely focus on a collective but almost always on a highly meritorious individualism.

One is hard-pressed to claim that the academy promotes solidarity. While police officers work with their partners, firefighters their ladder companies, health-care workers their team, and lawyers their firm, the last two vestiges of the hierarchical model of the medieval era are the academy and the church. In both we find the models of training and advancement that are highly individualistic and dubiously accountable. While we are all too familiar with the powerful influence that the culture of clericalism has had on our priests and bishops and have seen convincingly how many pastors and bishops are unable to promote any real sustained collegiality, we must ask to what degree the culture of the academy is an improvement over clericalism?³⁴ I remember Frank Clooney commenting years ago that as Boston College was promoting the church of the twenty-first century, he argued that more apt for Boston College would be a project called the university in the twenty-first century.

Aside from department meetings, we work alone, teach alone, grade individuals and write their single letters of recommendation. What about our professional lives exude solidarity? I'd say the most evident and frequent sign of solidarity with others is when we cite another's work in a footnote.

This lack of solidarity makes us dull in our sensitivity to the limits of the academy. This lack of solidarity jeopardizes our ability to promote justice at the university. For instance, we teach at institutions that provide a commodity that few can afford. The pathway to higher education is highly individualistic and competitive and rewards the fittest, while ignoring others. Do we stand in solidarity with those unable to study where we teach? Does it come up in our forums? Do we leave the community colleges to take care of the masses, while we provide quality education at prohibitive prices? As in health care, do we in higher education promote a two tiered system? What is the mentality of a high school student who knows that he or she will never get into a university of note, but rather will travel locally to get a less privileged education? Do we develop any solidarity with these students? While we criticize the health care industry for its soaring fees, do the similar economic barriers to higher education get critiqued?

What about other matters of justice and fairness. What about contracts for adjunct professors? Do we stand in solidarity with them? What about those norms for merit increment that favor almost always seniority? And what about the faculty member who has done more popular and accessible works; were it better if they had never done them? How are they welcomed by the academy at times of advancement?

It is not surprising then that the academy promotes such a frigid style of writing and inhibits so much creativity. Sure there are enormous benefits at the uni-

³⁴Michael Papesh, "Farewell to the Club," *America* 186, May 13, 2002, 8-9; *Clerical Culture: Contradiction and Transformation* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2004).

versity, in terms of teaching, mentoring and research. But there are also liabilities which we as theologians and as ethicists rarely address.

If we want to respond to the impasse of marginalized persons as well as those isolationists in the industrialized world, we need to be in our depths familiar with our own sick soul and our own suffering. But we need to explore these issues personally and professionally. We need to make the academy more humane, more attentive to the variety of styles that promote intellectual rigorism, more responsive not first to the problems of the twenty-first century, but to the people.

An emotionally detached place like the academy makes detachment its own type of style. We need instead to develop not only our research which recommends a more holistic, existential, imaginative, attractive, and integrated style; we need to write, work, and support communities within *and* outside the academy with that style. We need to be much more alive and in solidarity with one another and with others. And we need to be suspicious of the academic style which is not only a form of writing, but a form of life.

My colleague Lisa Cahill writes that moral truth “corresponds to the reality of human interdependence and to the possibility of our being in solidarity with one another to relieve human suffering.”³⁵ That seems to be right on, but in order to realize this task we cannot simply follow our minds and leave our hopeful hearts and sick souls at home. Otherwise we will remain trapped in our own unfortunate impasse.

JAMES F. KEENAN
Boston College
Boston, Massachusetts

³⁵Cahill, “Moral Theology: From Evolutionary to Revolutionary Change,” *CTEWC*, 221-227, at 223.