Presidential Address
"HEARTS OF FLESH":
STRUCTURAL SIN AND SOCIAL SALVATION

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Our convention's theme calls us to counter privatized conceptions of salvation, since we are redeemed as a people.[1] Today violent forms of nationalism, radical individualism, and meritocratic myths threaten the "ever wider we" God envisions.[2] In the face of this structural evil, salvation in Christ reunites us with God and one another. The whole person and the entire human race are involved in the salvific economy of the gospel.[3] Early in his papacy, discussing the social nature of salvation, Pope Francis described how God enters the dynamic of our "complex web of relationships," for no one is saved alone.[4] It is his understanding of structural sin, which ensnares us through this same web and which we are called to resist and dismantle, that focuses my reflections this morning. I begin by highlighting the "multivalent" character of Francis's account of structural sin, including his attention to apathy as a key feature that strengthens the durability of structural forms of injustice. Next, I address ways in which our theological discourse is not always well poised to address apathy, nor the subtle, deceptive, and diffuse operations of structural sin more broadly. Finally I suggest ways in which we might broaden a theological response to Francis's multivalent invitation, as we prepare hearts of stone to be replaced by hearts of flesh.

POPE FRANCIS'S MULTIVALENT STRUCTURAL SIN

Throughout his papacy, Francis has employed social sin in ways distinct from his predecessors, explicitly connecting structural harms with abetting attitudes and favoring prophetic denunciation[5] over bounded culpability. In its broadest sense, social

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[2] Francis, "Towards an Ever Wider 'We,'" Message for 107th World Day of Migrants (September 27, 2021), www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/migration/documents/papa-francesco_20210503_world-migrants-day-2021.html.

[3] Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (London: Burns & Oates, 2006), §52, 65.

[4] Antonio Spadaro, "A Big Heart Open to God," *America*, September 30, 2013, 20, 22.

[5] Thomas Massaro, *Mercy in Action: The Social Teachings of Pope Francis* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 31.

sin encompasses the unjust structures, distorted consciousness, and collective actions that facilitate dehumanization. It signals how sin pervades our whole being, analogous to the situation of original sin, with a "complex fabric of unjust social structures and many individual sins reinforcing each other."[6] Theological literature today treats many manifestations of social sin,[7] even as interpreters have differed on its precise scope; some limit it to the effects or embodiment of personal sin, others promote an expansive sense of all sin as primarily social, with personal sins as mere manifestations of social sin.[8]

Biblical scholarship on sin in John and Paul has long understood sin more as a condition than as an act or transgression. In his Gospel, John uses the term "the world" to describe "that hard-hearted state of existence within which one becomes enmeshed upon entrance into life."[9] Whereas some biblical texts depict sin "as an individual phenomenon," the tendencies of the prophets and Jesus "to castigate whole groups," of the gospel narratives to frame the crucifixion "as a result of political and religious, collective…structural forces" rather than individual betrayals alone, and the judgment of nations rather than individuals—to the surprise of the "sheep" and "goats" alike—challenge the confinement of sin to the knowing, willing individual alone.[10] The social situation of original sin essentially constitutes a state that facilitates individual sinfulness.[11] Yet until recent decades, the Catholic moral tradition has neglected, if not resisted, a social understanding of sin, due in part to an individualistic, act-oriented approach in traditional moral theology.[12]

Beyond biblical images for sin, certain theological depictions of sin signal contexts out of which they were devised or the preoccupations of those employing them:

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[6] Piet Schoonenberg, *Man and Sin: A Theological View* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1965), cited in Peter J. Henriot, "The Concept of Social Sin," *Catholic Mind* 71 (October 1973): 51.

[7] For recent examples, see, e.g., Joseph Loïc Mben, "Using the Institutional Model to Overcome Social Sin," *Kanien* 8, no. 2 (2020): 45-71; Megan K. McCabe, "A Feminist Catholic Response to the Social Sin of Rape Culture," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 46, no. 4 (2018): 635-657.

[8] For an overview of this range of understandings, see Conor Kelly, "The Nature and Operation of Structural Sin: Insights from Theology and Moral Psychology," *Theological Studies* 80, no. 2 (2019): 293–327; and Mark O'Keefe, *What Are They Saying About Social Sin?* (New York: Paulist Press 1990).

[9] Kenneth R. Himes, "Human Failing: The Meanings and Metaphors of Sin," in *Moral Theology: New Directions and Fundamental Issues; Festschrift for James P. Hannigan*, ed. James Keating (New York: Paulist Press, 2004), 153.

[10] Karen Kilby, "Sin and Suffering Revisited: A Conceptual Exploration," in *The Human in a Dehumanizing World: Re-Examining Theological Anthropology and Its Implications,* ed. Jessica Coblentz and Daniel P. Horan (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2022), 39.

[11] Peter J. Henriot, "Social Sin: The Recovery of a Christian Tradition," in *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry*, ed. James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead (New York: Seabury, 1980), 132.

[12] See, e.g., James F. Keenan, *History of Catholic Moral Theology in the Twentieth Century: From Confessing Sins to Liberating Consciences* (London: Continuum 2010).

rebellion, infidelity, impurity, error, idolatry, violation, estrangement.[13] "For Augustine, the root sin was pride. For Luther, it was unbelief. For Calvin, it was disobedience."[14] For Walter Rauschenbusch, witnessing firsthand the effects of the industrial revolution on workers in Hell's Kitchen and finding the dominant individual piety inadequate to responding to social injustices, the primary sin was selfishness, and he began to conceive of social sins "lodged in institutions and customs and absorbed by individuals."[15] Gustavo Gutiérrez's congregants living in Lima amid institutionalized poverty "were not well served by the notions of sin" he had studied in Leuven and Lyons, which emphasized anxious individual life choices among ample options, "sexual indiscretion, and a temptation toward an absolutized self." [16] Gutiérrez came to understand that sin occurs not only "within some intimate sanctuary of the heart," but moves into interpersonal relationships, fueling oppression and social conflict.[17] In Ignacio Ellacuría's terms, sinful political, economic, and cultural powers reflect unfolding histories of injustice and hard-heartedness with crucifying effects.[18] Related elevation of social sin and institutional conscientization at Medellín (1968) and Puebla (1978) no doubt shaped the formation of Jorge Bergolio, as well.[19]

Not unlike individualistic notions of salvation, individualistic conceptions of sin have served to narrow the scope of concern. In the Catholic tradition, the use of moral manuals (from the seventeenth to twentieth centuries) focused attention on legalistically determining precisely which acts are sinful and to what degree, with confessors' "sin-grids" underestimating both the maturity of the lay conscience and its degree of sinfulness alike.[20] Figures like these from the social gospel movement and Latin American liberation theology—together with political theologians in Europe—were instrumental in "deprivatizing" the gospel message. In the US context, Reinhold Niebuhr's attention to collective egotism—and feminist and liberationist contributions—similarly illuminated how institutions, cultural ideas, and social

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[13] Joseph H. McKenna, "The Possibility of Social Sin," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 60, no. 2 (June 1994): 125.

[14] Derek R. Nelson, *Sin: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London/New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 78.

[15] Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1997), 47, 60-1, 79.

[16] Nelson, *Sin*, 108.

[17] Gustavo Gutíerrez, *The Power of the Poor in History,* trans. Robert B. Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983), 147.

[18] Daniel P. Castillo, "Reconfiguring Ignacio Ellacuría's Symbolic Conception of 'the Crucified People': Jesus, the Suffering Servant, and Abel," *Theological Studies* 84, no. 1 (2023): 13, drawing on Ignacio Ellacuría, "The Crucified People: An Essay in Historical Soteriology," in *Ignacio Ellacuría: Essays on History, Liberation, and Salvation*, ed. Michael E. Lee (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013), 196 and Michael E. Lee, "Historical Crucifixion: A Liberationist Response to Deep Incarnation," *Theological Studies* 81, no. 4 (2020): 892–912, https://doi.org/10.1177/0040563920985816.

[19] Thomas Massaro also notes the link between Francis's Argentine roots and structural framing of injustice. Massaro, *Mercy in Action*, 31–32.

[20] James F. Keenan, "Raising Expectations on Sin," *Theological Studies* 77, no. 1 (2016): 166-67; Charles E. Curran, "Responding to Contemporary Crises: Resources from the Tradition," in *Building Bridges in Sarajevo: The Plenary Papers from CTEWC 2018,* ed. Kristin E. Heyer, James F. Keenan and Andrea Vicini (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2019), 136.

practices facilitate and perpetuate sin. At the same time, many have hesitated to relinquish a voluntaristic conception of sin wherein we sin only when we make "competent," willful choices to do so.[21]

Even the term "social sin" has been criticized as theologically suspect or more rhetorical rather than real, given that in "unwitting accommodation to structural evil…knowledge and freedom seem *not* to be met"[22]—or given the concern that only persons can sin. Yet as Francis's emphases on affect and indifference signal, we cooperate in collective evil in ways marked by ignorance, ambiguity, and passivity, obscuring personal culpability on the one hand, yet concretizing universal original sin, on the other. "Social sin" may be more evocative than precise, yet it remains biblically resonant, and colloquial uses of "structure" often denote institutional sin or unjust policies alone. Hence some pair structural sin with cultural sin (or its ideological dimensions) to designate these differences. In its internalized, subjective, unconsciously replicating forms, collective sin surpasses commonsense understandings of "structure." Yet if by "structural," following insights from partner disciplines engaged herein like critical realist sociology, we mean institutions, cultures, and *habitus*, then "structural sin" well captures the multivalence embraced by Francis's formal writings, homilies, and gestures.

Whereas the incorporation of "social sin," and then "structural sin," into the encyclical tradition preceded his papacy, Francis significantly advances his predecessors' awareness of the reality in terms of its scope and function. Pope John Paul II elaborated the meaning of social sin over his corpus yet consistently sought to circumscribe it theologically, due to a concern that social sin risks diminishing individual accountability; he insisted that the category may be understood as sin only analogously, since structures cannot sin or accrue guilt. In *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* John Paul reiterates how "structures of sin" are linked to individuals' acts, making them difficult to remove.[23] In *Evangelium Vitae* he refers to the "moral conscience of society" that "encourages the 'culture of death,' creating and consolidating actual 'structures of sin' which go against life."[24] Even as John Paul was "aware of the unconscious, nonvoluntary, quasi-automatic dimension of social sin," he emphasized personal responsibility in his uses.[25]

In *Caritas in Veritate*, Pope Benedict XVI briefly refers to the presence of original sin in social structures in treating sinful effects evident in the economy.[26] Elsewhere he

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[21] Jesse Couenhoven, "What Sin Is: A Differential Analysis," *Modern Theology* 25, no. 4 (2009): 568, citing Marilyn McCord Adams, "Sin as Uncleanliness," *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991): 2.

[22] McKenna, "The Possibility of Social Sin," 132.

[23] John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (December 30, 1987), §36, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis.html.

[24] John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae* (March 25, 1995), §24, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html.

[25] Gregory Baum, "Structures of Sin," in *The Logic of Solidarity: Commentaries on Pope John Paul II's Encyclical* On Social Concern, ed. Gregory Baum and Robert Ellsberg (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), 115.

[26] Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* (June 29, 2009), §34, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html.

raises concerns that secular culture tends to eliminate the sense of sin, in terms of his concern with its "dictatorship of relativism,"[27] yet submits that original sin "can be evermore expressed as personal sins which can become structures of sin."[28] Whereas he envisioned structure as more malleable than his predecessor, Benedict "emphasized the personal moral agency involved in creating and sustaining vicious structures," rather than a mutually influencing dynamic.[29] If these earlier magisterial understandings of structural sin remained primarily personal or interpersonal, Francis has been more disposed to a "transpersonal" sense of sin that understands collective sin as greater than the sum of individual sins.[30]

Nonvoluntary dimensions of social sin, which largely reflect the impact of CELAM (the Latin American and Carribean Episcopal Council or *Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano y Caribeño*) at Medellín, may also be understood in terms of scotosis,[31] suggestive of the ways we are susceptible to a captivating environment that prevents us from seeing rightly.[32] Beyond his attention to institutional arrangements forces shaping poverty and inequality, Francis regularly interrogates these subjective dimensions of sin that harden resistance to the common good. His incorporation of insights from liberation theology on nonvoluntary dimensions of sin point to his concern for the forces facilitating pervasive rights violations and callous indifference.[33] His predecessors' theological circumscription of the category to underscore individual responsibility—a "univalent" model—constrains its value for uncovering these subtle social dynamics that impact sensitivity to injustice.[34] Francis's contributions remain

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[27] Joseph Ratzinger, "Homily of His Eminence Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger" (April 18, 2005), https://www.vatican.va/gpII/documents/homily-pro-eligendo- pontifice_20050418_en.html.

[28] Benedict XVI, "Benediction to Participants of Italian Catholic Action" (October 11, 2012), https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2012/october/documents/hf_ ben-xvi_spe_20121011_fiaccolata.html.

[29] Daniel Daly, *The Structures of Virtue and Vice* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2021) 44.

[30] As Kenneth Himes describes this sense, "we live in sin as a people, and our collective sin is more than the sum of individual sins." Himes, "Human Failing," 158.

[31] See O'Keefe for an overview of several scholars' discussion of this dimension of social sin as "knowing ignorance," including Bernard Lonergan's understanding of "scotosis" as an unconscious blocking of understanding and Bernard Häring's identification of sin as *skotos*. O'Keefe, *What Are They Saying*, 36. Resources in the Christian tradition like Augustine's *libido dominandi,* Thomas Aquinas' relation of the passions to the will have long signaled the depth and nonrational reach of sin, yet the same dynamics perhaps diminish pastoral attention to scotosis and thereby shrink the scope of agents' wrongdoing.

[32] See also Himes, "Human Failing," 159.

[33] For a more detailed account of John Paul II's and Latin American theologians' approaches to social sin (including a development of the brief indications of nonvoluntary elements of John Paul II's account) see Kristin Heyer, "Social Sin and Immigration: Good Fences Make Bad Neighbors," *Theological Studies* 71, no. 2 (2010): 410–36.

[34] John Paul II's treatment of the impact of imperialistic ideologies in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* or the dramatic conflict between a "culture of life" and a "culture of death" in *Evangelium Vitae* remains in tension with his significant emphasis on personal responsibility and structural rather than ideological dimensions of social sin. Conor Kelly has convincingly suggested that Francis's contributions draw the magisterial and liberationist trajectories closer

more reflective of liberationist tendencies without abandoning earlier magisterial uses, attending to damaging forces and choices alike.

Whereas Francis is less likely to use "structural sin" language than his predecessors, he regularly highlights the influence of collective forms of injustice and the affections that magnify their effects. His approach to these pervasive temptations to build a culture of walls "in the heart" and "on the land" employs structural analyses but also elevates attitudes intensifying the harms these walls wreak, signaling a development in the use of structural sin. From *Evangelii Gaudium* to *Fratelli Tutti* and apostolic exhortations, addresses, and homilies in between, Francis underscores pervasive cultures and habits that conceal as they harm. Warning that the "economy of exclusion and inequality…kills,"[35] he repeatedly challenges not only the reductive market ethos dominating a range of policies, but also its desensitizing effects. He connects this logic of exclusion based on materialism to perceptions and treatment of those on the margins as disposable.[36] In *Evangelii Gaudium* Francis refers to the "evil crystalized in unjust social structures,"[37] and implies structures exceed the accumulated actions of individual agents.[38] From Lampedusa to Lesbos he has lamented exploitative trade and migration policies along with the xenophobic attitudes that push and pull migrants like "pawns on a chessboard."[39] *Laudato Si'* not only decries deficient regulatory norms but also our formation by disvalues (the virus of consumerism, a "cheerful recklessness"[40]) that prevent us from even hearing the cry of the earth or the cry of the poor. Francis returns in *Laudate Deum* to the function of a technocratic paradigm in abetting our intergenerational climate debt[41] and continues to summon ecological conversion from operative mindsets that inhibit integral ecology and moral growth alike. Finally his analyses of poverty and inequality in *Fratelli Tutti* also exhibit this multivalent sense, attending to structural causes of economic injustice as well as

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together in recognizing the "emergence of social structures as 'entirely new realities' that can and do have influence in their own right," even while acknowledging that "there is still a tendency in liberation theology to stress the causal force of structures of sin and a countervailing tendency in magisterial texts to stress the personal roots of structural sin. Kelly, "Nature and Operation of Structural Sin," 298.

[35] Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (November 24, 2013), §53, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html (hereafter cited as *EG*).

[36] Jorge E. Castillo Guerra, "'A Church without Boundaries': A New Ecclesial Identity Emerging from a Mission of Welcome; Reflections on the Social Magisterium of Pope Francis as Related to Migration," *Journal of Catholic Social Thought* 14, no. 1 (2017): 51, https://doi.org/10.5840/jcathsoc20171415.

[37] *EG*, §59.

[38] Daly, *Structures of Virtue and Vice,* 45.

[39] Francis, "Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees (2014)" (August 5, 2013), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/migration/documents/papa-francesco_20130805_world-migrants-day.html.

[40] Francis, *Laudato Si'* (May 24, 2015), §22, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

[41] Edward Tverdek, O.F.M., "More Than a Sequel," in "Meeting the Moment: Two Readings of *Laudate Deum*" *Commonweal* (February 2024): 21; see Francis, *Laudate Deum* (October 4, 2023), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/20231004-laudate-deum.html.

ideological threats to social instincts, whether self-absorption fueling hardened insulation[42] or the dogma of neoliberal faith.[43] Francis's multivalent approach brings together what we feel (heart) with what we think (head) in addressing and responding to structural sin.

This method characterizes his approach to certain injustices marking the church's practices as well.[44] His decentralizing internal reforms target harmful mindsets, whether "triumphalism, clericalism [or] infantilizing the laity."[45] As Bradford Hinze notes, his focus on "pathologies of power associated with corporate corruption," "the pathos of curial centralization," and the "distinctive approach to knowledge and power" of ideological elites highlights how such patterns can be transmitted through ritual rubrics, bureaucratic policies, and spiritual disciplines, rather than via deliberate individual acts alone.[46] He frames "the cancer of clericalism" as a sin of arrogant entitlement.[47] Here in Baltimore the structural sins of abuse and its coverup led the archdiocese to file for bankruptcy last September, and many have rightly questioned whether the pope has fully appreciated the structural dimensions of ecclesial factors continuing to abet abuse.[48] On the whole, Francis broadens an understanding of the operations of social sin in church and world alike, shining light on opaque forces at work in ways that "exceed the domain of intentional subjects" or even conventional structural analyses alone.[49] This invites attention to not only "the effects of social forms but their very logic" and how they constitute persons as subjects, including as a medium for harmful outcomes.[50]

Collective Indifference in the Global North

A multivalent approach, then, moves beyond univalent models that reduce all structural sin to the effects of sinful individuals on the one hand, or that understand all sin as essentially social, on the other.[51] Francis's approach also underscores how indifference and a sense of invulnerability facilitate injustice in ways captured by neither political and economic considerations alone nor purely cognitive accounts of culpability. *Fratelli tutti* targets roots of nonvoluntary indifference—cynicism,

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[42] *FT*, §89.

[43] *FT*, §168.

[44] Bradford E. Hinze, "The Ecclesiology of Pope Francis and the Future of the Church in Africa," *Journal of Global Catholicism* 2, no. 1 (2017): 20.

[45] Hinze, "The Ecclesiology of Pope Francis," 19.

[46] Hinze, "The Ecclesiology of Pope Francis," 20.

[47] Francis, *Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020), 25.

[48] For an analysis of structural and cultural factors abetting clergy sexual abuse, see Julie Hanlon Rubio and Paul J. Schutz, *Beyond 'Bad Apples': Understanding Clergy perpetrated Sexual Abuse as a Structural Problem & Cultivating Strategies for Change* (Santa Clara, CA: Ignatian Center, 2022), https://www.scu.edu/media/ignatian-center/bannan/Beyond-Bad-Apples-8-2-FINAL.pdf.

[49] Hinze, "Ecclesiology of Pope Francis," 22.

[50] Ryan Darr, "Social Sin and Social Wrongs: Moral Responsibility in a Structurally Disordered World," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 37, no. 2 (2017): 23.

[51] For an overview of this range of understandings, see Mark O'Keefe, *What Are They Saying about Social Sin?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990).

narcissism, entitlement—elaborating how a culture of consumerist comfort abetted by social media distractions incubates false ideologies that isolate and manipulate consciences[52]. (Paul Lakeland warned us of the dehumanizing operations of surveillance capitalism along similar lines five years ago;[53] Vincent Miller's plenary this year does so in terms of extractivism.)[54] Revisiting the theme of globalized indifference, which Francis frames as the opposite of God's compassion, he regularly reflects on the many ways we are tempted, like the priest and Levite, "to pass at a safe distance," whether we "retreat inwards, ignore others, or [remain] indifferent to their plight."[55] Last September in Marseille, he forcefully decried the "fanaticism of indifference" that "bloodies the Mediterranean."[56] The Archbishop of Kinshasa, Cardinal Fridolin Besungu Ambongo, O.F.M. Cap., frames climate change as an "example of structural sin facilitated by callous indifference and selfish greed," devastating the lives of the poor and the planet.57 Francis has preached on apathy as not only "habitual sin" but as a pervasive fog, a poisonous sickness, and an addictive drug, warning that "if you taste it often enough, you come to like it."[58]

The heart is often evoked as an analog to conscience across the Hebrew Bible, whether it is judged by God, is the instrument through which one recognizes her guilt, or whose examination empowers an agent to pursue the good.[59] Addressing his fellow exiled Judeans, Ezekiel indicates that YHWH will remove people's stony hearts altogether: "A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you[.] … I will give you a heart of flesh," (Ez 36:26-27 NRSVue, used throughout). Whereas the transformation in Ezekiel occurs in the context of YHWH's vindication and reestablishment as sovereign, there remains a personal, pastoral concern for the moral life and a social framing of conversion and restoration: "I will give them one heart[.]

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[52] Francis, *Fratelli Tutti* (October 3, 2020), §45, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html (hereafter cited as *FT*).

[53] Paul Lakeland, "Crisis and Engagement: The Role of the Servant Theologian," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 74 (2019): 71-81. Lakeland draws upon Kathryn Tanner's work on the all-encompassing pretense of finance capitalism and the diminishment of agency wrought by neoliberalism more broadly.

[54] In this volume, see Vincent J. Miller, "Seeking Salvation in a World Made Frictionless: Communion, Extractivism and Integral Ecology," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 78 (2024): 31-51.

[55] *FT*, §73.

[56] Francis, "Moment of reflection with religious leaders near the memorial dedicated to sailors and migrants lost at sea," (Marseille, September 22, 2032), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2023/september/documents/20230922-marsiglia-leaderreligiosi.html.

[57] Agnes Aineah, "Climate Change is "structural sin", Bishops in Africa Say, Demand World Leaders' Action," Association for Catholic Information in Africa (Nairobi, 17 October, 2022), https://www.aciafrica.org/news/6870/climate-change-is-structural-sin-bishops-in-africa-say-demand-world-leaders-action.

[58] Francis, Homily, Morning Mass in the Chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marthae (Rome, March 24, 2020), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/cotidie/2020/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie_20200324_mai-lamentarsi.html.

[59] James F. Keenan, *The Moral Life: Eight Lectures* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2023), 64.

… They shall be my people and I will be their God" (Ez 11:19-21). The one heart and covenant formula indicate that these matters of the heart take place in a communal context. YHWH summons a people-wide transformation, and because the new heart is the shared heart of the covenantal community, indifference and structural sin are affronts to God's love.[60] Matthew's Jesus elevates the interiorization of righteousness in light of this prophetic focus on the disposition of one's heart (Mt 5:21-45; 25:31-46).[61] Francis's preaching on various iterations of hardheartedness across both testaments anchors his concerns about the dangers of indifference. A month before he was elected to papacy, preaching on Ash Wednesday, Francis urged, "Rend your hearts, so that through that crack we can really look at ourselves. Rend your hearts, open your hearts, because only in a broken and open heart can the merciful love of God enter, who loves and heals us."[62]

He has sustained attention to the need to break open our hearts in the face of idolatrous temptations, fearful insecurities, and hardening life experiences.[63] His examples of spiritual necrosis, religious narcissism, and ideological closure in related meditations connect a concern for multivalent structural sin with the stony hearts that secure its grip.[64] He links such imagery to the need for the Holy Spirit to soften hardened hearts and make them "[d]ocile to the freedom of love."[65] In Ciudad Juárez preaching on Jonah, for example, he commended tears at injustice that can "soften the heart": "the tears that purify our gaze and enable us to see the cycle of sin into which very often we have sunk[.] …[T]ears that can sensitize…our attitude hardened and especially dormant in the face of another's suffering."[66] Biblical witness and preaching on hearts of stone invite a focus on the function of indifference rather than on merely missing the mark (*hamartia*).

For a North American guild, it is worth noting how a culture of meritocracy helps facilitate what some have called our "ironic structural vice," given how a liberal individualist ethos that touts industriousness paradoxically "enshrines sloth as a

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[60] I am grateful to Andrew Davis for his insights on this passage and its implications. We find this formulation in Jeremiah and Hebrews, as well.

[61] Jeffrey S. Siker, *Sin in in the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 1-16.

[62] Jorge Bergoglio, "Lenten Message for Buenos Aires" (dated February 13, 2013; source publication date March 14, 2013), https://zenit.org/articles/cardinal-bergoglio-s-lenten-message-for-buenos-aires/.

[63] Francis, "Morning meditation in the chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marthae: Hardened Hearts" (January 9, 2015), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/cotidie/2015/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie_20150109_hardened-hearts.html.

[64] Francis, "Hardened hearts." On his references to spiritual necrosis, see Francis, "Pastoral Visit to the Roman Parish," (April 6, 2014), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2014/documents/papa-francesco_20140406_omelia-parrocchia-san-gregorio-magno.html; on the risk of ideologically hardened hearts, see Francis, "Morning meditation in the chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marthae: Open Our Hearts to Compassion" (February 18, 2020), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/cotidie/2020/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie_20200218_open-ourhearts-tocompassion.html.

[65] Francis, "Hardened hearts."

[66] Francis, "Homily on the Apostolic Journey of his Holiness to Mexico" (February 17, 2016), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2016/documents/papa-francesco_20160217_omelia-messico-ciudad-jaurez.html.

structural vice…while ostensibly striving to undermine it as a personal one," resisting the demands of love and the common good.[67] For "belief in our self-sufficiency [precisely] enables us to remain oblivious to the presence and cold-hearted to the struggles of those on whom we actually depend," such that sloth is opposed to charity and is a denial of our interdependence.[68] Stony hearts of indifference make it easy for the reader of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus to perceive his "sin of indifference" and judge his lack of awareness "vincible ignorance," even as this remained hidden to the rich man and his brothers.[69] Hence the opacity of structural sin paves the way toward both indifference to suffering and "obliviousness to our capacity and obligation to address it."[70] In a "post-truth" era the self-deception resulting from echo chambers, the attention economy, or other forms cultivated ignorance further feed this dynamic. In the US context, it is also worth recalling the disproportionate influence of our collective apathy, not unlike how our economic and military policies issue harmful intended and unintended consequences across the globe.

Structures of sin impose themselves in more durable ways because of this indifference to injustice.[71] Consider the juxtaposition of White grievance animated by "anticipatory loss" with Black grief over tangible suffering and existential threats.[72] If apathy couples indifference with a failure to be moved by others' concerns [73] and habituates sloth, thereby further insulating us from that which could dispel our indifference, a multivalent lens better elucidates the cyclical interplay of the intellect, will, and affections. At the same time, existing theological discourse is not always well primed to call out or respond to apathy, given its continuing focus on complicity, causation, and action rather than inaction. Structural sin remains a deeply rooted problem that surpasses these dimensions, however, so how might we broaden the sources we rely on in response to this multivalent invitation? Engagement with interdisciplinary partners and ecumenical theological sources can bolster Catholic theological accounts of structural sin as well as suggest models of responsibility that better respond to this insulating cycle. I suggest next how a reflexivity-*habitus* hybrid,

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[67] Christopher D. Jones and Conor M. Kelly, "Sloth: America's Ironic Structural Vice," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 37, no. 2 (2017): 123.

[68] Lindsay M. Marcellus, "Perfecting Ecological Relationality: Acknowledging Sin and the Cardinal Virtue of Humility" (PhD diss., Boston College, 2022) 228, 233.

[69] Marcellus, "Perfecting Ecological Relationality," 273.

[70] Marcellus, "Perfecting Ecological Relationality," 274. Julie Hanlon Rubio also indicates how habits of false activity or "mindless busyness" feed the structural vice of sloth, see Julie Hanlon Rubio, "Sloth," in *Naming Our Sins: How Recognizing the Seven Deadly Vices can Renew the Sacrament of Reconciliation,* ed. Jana Bennett and David Cloutier (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2019), 92. As Alex Mikulich puts it, "The poison of segregation means that we become morally and spiritually insensitive to the plight of the disinherited." Alex Mikulich, *Unlearning White Supremacy: A Spirituality for Racial Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2022), 39.

[71] Mathias Nebel, "The Signs of the Times and Sinful Structures: An Interpretation in Light of the Theology of Hans Urs Von Balthasar," in *Scrutinizing the Signs of the Times in the Light of the Gospel*, ed. Johan Verstraeten (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2007), 109.

[72] Juliet Hooker, *Black Grief, White Grievance: The Politics of Loss* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2023), 21-2.

[73] McKenna, "The Possibility of Social Sin," 130.

Augustinian insights, and moral luck can complement the valuable work underway by those incorporating tools from critical realist sociology in structural sin analysis.

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STRUCTURAL SIN: PROSPECTS FOR THEOLOGICAL EXPANSION

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The more subtle ways in which we benefit from and replicate injustice, making us complicit in structural sin, are not captured in approaches that reduce collective behaviors to personal sins in order to locate responsibility with discrete individuals.[74] Whereas on the whole developments from act-centered to person-centered morality and attention to the dynamic and socially situated character of human life hold promise for bringing together a concern for "sin and sins" in a complex landscape of reflexivity and interdependence,[75] theological analyses too often isolate rather than integrate inter/subjective and objective dimensions of structural sin—risking a different univalence.[76] Moreover, valuable summons to encounter, conversion, and solidarity as antidotes to indifference can remain vague and fail to infuse methodological foci. Hence we turn to the possibilities and limits of several new developments in order to hone theological responses to the indifference and oblivion besetting us and multivalent model of structural sin inviting us. Recent theological applications of critical realism have been concerned to respond to the errors of determinism, specifying structures' nondeterministic, causal impact on agency—a valuable impulse I applaud following last year's convention theme on freedom! Incorporating attention to Pierre Bourdieu's *habitus* and more Augustinian strands can help us attend equally to temptations in the other direction, however—temptations to assume we can pull up our bootstraps and make our own fate—so as not to underestimate the pervasive pull of sin.

Critical Realist Sociology

Over a century ago, W.E.B. DuBois pioneered structural analyses of social inequality, articulating Black persons' agency amid the economic and cultural forces of racism, challenging dominant sociological approaches of his day, and reshaping the

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[74] See Lorraine Cuddeback-Gedeon, *The Work of Inclusion: An Ethnography of Grace, Sin, and Intellectual Disabilities* (London: T&T Clark, 2023), 126, citing John Paul II, "Reconciliatio et Paenitentia," (December 2, 1984), §16, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_02121984_reconciliatio-et-paenitentia.html, and Kilby, "Sin and Suffering Revisited."

[75] See Darlene Weaver, *The Acting Person and the Christian Moral Life* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011) and Cuddeback-Gedeon, *The Work of Inclusion*.

[76] Daniel Daly's framing of structural virtue and vice helps integrate the formative effects of structure and culture on agency within a virtue framework. Daly, *Structures of Virtue and Vice.* Drawing on the work of Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr, Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki addresses preconscious dynamics in terms of modes of "intersubjectivity" that provide the structures of individual consciousness and value systems, and the internalized norms of idealized values perpetuated by social institutions set up to maintain privilege or profit. Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki *The Fall to Violence: Original Sin in Relational Theology* (New York: Continuum, 1995), 126.

field in emancipatory directions.[77] Theological scholarship drawing on recent work in critical realist sociology has convincingly indicated its value for specifying the relationship between structures, culture, and agency amid the complex, stratified dynamics that mark structural sin.[78] Such work indicates the ways structures and cultural ideas impact agency in significant ways, but are not utterly determinative.[79] It provides a differentiated understanding of how agents are embedded in larger social systems that emerge from the activity of individuals, and how their "free choices are shaped by the restrictions, opportunities, and incentives they face within [those] social structure[s]."[80] Hence structures and culture generate enticements that make sinful complicity more likely and virtuous choices more rare, while keeping freedom intact, including agents' ability to transform sinful structures and culture. Daniel Finn's work has pioneered theological applications of critical realism, with other colleagues' work specifying implications in areas of virtue,[81] social ethics,[82] including structural sin

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[77] He indicated the causal dimensions of slavery and colonialism in the development of capitalism underplayed by Emile Durkheim and Max Weber, for example, and through his empirical work, prefigured concepts such as health disparities, structural injustice and intersectionality. See, e.g., W.E.B. DuBois, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1899); Aldon D. Morris, *The Scholar Denied: W.E.B. DuBois and the Birth of Modern Sociology* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015).

[78] See, e.g., Daniel K. Finn, ed., *Moral Agency within Social Structures and Culture: A Primer on Critical Realism for Christian Ethics* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2020) and Daniel K. Finn, "What is a Sinful Social Structure?" *Theological Studies* 77, no. 1 (2016): 136-64.

[79] Finn, *Moral Agency within Social Structures and Culture*, 32-3.

[80] David Cloutier, "Critical Realism and Climate Change" in *Moral Agency within Social Structures and Culture: A Primer on Critical Realism for Christian Ethics,* ed. Daniel K. Finn (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2020), 63.

[81] Daly, *Structures of Virtue and Vice.*

[82] Daniel K. Finn, *Consumer Ethics in a Global Economy: How Buying Here Causes Injustice There* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2019); Conor M. Kelly, "Systemic Racism as Cultural and Structural Sin: Distinctive Contributions from Catholic Social Thought," *Journal of Catholic Social Thought* 20, no. 1 (2023): 143-165; Conor M. Kelly, *Racism & Structural Sin: Confronting Injustice with the Eyes of Faith* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2023); Matthew A. Shadle, *Interrupting Capitalism: Catholic Social Thought and the Economy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); David Cloutier, "Cavanaugh and Grimes on Structural Evils of Violence and Race: Overcoming Conflicts in Contemporary Social Ethics," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 37, no. 2 (2017): 59–78; Sara Bernard-Hoverstad, "From Religions Cosmology to Environmental Praxis: Empowering Agency for Sustainable Social Change" (PhD diss., Boston College, 2023); Emma McDonald Kennedy, "Forming Agents, Forming Families: Moral Agency in the Context of Procreation" (PhD diss., Boston College, 2023) (at intersection of social ethics and sexual ethics).

itself,[83] and ecclesial reform,[84] such as seminary education and the parish structural matrix.

By helping agents to understand where they are amid social positions, critical realism clarifies how that positioning influences them to adopt certain ideas and "provides both perils and possibilities for their agency."[85] The field's central figure, philosopher of science Roy Bhaskar, took aim at long dominant empiricism and argued instead that there are "ontologically real" things we can learn about beyond what can be perceived by our five senses.[86] Beyond expanding the domains of reality from the empirical to include broader, encompassing realities of the "actual" and the "real," another key contribution of critical realism of interest to structural sin is the significance of emergence. Critical realists and their proponents often point to the example of water to illustrate how emergence "occurs when two or more 'lower level' elements combine to form a 'higher level' element that has different characteristics. For whereas water is composed of hydrogen and oxygen and 'emerges' from them, water's characteristics are quite different from either. Water puts out a fire, while hydrogen and oxygen feed it."[87] Hence the capacity of water to extinguish fire is an "emergent" property, or one "that is not possessed by the parts individually and would not be possessed by the full set of parts in the absence of the structuring set of relations between them."[88]

In a similar manner, social structures emerge from the interaction of individual persons, their building blocks the preexisting relations between social relations; social structures exert downward "causal impact" on persons' restrictions, enablements, and incentives.[89] Structures emerge from and are sustained by the actions of individuals, yet because reality is stratified, they have an independent existence and operate at a

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[83] Finn, "Sinful Social Structure;" Kelly, "The Nature and Operation of Structural Sin;" and Theodora Hawksley, "How Critical Realism Can Help Catholic Social Teaching," in *Moral Agency within Social Structures and Culture: A Primer on Critical Realism for Christian Ethics*, ed. Daniel K. Finn (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2019), 9-18.

[84] See Richard R. Gaillardetz, "The Chimera of a 'Deinstitutionalized Church': Social Structure Analysis as a Path to Institutional Church Reform," *Theological Studies* 83, no. 2 (2022): 219-244; David Cloutier, "Holy Agents, Holy Structures: Thinking through Transformation in the Education of Priests," *Josephinum Journal of Theology* 26, nos. 1 and 2 (2019) 1-10; Edward P. Hahnenberg, "Discerning Disciples: Lay Agency Sixty Years After Vatican II" (symposium paper, Vatican II: Legacy & Limits, Villanova University, Philadelphia, PA, November 30, 2023), forthcoming in related collected volume.

[85] David Cloutier, "Sociological Self-Knowledge, Critical Realism, and Christian Ethics," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 34, no. 2 (2021): 165.

[86] Finn, "Sinful Social Structure," 147. For an overview of these empiricist critiques and the reality of the transfactual see 147-9, where Finn draws upon Roy Bhaskar's *Realist Theory of Social Science*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 2008).

[87] Finn, "Sinful Social Structure," 149; See also, Christian Smith, *What is a Person? Rethinking Humanity, Social Life and the Moral Good from the Person Up* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 25-42.

[88] Dave Elder-Vass, *The Causal Power of Social Structures: Emergence, Structure and Agency* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 17, as cited in Finn, "What is a Sinful Structure," 150.

[89] Finn, "Sinful Social Structure," 151; Margaret Archer, *Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 65–92.

"higher" level than those individuals or groups—sometimes with causal consequences at odds with founders' original intentions.[90] In Christian Smith's words, social structures are "durable systems of patterned human social relations."[91] A critical realist approach avoids errors of individualism and collectivism, making it amenable to use by Christian theologians.[92]

Critical realist insights on emergence help explain how the cumulative effects of agents' discrete actions generate and sustain unjust structures and cultures "with broader, more harmful effects than a simple summation of the contributing behaviors would predict," given that once such "systems are in place, actions *within* them may be ethically irreproachable individually and yet devastating cumulatively."[93] (Fictional moral philosopher Chidi Anagonye and his friends learned this the hard way en route to the *Good Place*!) Most theological applications of critical realism help analyze these more complex operations of structural sin in terms of agents' role-related engagement with mutually constituting structures and cultures.

The interplay of role-related incentives, reinforcing systems, and relational dynamics among structures are evident in the opioid epidemic's rampant spread and brutal toll, for example, which reaches far beyond the opportunistic maneuvers of one family, corrupt actions of doctors, or negligence of government officials. More than a conspiracy of individual sinful agents, the Purdue Pharma case "demonstrates how a business…or a system…or law, can be set up in such a way that even good-willed individuals become enmeshed in carrying out evil beyond their intentions" and how an entire ecosystem can facilitate structural sin, from securing favorable reports, to manipulating claims and public relations contacts, to reinforcing sales incentives.[94] Critical realist tools reveal how Oxycontin use is more complex than individuals' harmful choices, but also more multilayered than generic greed alone.[95]

The interdependence of structure and culture also illuminates the way racist cultures and structural opportunities work in tandem to abet a disproportionate use of lethal force by police.[96] As Kelly Brown Douglas puts it, "law enforcement officers do not need to be corrupt or overtly racist to see Black bodies through a lens of threat,

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[90] Finn, "What is a Sinful Structure?," 151,

[91] Smith, *What is a Person,* 322. Smith's extensive account of social structures incorporates not only the presuppositions and role-related dimensions outlined here, and those emphasized by ethicists employing critical realism like normalizing sanctions (costs/rewards) and encouragement of passive acquiescence, but their historic dynamism, incorporation of bodily practices, culturally significant mental categories, normative beliefs and motives. His account treats structure and culture together, whereas other critical realists' accounts, like Margaret Archer's, separate the two out. Herein I treat structure and culture as separate but related.

[92] Finn, "Sinful Social Structure," 145-7.

[93] Cristina L. H. Traina, "Facing Forward: Feminist Analysis of Care and Agency on a Global Scale," *Distant Markets, Distant Harms: Economic Complicity & Christian Ethics,* ed. Daniel K. Finn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 174. Emphasis in original.

[94] Trevin Wax, "What OxyContin Reveals About Structural Sin," *The Gospel Coalition*, January 11, 2022, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/purdue-pharma-and-pervasiveness-of-sin/.

[95] See Patrick Radden Keefe, *Empire of Pain: The Secret History of the Sackler Dynasty* (New York: Doubleday, 2021).

[96] Finn, *Consumer Ethics in a Global Economy*, 125.

fear, and criminality. The police are a part of the same public that is 'socialized' into an anti-Black narrative."[97] Here in Baltimore, we remember Freddie Gray. Conor Kelly employs critical realist tools to illuminate how "stand your ground" laws institutionalize a cultural norm of suspicion of Black bodies in predominantly White spaces ("the law's enablements function as a racist structure that reinforces the value of a racist culture") and why technological approaches to counteracting the use of excessive force (like the use of body cameras) fail to address structural forces and cultural assumptions interacting. Such a framework can also help transform sinful cultures, as structural reforms can challenge the sufficiency of cultural values, prompting their adaptation.[98]

Hence attention to how cultures and structures generate restrictions and opportunities to shift understandings and preferences proves valuable to investigations into structural sin and social transformation alike. [99] Moreover critical realism helps elucidate how so many typically acquiesce to restrictions faced within social structures or incentives offered by dominant culture, making us susceptible to "going along" with dominant moral mindsets. As durable social structures encourage status-quo cooperation in these ways, they strengthen a "drag effect" calcifying indifference, in particular.[100] Yet its tools may be better suited to analyzing particular institutional arrangements or harmful ideals that incentivize and constrain than pervasive, prereflective ways in which agents are conditioned. If for example, White supremacy is the water and not the shark,[101] so to speak, and structural sin's subjective effects surpass objective accounts of causality, a multivalent account invites us to capture and counter this more expansive dynamic, as well. Critical realist sociologist Dave Elder-Vass proposes a "hybrid" account, joining Margaret Archer's reflexivity model, emphasizing agents' deliberate choices among tradeoffs and influences, with Bourdieu's concept of *habitus,* that gives a more central role to conditioning. The hybrid helps capture both objective operations of external structures and culture and more subjective operations of internalized "structuring structures."[102] For diffuse dimensions of sin can become lost amid too exclusive a focus on role-related activity or personal culpability alone.

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[97] Kelly Brown Douglas, *Resurrection Hope: A Future Where Black Lives Matter* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2021), 51.

[98] Conor Kelly, "Systemic Racism as Cultural and Structural Sin: Distinctive Contributions from Catholic Social Thought," *Journal of Catholic Social Thought* 20:1 (2023): 156, 161, 163.

[99] Finn, *Consumer Ethics in a Global Economy,* 88.

[100] Some theologians frame such patterns in terms of "indirect voluntary ignorance." James Keenan argues that this is the price we pay for our own cheap grace, allowing us to go along without raising questions. Keenan, *The Moral Life,* 108.

[101] Kyle "Guante" Tran Myhre, "How to Explain White Supremacy to a White Supremacist," in Kyle "Guante" Tran Myhre, *A Love Song, A Death Rattle, A Battle Cry* (Minneapolis, MN: Button Poetry, 2018): 36. See also Alex Mikulich, "White Complicity in US Hyper-Incarceration," in *The Scandal of White Complicity: A Nonviolent Spirituality of White Resistance,* ed. Alex Mikulich, Laurie Cassidy, and Margaret Pfeil (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 63.

[102] Elder-Vass, *Causal Power of Social Structures,* 108-9,113-14. For Bourdieu on "structured and structuring structures" see Pierre Bourdieu, *Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*, trans. M. Adamson (Cambridge: Polity, 1994 [Originally published by

Habitus Hybrid

Even given the high value of this theoretical work on the structural and cultural forces "enstructured agents" navigate, critical realist pioneers like Archer have been criticized for neglecting the role of social structures in shaping agents as social mechanisms get internalized.[103] Some have critiqued dominant structural sin language in a similar vein, countering that sin structures agents in their very interiority, and that we remain "responsible for its distortions" in ways not captured by overly objectivist accounts.[104] For example, Brian Hamilton finds dominant approaches overlook how structural sin shapes agents from within, in ways that exceed constraints on and enablements of action or appeals to culture.[105] Given the nonvoluntary dimensions of

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Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, (1987)] 170). It is "structured" by one's past and present circumstances, such as family up bringing and educational experiences. It is "structuring" in that one's *habitus* helps to shape one's present and future practices. It is a "structure" in that it is systematically ordered rather than random or unpatterned. This "structure" comprises a system of dispositions which generate "perceptions, appreciations and practice." See Karl Maton, "Habitus," in *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts* ed. Michael Grenfell (London/New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), 51; Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice,* trans. Richard Nice (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 53.

[103] See, e.g., Ana Caetano, "Defining Personal Reflexivity: A Critical Reading of Archer's Approach," *European Journal of Social Theory* 18, no. 1 (2015): 60-75. I am grateful to Emma McDonald Kennedy whose own related work brought this to my attention. Though Archer does at points imply internalization (double morphogenesis, e.g.) it is not her emphasis; see Margaret Archer, *Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 247-293.

[104] See, e.g., Brian Hamilton, "It's in You: Structural Sin and Personal Responsibility Revisited," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 34, no. 3 (2021): 361. James Keenan has amplified such critiques in James F. Keenan, "Recognizing Collectives as Moral Agents," *Theological Studies* 85, no. 1 (2024): 96-123 and James F. Keenan, *The Moral Life*, 58-60. For example, concerned that John Paul II and his interpreters wrongly understand structural sin as something only external to agents, Hamilton turns to Pierre Bourdieu and Judith Butler to emphasize these "structural distortions of my agency that I did not consciously choose." Hamilton, "It's in You," 361, 372-3. He elaborates, "culture is still something out there…and it is misleading to draw clean distinctions between structure and culture by assigning to one the objective and the other the subjective aspects of society or by assigning to one the material and the other the ideal aspects of society." Therefore, in his view, critical realism misunderstands the relationship of structures to agents' moral life. Brian Hamilton, "It's in You," 370n38. Brianne Jacobs also draws on Butler's work to illuminate nonvoluntary participation in social sin; see Brianne Jacobs, "Moral Accountability and Nonvoluntary Participation in Social Sin," in *Judith Butler und die Theologie,* ed. Bernhard Grümme and Gunda Werner (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag 2020), 189-200. Other feminists and theologians (and feminist theologians) along with some critical realists worry that poststructuralist accounts like Butler's risk excluding the possibilities of agents transforming cultures. In terms of the former case, see Jennifer Beste, "The Limits of Poststructuralism for Feminist Theology," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 22, no. 1 (2006): 5-19; on the latter see Margaret Archer, *Structure, Agency, and the Internal Conversation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 348.

[105] Brian Hamilton, "It's in You," 372-3. He elaborates, "culture is still something out there…and it is misleading to draw clean distinctions between structure and culture by assigning to one the objective and the other the subjective aspects of society or by assigning to one the

sin that liberation theologians emphasize and Pope Francis develops, Elder-Vass's hybrid better captures this internalized element of unconscious agential distortions that malform from within,[106] on the one hand, and allows for responsibility-taking and resistance, on the other hand. This synthesis brings together "reflexive deliberations and the consequent choices of identity and projects that individuals make," via Archer's work, with "the possibility of acting without such deliberations"—via Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, "systems of durable, transposable dispositions" produced by the "structures constitutive of a particular type of environment."[107] Like most theological applications of critical realism, Archer stresses the externality of social forces on the outcomes of agents' plans rather than on subjectivity itself.[108] Such analysis helpfully develops reflexivity as it theorizes the acquisition of personal and social identity, yet "neglects the role of habitus" in terms of the effects of structures channeled through an agent's dispositions.[109] Even as Archer admits that "we do not make our personal identities under the circumstances of our own choosing,"[110] she rejects the implication that such social positions determine our subjectivity or behavior—critical, in particular, of "social hydraulics," or the view that "no recourse need be made to any aspect of human subjectivity in order to explain social action,"[111] as well as the (general ontological error of) conflation of agency and structure and the "internalization of externality."[112]

For Bourdieu's part, his emphasis on *habitus* has been criticized for its apparent denial of conscious, deliberative decision making, risking *habitus* becoming no more than a "conveyor belt" for the socially-determined human behavior.[113] The dynamics

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material and the other the ideal aspects of society." Therefore, in his view critical realism misunderstands the relationship of structures to agents' moral lives. Brian Hamilton, "It's in You," 370n38.

[106] See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1984): 170 and Brian Hamilton, "It's in You," 365. I am less concerned with critical realism as a flawed starting point than is Hamilton, yet share some of his assessments of its limits, interest in highlighting how the outer social and inner self shape each other, and appreciation for the value of Bourdieu in that vein.

[107] Dave Elder-Vass, *The Causal Power of Social Structures: Emergence, Structure and Agency* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 88; Pierre Bourdieu, "Structures and the Habitus," in *Anthropology in Theory: Issues in Epistemology,* ed. Henrietta L. Moore and Todd Sanders (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2014), 332 as cited in Ebenezer Akesseh, "Racial Habitus, Resurrection and Moral Imagination," *Journal of Moral Theology* 11, no. 1 (2022): 38.

[108] Elder-Vass, *Causal Power of Social Structures,* 112.

[109] Elder-Vass, *Causal Power of Social Structures,* 111.

[110] Margaret Archer, *Being Human: The Problem of Agency* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 10.

[111] Margaret Archer, *Making Our Way Through the World: Human Reflexivity and Social Mobility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 6.

[112] Elder-Vass, *Causal Power of Social Structures,* 104-105. For Elder-Vass' explication of a literal vs. metaphorical sense of this internalization in this disagreement, see 105-107.

[113] Elder-Vass, *The Causal Power of Social Structures,* 100-101; he refers to eleven such critics there and notes that Bourdieu tends to overstate his case against conscious decision making in ways that give the impression he finds it marginal or insignificant; he does seem to

of structural sin and conversion demand that theologians take seriously both the powerful factors that shape agency and human freedom amid even those pervasive, sinful structures, cultures, and imaginaries; Elder-Vass argues that most actions "are co-determined by *both* our habitus and our reflexive deliberations…two complementary moments of one and the same process."[114] For our dispositions may be significantly and unconsciously impacted by social factors, and yet we are never merely at their mercy.[115] Bourdieu's earlier work on the socially conditioned dispositions and schemes of perception of *habitus* had a cognitive focus, whereas his later work incorporated embodied dimensions, as well.[116]

Hence from Archer, Elder-Vass's synthesis takes "her ontological insistence on the distinct existence of uniquely human causal powers and her theoretical insistence on the need to take account of conscious reflexive deliberation in the explanation of human action." Yet he modifies it to allow for the role acquired dispositions that are impacted by social context play in the causation of agents' behavior. From Bourdieu, Elder-Vass's synthesis adopts this operation of *habitus* and "recognition that our socially influenced beliefs contribute to the reproduction of social structure."[117] Yet Elder-Vass modifies such emphases to clarify that "social structures are not literally internalized by individuals, but only metaphorically, through the influence they have on our subjectivity," given agents are sometimes able to critically evaluate dispositions "in the light of our experience, our reasoning capacities and our value commitments."[118]

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accept the role of conscious deliberation but finds it secondary to the logic of the *habitus* (101-102).

[114] Elder-Vass, *Causal Power of Social Structures,* 108.

[115] At the points of decision making and in translating our dispositions into behaviors and practices, we may be highly reflexive in some cases but not others (or different agents from the same social group over different points in history may exhibit different degrees of reflexivity). Elder-Vass, *Causal Power of Social Structures*, 109-112.

[116] Daniel F. Pilario, *Back to the Rough Grounds of Praxis: Exploring Theological Method with Pierre Bourdieu* (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2005), 129; Maton, "Habitus," 57.

[117] Elder-Vass, *Causal Power of Social Structures,* 113.

[118] Elder-Vass, *Causal Power of Social Structures,* 113. Elder-Vass forges this synthesis by analyzing the "process of interaction between an emergent mental layer invoked in the process of decision making and the underling neural layer that translates our dispositions into actual behaviour explains how dispositions can in fact produce practices, while leaving space for conscious decision making in the very same process," (109). He indicates "how the interplay of our social context with our biological powers to form and store dispositions and to translate them into behaviour plays a fundamental role in the causation of our behaviour. Our reasons, our dispositions and our beliefs are all emergent properties of the human being as a whole, but they are emergent from a biological base, and social causes play a central part in their morphogenetic and morphostatic histories," (114). As he notes, "our actions are caused by the dispositions stored in our neural networks as a result of past decisions and experiences maps closely onto Bourdieu's claim that our practices are caused non-consciously by our habitus…[together with/allow for] a decision-making….mechanism by which the reflexive deliberation emphasized by Archer can enter into the same process of action determination as the habitus," (108-9). Among critical realists, Archer separates out culture from structure, Christian Smith combines the two and his

Our predispositions and expectations, our sense of what is "reasonable," and the embodied experiences of our histories are conditioned by our *habitus*, both reflecting and producing our self-understanding.[119] Even as agents' choices depend on the positions they occupy in a particular social field, Bourdieu's account probes "which of these choices are visible to us and which we do not see as possible are the result of our past journey" that has shaped our vision.[120] Bourdieu's *habitus* has informed the framing by scholars, including theologians, of a "racial habitus" that is likewise produced by subconscious social conditioning and reproduces social practices (and therefore structures).[121] They employ the term "White habitus" to describe "a racialized, uninterrupted socialization process that conditions and creates white tastes, perceptions, feelings, and emotions,"[122] and to consequently raise doubts about the adequacy of intellectual appeals to conversion and solidarity alone.[123] Womanist reflections on the distorting effects of imagination call attention to how perception and embodied dispositions are shaped by White *habitus*.[124] Decolonial scholarship on

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understanding of cognitive beliefs still differs from nonvoluntary/epistemic bondage highlighted here, and for Douglas Porpora, culture still entails intentionality; the hybrid of Archer and Bourdieu presented by Elder-Vass hence best captures both the reflexive and the nonvoluntary dimensions of structural sin.

[119] Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 56; Karl Maton, "Habitus," in *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts*, ed. Michael Grenfell (London/New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), 51, 52, 58; Pierre Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*, trans. R. Nice (Cambridge: Polity, 2000); and Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. R. Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

[120] Karl Maton, "Habitus," 52. For a "postcolonial critical realism" ontological framework that highlights the invisible, power-laden operations of coloniality in related ways, see Meghan Tinsley, "Toward a Postcolonial Critical Realism," *Critical Sociology* 48, no. 2 (2022): 235-250.

[121] Elder-Vass, *The Causal Power of Social Structures,* 99, citing Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice,* 58-9. See e.g. work by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, Shawn Copeland, Diana Hayes, Delores Williams, Bryan Massingale, J. Cameron Carter, Willie James Jennings, Ebenezer Akesseh, Antipas L. Harris, Joe Feagin, Laurie Cassidy, Alex Mikulich, Karen Teel, Maureen O'Connell, Katie Walker Grimes, and Michael Jaycox.

[122] Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in Marica* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013) 152 as cited in Akesseh, "Racial Habitus, Resurrection and Moral Imagination," 29.

[123] See, e.g., Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010); Bryan Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010); Mikulich, "White Complicity in US Hyper-Incarceration;" Maureen O'Connell, "After White Supremacy the Viability of Virtue Ethics" *Journal of Moral Theology* 3, no. 1 (2014): 83-104; Michael Jaycox, "Black Lives Matter and Catholic Whiteness: A Tale of Two Performances," *Horizons* 44, no. 2 (2017): 306-341; Katie Walker Grimes, *Christ Divided: Antiblackness as Corporate Vice* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017), 238; Akesseh, "Racial Habitus, Resurrection and Moral Imagination"; Therese Lysaught and Cory D. Mitchell, "Vicious Trauma: Race, Bodies and the Confounding of Virtue Ethics," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 42, no. 1 (2022): 75-100.

[124] See, e.g., Emilie M. Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Kelly Brown Douglas, *Resurrection Hope.*

embodied knowledge,[125] and recent work on the vulnerability of rationality,[126] fragility of virtue,[127] and moral intuitionism[128] similarly address distorted capacities of perception and sympathies.[129] Christina McRorie has underscored the sinful nature of this "epistemic bondage": not only the "the invisible and affective damage that a sinful culture does to those with privilege," but also "the feedback loop through which injustice generates the very embodied sensibilities by which it is ultimately sustained."[130] Hence as structural sin impacts agents' choices in role-related relationships (police violence) influenced by dominant cultures (suspicion of Black bodies) and the unconscious formation by a White racial frame (Bryan Massingale's "soul sickness"[131]), a hybrid of reflexivity and *habitus* allows for a more capacious theoretical elaboration of Francis's multivalent approach.

Even as the social roles we occupy often channel our agency, *habitus* captures the pre-reflective operations of social structures, the way they are insinuated into our actual experience of moral agency in the world:[132] for example, our reaping and bequeathing intergenerational economic privilege without questioning inherited narratives of desert, or making ourselves small in response to our internalized scripts, whether about our "nobodiness" or our being "too much." The concealed care work that sustains most economic roles makes it difficult to recognize other subtly formative influences of our social worlds.[133] For some agents must seek the upright in more crooked rooms than others, such that structures and cultures may not fully account for constraints.[134] KC

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[125] See, e.g., Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks,* trans. Charles Lamm Markmann (New York: Grove, 1967) and Mayra Rivera, *Poetics of the Flesh* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015). For a related analysis of how such approaches challenge dominant modern epistemologies, see Alex Mikulich, "Catholic Social Teaching: Toward a Decolonial Praxis," *Journal of Moral Theology* 13, Special Issue 1 (2024): 194-219.

[126] Christina G. McRorie, "Moral Reasoning in 'the World'," *Theological Studies* 82, no. 2 (2021): 213-237.

[127] Kate Ward, "Virtue and Human Fragility," *Theological Studies* 71, no. 1 (2020): 150-68.

[128] Elizabeth Sweeny Block, "Moral Intuition, Social Sin, and Moral Vision: Attending to the Unconscious Dimensions of Morality and Igniting the Moral Imagination," *Religions* 12, no. 292 (2021): 1-15.

[129] Christina G. McRorie, "Moral Reasoning in 'the World,'" 217.

[130] McRorie, "Moral Reasoning in 'the World,'" 221, 225.

[131] See Bryan Massingale, "Toward a Spirituality for Racial Justice: The Transformation of Consciousness and the 'Souls of White Folks," in *Desire, Darkness, and Hope: Theology in a Time of Impasse*, ed. Laurie Cassidy and M. Shawn Copeland (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2021), 325-346.

[132] I am grateful to Brian Hamilton for framing our shared interest in this way in an email exchange.

[133] See Christine Firer Hinze, *Glass Ceilings and Dirt Floors: Women, Work, and the Global Economy,* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2015); Kristin Heyer, "Enfleshing the Work of Social Production: Gender, Race and Agency," *Journal of Moral Theology* 12, Special Issue 1 (April 2023): 82-107, https://doi.org/10.55476/001c.75195.

[134] Melissa Harris Perry, *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 29, drawing on H. A. Wilkins et al., "Field-Dependent and Field-Independent Cognitive Styles and Their Educational Implications," *Review*

Choi describes the disciplining power of White racism that configures Asian Americans' self-understanding, agency, and aspirations in this vein, not only via the model minority myth, but also subtle "sycophantic gestures, beguiling camaraderie, or even a kind of magnanimous paternalism."[135] Documentation status can become a controlling trait like a lead weight, with stigma and fear management reinforcing legal exclusion.[136] In terms of *habitus* and apathy, collective forgetting about Native American genocide and chattel slavery is itself an "epistemic practice of the white racial frame," as Laurie Cassidy puts it.[137] Daniel Pilario's work, grounded in his Filipino context during the Marcos regime, notes how religious practices encompass both intentional and unconscious values, as well.[138] If "part of what social structures structure" is our very interiority—our bodies, perception, understanding—then "our habitus is integral to the structure."[139] Yet the Christian conviction that we are not beholden to subjective sinful patterns, that sin prevails but grace abounds, commends the pairing of *habitus* with reflexivity.

This hybrid as applied to structural sin functions to bridge the emphases of Francis's predecessors' focus on individual responsibility (reflexivity) with his liberationist influences (*habitus*).[140] A multivalent method turns theology's attention to the ways structural sin is aided by its hiddenness that resists discovery, thereby enlisting agents "in its silent conspiracy" in ways other than conscious support.[141] Elder-Vass's hybrid helps map the causal yet nondeterministic role not only structures and cultures but dispositions and perception play in the dynamics of structural sin, conversion, and agency. Francis's persistent attention to the link between structures of injustice and affective dimensions of conversion are reflective of his Ignatian influences, as well.[142] Even as his approach implicitly attends to the relationship of structure, culture, and *habitus*, the interrelated ways in which patriarchal structures, gender essentialism, separate spheres ideology, asymmetrical power dynamics, and

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of Education Research 47, no. 1 (1977): 1-64. In her book, where she elaborates this metaphor, Harris-Perry offers the lived experiences of African American women with an emphasis on their internal worlds as impacted by/impacting their political realities to understand democratic citizenship in the United States (20-21).

[135] Kijoo Choi, *Disciplined by Race: Theological Ethics and the Problem of Asian American Identity* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2019) xix, 19-20, 34, 100, 148.

[136] Roberto Gonzalez, "Learning to Be Illegal: Undocumented Youth and Shifting Legal Contexts in the Transition to Adulthood," *American Sociological Review* 26.4 (2011) 602-619, https://doi.org/10.1177/00031224114119.

[137] See Laurie Cassidy, "Who Do you Say That I Am?" in George Yancy and Bill Bywater, eds., *In Sheep's Clothing: The Idolatry of White Christian Nationalism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield 2024) 128 and Cassidy, "Starting with the Land Under our Feet," in *What is Constructive Theology?: Histories, Methodologies, and Perspectives*, ed. Marion Grau & Jason Wyman (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 167–190.

[138] Pilario, *Back to the Rough Grounds of Praxis*, 454-481.

[139] Hamilton, "It's in You," 372-73.

[140] Conor Kelly has argued Francis has brought these two strands closer together, see "The Nature and Operation of Structural Sin," 296-99.

[141] McKenna, "The Possibility of Social Sin," 130.

[142] For an assessment of the impact of his Ignatian spirituality on his moral vision, see Conor M. Kelly and Kristin E. Heyer, eds., *The Moral Vision of Pope Francis: The Distinctive Contribution of the First Jesuit Pope* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2024).

internalized misogyny reinforce ecclesial exclusion indicate but one "growing edge" in need of this hybrid analysis toward social conversion.

Augustinian Strand

Not unlike the "ecumenical" origins of social sin emerging from the social gospel movement and Medellín*,* this hybrid account attends both to sin and sins, to intergenerational malformation and reflexivity. For the subjective dimension of sin highlighted by *habitus* reflects the Pauline understanding of sin as a state of the heart or way of being as well as an Augustinian doctrine of original sin that similarly emphasizes this sense of inherited status.[143] Understanding inherited beliefs and unchosen loves as involuntarily internalized yet "undemocratically" distributed offers another avenue for responding theologically to a multivalent model of structural sin. Considering ourselves responsible for sinful beliefs and actions even when they flow from preconscious habituation further expands an understanding of structural sin in ways informed by work in Augustinian ethics.[144] Whether considering acts contrary to divine law or right reason, Catholic tradition has often focused on sins, with Protestant ethics generally emphasizing sin, a broken relationship with God.[145] Attention to Augustinian ethics can complement the implicitly Thomistic appropriations of critical realism in productive ways that do justice to our finitude and freedom. Thomistic categories map readily onto most theological applications of critical realism, whether elements of virtue ethics,[146] trust in reason and optimism about humans' ability to transform unjust structures, or the assumption of a hierarchy of goods. Augustinian emphases can complement these in this spirit of hybridity. They turn our attention to how we are constructed by God, others, unchosen desires, and the power of sin,[147] rather than our self-made dimensions through deliberate, virtuous actions. As Lisa Sowle Cahill notes, the Genesis 3 account of the Fall "only reinforces the impression that moral evil and responsibility originate prior to human choices."[148] Such emphases suggest that clean lines of intentionality or even complex conceptions of causality fail to capture all of the ways in which we are involved in structural sin.

Jesse Couenhoven's account of Augustinian compatibilism addresses our responsibilities for qualities in ourselves over which we lack control, concluding that

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[143] Couenhoven, "What Sin Is," 581.

[144] As one example, Couenhoven discusses how "persons imbibe sexism as one of the plausibility structures of the communities in which they are reared; sexist stances are often ignorant, unchosen…nevertheless, even persons who find, do their dismay, that their hearts have been constructed as sexist by persons and powers whose teachings they have involuntarily internalized should be held deeply responsible and blameworthy for the evil beliefs and actions that flow from them. … If my beliefs and loves are false, twisted, and unjust, that reflects poorly on me, and it is incumbent on me to repent of and seek forgiveness for the movements of my heart." Couenhoven, "What Sin Is," 581.

[145] James F. Childress, "Sin(s)," in *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics,* ed. James F. Childress and John Macquarrie (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1986), 585.

[146] Daly, *The Structures of Virtue and Vice.*

[147] Couenhoven, "What Sin Is," 578.

[148] Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Global Justice, Christology and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 56.

"it is possible to be responsible without being free."[149] Whereas his work primarily addresses the function of original sin rather than structural sin, its "suggestion that we can be culpable for involuntary and inherited evils" weakens "the distinction between individual and social sin" and offers insight into responsibility in the face of unbidden histories, inheritances, and influences of sin—and the identity-forming powers of grace."[150] His virtue ethical theory of responsibility mediates "between overly high and overly low estimations of our agency—recognizing our lack of control while affirming our status as responsible agents."[151] Augustine's primary metaphors of sin—stain, infection, wound—similarly caution that virtuous acting (or even striving) is not entirely up to the willing of agents (or reflexive, role-related activity) alone.[152] Recent findings in the social sciences confirm the significant influence of subconscious processes, as well. In ways analogous to original sin, then, subjective dimensions of structural sin can lead us to find ourselves "overtaken by sin in ways that we do not choose and yet perpetuate."[153] Unlike the universal inheritance of original sin, we perpetuate internalized xenophobia, ableism, or White supremacy to distinct degrees based on our inheritances, formation, embodied practices, cultural contexts and more. Couenhoven uses the example of Augustine's own sexism to suggest that failures in moral perception and judgment deem it an inherited, involuntary sin for which he should be held accountable, not merely nonnegligent ignorance.[154]

How we act on or resist evil beliefs of course remains relevant, and the responsibility of those who do not choose their beliefs, emotions, or actions is relatively diminished (blameworthiness for evil beliefs is increased by bad faith, violating one's conscience, or avoiding one's epistemic duties, moreover).[155] Responsibility for structural sin nevertheless surpasses conscious, deliberate manifestations of these inheritances. Our internal actions (motivations, beliefs, states of mind), our orientations, and our loves from which we live willingly (even if in a weakly voluntary manner) confer responsibility, as well, on this view.[156] Amid structural sins of apathy and passive reproduction of injustice, this approach orients the moral life to what we notice and attend to,[157] like theologians working in recognition urge. Hence a more Thomistic approach focusing on causality, habituation through role-related practices, and reason-responsive agency is valuable for understanding certain operations of structural sin, yet it benefits from Augustinian emphases on our need for conversion in the face of deeply seated motivations, orientations, and loves.[158] As Ezekiel reminds

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[149] Couenhoven, *Stricken by Sin, Cured by Christ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 12.

[150] Couenhoven, *Stricken by Sin,* 8.

[151] Couenhoven, *Stricken by Sin,* 9.

[152] Couenhoven, *Stricken by Sin,* 96.

[153] Couenhoven, *Stricken by Sin,* 13.

[154] Couenhoven, *Stricken by Sin,* 206-7.

[155] Couenhoven, *Stricken by Sin,* 206.

[156] Couenhoven, *Stricken by Sin,* 84. 92.

[157] Couenhoven, *Stricken by Sin,* 205.

[158] For Aquinas' own understandings of *habitus* as "a disposition whereby someone is disposed, well or ill," as "that whereby something is done when necessary," and as "that whereby we act when we will," see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* trans. Fathers of the English

us, we require God's healing initiative to replace our hearts of stone with hearts of flesh. In Jesus' fulfillment of this prophetic word, this new heart of flesh was unleashed in our world, given to us in the new life of baptism, transforming us into new creatures sensitized by the power of the Spirit and invited into resurrection life.[159] I grant that this Augustinian strand may pose soteriological questions for Catholic applications, but it can caution against social Pelagianism and intellectual determinism in generative ways.

Finally, womanist and feminist insights on moral luck further illuminate the constitutive power of structural vices and blur lines between control and causality. Katie Geneva Cannon's groundbreaking methodological critiques unmask the effects of social power on agency, exposing how prevailing frameworks and ideals take for granted freedom amid a wide range of choices, even as they implicitly condone structural sins.[160] The virtues she identifies that constrained agents exhibit "to prevail against the odds with moral integrity" in light of inherited, intersectional complexes are reflective of a liberating *habitus*-reflexivity model.[161] Lisa Tessman underscores how ordinary vices of domination that allow the privileged who exercise them to be "happy" or apparently "flourish" appearing to be acceptable or even good (injustice, cruelty, greed), are facilitated by the meta-vice of "indifference to (preventable and unjust) suffering of certain others."[162] Hence if one's only fault is complacency toward advantaging structures, moral deficiency arises via the consequent vices of domination.[163] Structural features like residential segregation or the privatization of shared goods not only "burden the agency" of the many, but also isolate the few from even noticing problems that disadvantaged people face; "[t]he freedom from noticing the suffering that [our] own advantages depend on enables indifference."[164] We hear echoes in philosophical literature on moral luck of the anesthetizing effects of indifference Francis decries. Kate Ward's related theological work on how wealth and inequality function as moral luck to hinder virtue pursuit illustrates how inequality

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Dominican Province, 1st Complete American Ed., 3 Vol. (New York: Benzinger Bros., 1947) I-II, 49.2-3; for related secondary analysis by Brian Patrick Green, "*Habitus* in the Roman Catholic Tradition: Context and Challenges," in *Habits in Mind: Integrating Theology, Philosophy, and the Cognitive Science of Virtue, Emotion, and Character Formation*, ed. Gregory R. Peterson, James Van Slyke, Michael Spezio, and Kevin Reimer (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2017), 41-57; Ezra Sullivan, *Habits and Holiness: Ethics, Theology, and Biopsychology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2021).

[159] Gregory Polan, "Preaching at the Easter Vigil: The Paschal Mystery in the Old Testament Texts," *Liturgical Ministry* 13 (2024): 152-159.

[160] Katie Geneva Cannon, *Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community* (New York: Continuum, 1996), 60-1; Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics,* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006), 2.

[161] Canon, *Katie's Canon*, 58, 61.

[162] Lisa Tessman, *Burdened Virtues: Virtue Ethics for Liberatory Struggles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 77.

[163] Tessman, *Burdened Virtues,* 54-5.

[164] Tessman, *Burdened Virtues* 77-8. For her discussion of how agents experiencing oppression can be prevented from developing some of the (standard) virtues in morally damaging ways and how such agents exercise "burdened virtues," see her chapters 1, 2 and 4.

"shapes us morally as we live within it."[165] Hence moral luck helps nuance and evaluate "how value differences ingrained in structures can affect people within the same society in different ways related to their social positioning."[166] Like Augustinian emphases, it also alerts us to ways in which the degree of "moral blame or credit we receive often depends on factors beyond our control."[167]

CONVERSION AND RESPONSIBILITY

What does this troubling of the waters and widening of the streams feeding our understanding of structural sin demand in response, then, from theology today? What might we conclude about conversion and responsibility, particularly in the light of social salvation? Critical realism provides helpful tools for understanding how structures work and therefore can be transformed,[168] and work in social movements and collective agency charts promising paths of resistance to structural sin.[169] Here I supplement those with several suggestions in light of my focus on *habitus* and apathy: first, shift methodological foci from parsing complicity toward taking responsibility; second, allow disorientation(s) to tenderize our hearts; and third, center the protagonism of those marginalized.

One of the reasons emphases on common sinfulness and mercy strike some as threatening is the lure of quests for unambiguous innocence as identity markers. As Darlene Weaver lamented last year, in the US Catholic context a preoccupation with preventing cooperation with intrinsic evil and scandal too often encourages passive responsibility.[170] Cooperation with evil helps account for responsibility in an increasingly complex world, yet emphases on avoiding complicity with evil risk bypassing attention to what clouds discernment or dulls conscience altogether, including indifference. The cooperation with evil category also tends to treat evil as

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[165] Kate Ward, *Wealth, Virtue and Moral Luck: Christian Ethics in an Age of Inequality* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2021), 4. As she and others have noted, womanists have long written about the constitutive power of moral luck and how external and internalized forms of oppression shape moral selves.

[166] Ward, *Wealth, Virtue and Moral Luck,* 88-89.

[167] Cristina L. H. Traina, "Facing Forward," 184-5.

[168] See, e.g., Christian Smith, *What is a Person,* 365-379

[169] See Lisa Sowle Cahill, "Social Movements as Carriers of CST: The Challenges of Gender Justice," *Journal of Catholic Social Thought* 20, no. 1 (2023): 99-121, https://doi.org/10.5840/jcathsoc20232016; Kevin Ahern, *Structures of Grace: Catholic Organizations Serving the Global Common Good* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015); James F. Keenan, "Recognizing Collectives as Moral Agents," *Theological Studies* 85, no. 1 (2024): 96-123, https://doi.org/10.1177/00405639231224032.

[170] Darlene Weaver, "Freedom in a Morally Diverse World," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 77 (2023): 25. M. Cathleen Kaveny has written about the "emerging prophetic" meaning of intrinsically evil acts contesting efforts that coopt its technical meaning for rhetorical purposes: M. Cathleen Kaveny, *Law's Virtues: Fostering Autonomy and Solidarity in American Society* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2012). Julie Hanlon Rubio's work has looked to connect cooperation with evil with attentiveness to social sin and "cooperation with good;" see Julie Hanlon Rubio, "Moral Cooperation with Evil and Social Ethics," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 31, no. 1 (2011): 103-122.

external rather than probing how structural sin malforms the individual from within.[171] Not unlike the "tyranny" of meritocratic cultural narratives[172] and individualistic salvation accounts—ones in which we take control of our lives, overcome challenges through cognitive skill, obedience, and acquisition of stable virtues, and then get what we deserve—fail to tell the whole (true) story. Narrow emphases on autonomy and causality can restrict responsibility for sin to questions of culpability,[173] which fails to account for the depth and reach of sin or hold accountable those ensnared in its hidden contributing dynamics. As Lorraine Cuddeback-Gedeon cautions, "[i]t may be that all the options available have a social impact that contributes to unjust structures beyond what the individual in question might intend, or consent to," problematizing questions of direct and indirect culpability for those effects.[174] Given the uncertainty and scale marking many moral challenges today, dominant moral and pastoral models can thus miss key concerns and unwittingly reinforce vices of domination. Hence accounts primarily attentive to causality (or complicity) similarly risk other univalent models of structural sin and responsibility.

Understanding responsibility in ways that surpass complicity alone can help shift accountability questions from calculating causation and guilt to taking personal and collective responsibility for social transformation of injustices that include unintentional harms.[175] Forward-facing accounts from feminist philosophy show promise in this vein.[176] For instance, Cristina Traina adapts feminist work in moral and epistemic luck on "moral action within large systems, acknowledging systems' momentum but holding individuals responsible for benefitting unjustly from them, for acting with integrity within them, and for changing them."[177] Iris Marion Young's social connection model interrogates the background conditions conventional ascriptions of blame or fault deem "normal", without rejecting a liability model of responsibility where applicable.[178] Susan Wolf's "deep responsibility" exceeds blameworthiness to address how persons can be deeply responsible for involuntary sin,

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[171] Brian Hamilton, "It's in You," 365, 369.

[172] Michael Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux) 2020.

[173] Cuddeback-Gedeon, *The Work of Inclusion,* 127 drawing on Weaver, *The Acting Person and the Christian Moral Life*, 116-118.

[174] Cuddeback-Gedeon, *The Work of Inclusion,* 127.

[175] Cristina L. H. Traina, "Facing Forward," 175, 193.

[176] Claudia Card differentiates "forward-looking" from "backward-looking" accounts of responsibility, broadening responsibility beyond analyzing causality with the former category. See Claudia Card, *Unnatural Lottery: Character and Moral Luck* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1996).

[177] Traina, "Facing Forward," 178. Traina draws on philosophers like Tessman, Claudia Card, Susan Wendell and Heidi Graswick in this vein. Kate Jackson-Meyer takes up Card's work on responsibility in this vein in Kate Jackson-Meyer, *Tragic Dilemmas in Christian Ethics* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2022), 116-17. Again, Cannon's work is a significant precursor here, developing virtues those to live within oppressive contexts with integrity, such as courage, unctuousness, grace, and dignity; see Canon, *Katie's Canon*, 61.

[178] Iris Marion Young, "Responsibility and Global Justice: A Social Connection Model," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 23, no. 1 (2006):102-130; Iris Marion Young, *Responsibility for Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

sins of ignorance, and social sin.[179] A multivalent model cautions against thinking about responsibility as "all or nothing."[180] It draws attention to the impossible choices that inevitably arise and thus the risk we run in becoming "distracted by our desire for moral purity" in the face of responsibilities only intensified by hyperagency.[181]

Second, I suggest that the very "resolvism"[182] marking ethical models similarly obstructs conversion, and ordinary disorientations might instead burst our "soap bubbles" of indifference.[183] Reigning paradigms that presume control and idealize decisive action emphasize our intentionality and efficacy, yet if we are responsible for our subconscious *habitus* as well, such models obscure our lack of control and even deter us from the experiences that could soften our stony self-righteousness. Philosopher Ami Harbin's work on the moral and political value of "disorientations" illuminates their "tenderizing" and awareness-generating effects. She argues that "even when these kinds of awareness don't help us resolve how to act, they generate epistemic humility, resistant identification, and collaborative action," all morally beneficial capacities, particularly given privileged contexts that foster vicious oblivion.[184] She delineates how "disorientations" produced by trauma, queerness, and migration help question harmful norms, detect vulnerabilities, and generate solidarity,[185] shifting habits and expectations in ways that "more accurately reflect and better respond to conditions of unpredictability, vulnerability, and interdependence."[186] She also addresses how the effects of disorientations caused by facing illness or grief can extend beyond the realm of life in which they occur. We saw at the convention liturgy how parables can be similarly disorienting, subverting expectations in ways that provoke new awareness. I would add, more personally, that parenting has provided ample practice in "openness to the unbidden,"[187] and that the unexpected gifts of my

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[179] Susan Wolf, "Responsibility, Moral and Otherwise," *Inquiry* 58, no. 2 (2015): 127-142. For uses of Wolf's concept in Augustinian ethics see Couenhoven, "What Sin Is," 575 and Couenhoven, *Stricken by Sin,* 14.

[180] Couenhoven, *Stricken by Sin*, 129

[181] Traina, "Facing Forward,"189. For a recent analysis of navigating such choices see Jackson-Meyer, *Tragic Dilemmas in Christian Ethics*.

[182] Philosopher Ami Harbin coins "resolvism" for this preoccupation of philosophical ethics and moral psychology to indicate how "an overemphasis on moral resolve eclipses other aspects of moral motivation," in Ami Harbin, *Disorientation and Moral Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 43.

[183] Francis, "Homily at 'Arena' Sports Camp" (Lampedusa, July 8, 2013), https://www. vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130708_omelia-lampedusa.html.

[184] Ami Harbin, "Response to Commentaries on *Disorientation and Moral Life*," *Feminist Philosophy Quarterly* 4, no. 2 (2018) 1-2. See also Harbin, *Disorientation and Moral Life*, 25-31, 119-124

[185] Even as some unjust structures and cultures demand resolute actions of resistance and transformation, Harbin notes that irresolute actions may be called for, offering examples of both/and actions, doubling back actions, and building without blueprints. See *Disorientation and Moral Life,* 125-152.

[186] Harbin, "Response to Commentaries," 1-2.

[187] William May's comments to the President's Council on Bioethics, October 17, 2002, available at https://bioethicsarchive.georgetown.edu/pcbe/transcripts/oct02/oct17full.html, as

own fracturing experiences have brought into relief the promise of untidy models of agency and graces of disorientation. So where our paradigms remain marked by a cause-and-control model, they divert attention away from these nonlinear, dislodging, reorienting processes that can generate concern for the larger community. Dominant models instead risk despair and apathy on the one hand, or circumscription of precise accountability that turns us inward, on the other. Refusals of the type of disorientations Harbin traces—defensiveness, scapegoating—impede recognition, responsibility, and repair.[188]

Addressing us in 2013, James Keenan connected his own experiences of health-related "disorientation" to an increased awareness of the fragility of life, productive destabilization, and an affective union in solidarity with those who live in precarity.[189] His more recent work similarly underscores grief as a precondition for the moral life,[190] an experience that offers a passageway to recognition as it did for the disciples encountering Jesus in the Upper Room.[191] The moral life does not aim at precarity as an end in itself, nor does solidarity consist merely in affective union without a collective dismantling of structural sin, as M. Shawn Copeland cautions.[192] Yet Ezekiel's heart of flesh and Francis's revolution of tenderness remind us that "where we are precarious and vulnerable, the Spirit finds her home."[193] Those writing at intersections of theology and spirituality or aesthetics similarly help us counteract "idols of invulnerability."[194] Welcoming disorientations can help us leave our comfort zones, connecting our own frailty to God's mercy that leavens cramped notions of

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referenced in Michael J. Sandel *The Case against Perfection: Ethics in the Age of Genetic Engineering* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 2009), 45.

[188] Harbin, 42-53. Christine Firer Hinze likens a martyr's posture of vulnerable witness to an "unclenched life-orientation ready to bear the 'weight of reality' and the 'sufferings due to solidarity'" amid "risky struggles to incarnate an inclusive common good" in a similar vein. Christine Firer Hinze, "Over, Under, Around, and Through: Ethics, Solidarity, and the Saints," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 66 (2011): 59.

[189] James F. Keenan, "Impasse and Solidarity in Theological Ethics," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 64 (2013): 47-60.

[190] See, e.g., Keenan, *The Moral Life,* 1.

[191] Keenan, *The Moral Life,* 4.

[192] M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom,* 92-95.

[193] Keenan, *The Moral Life,* 10.

[194] In his presidential address Roberto Goizueta indicated how apathy and avoidant apathy and avoidant attitudes toward those made vulnerable reflect idolatry of invulnerability and "pathological fear of our own [human] fragility," Roberto Goizueta, "Presidential Address: The Crucified and Risen Christ: From Calvary to Galilee," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 60 (2005): 64-5. Laurie Cassidy and her collaborators invite attention to how the *Spiritual Exercises* might help readers disidentify with the racism entrenched in our national imaginary and even spiritual practices. Laurie Cassidy, ed., *Praying for Freedom: Racism and Ignatian Spirituality in America* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2024). J. Matthew Ashley similarly draws fruitful connections in this vein in J. Matthew Ashley, *Renewing Theology: Ignatian Spirituality and Karl Rahner, Ignacio Ellacuría, and Pope Francis* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2022).

justice.[195] If sinful agency is "encrypted in socialization processes that encourage individuals in unreflective obedience to the 'ordinary' and 'expected,'"[196] the new perspectives, creativity, and moral maturity often invited by disorientations offer welcome antidotes. As attention to the grip of *habitus* and the power of the Spirit alike indicate, the "transfiguration of affectivity" remains crucial for authentic, lasting social change.[197] The stakes remain high for countering the fear and anger fueling structural sins like White Christian nationalism today.

Despite Francis's admirable calls to encounter at various peripheries (sometimes at the service of softening disorientations), episodic practices can be reconfirming rather than reconfiguring. Social conversion instead demands centering the protagonism of those marginalized. Decolonial theological scholarship and praxis prod the church and theological academy to move beyond unidirectional or instrumentalized engagement of voices and contributions from those on the underside of structural violence, as Susan Abraham's, Tracy Sayuki Tiemeier's, and Carlos Mendoza Álvarez's plenaries in this volume indicate.[198] Roberto Goizueta writes of an "aesthetic, affective praxis of friendship" as the foundation of "an authentic option for poor persons in their historical concreteness" in this regard.[199] Too often patronizing or exclusionary assumptions mark ecclesial approaches, only reinforcing "centers" and "margins." Further work in theology is needed to foreground voices and concerns deemed "contextual," including (and especially) when they contest "traditional" assumptions. For example, evolving understandings of how autistic persons exercise empathy challenge standard accounts of formation and of the virtuous life itself.[200] Immigrant rights movements that center those displaced contest not only structural dehumanization but also charity-based models. Catholic institutions undertaking reparations for their involvement in slavery that put the voices of descendants front and center similarly pave another way. Syllabi, exam lists, and gatekeeping mechanisms that remain exclusively Western shape emerging scholars' methods and engagement with the world church. Just as the Synod invokes the protagonism of the

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[195] Francis, "Pope Francis: God is Not Frightened by our Sins," *America* (January 19, 2022), https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2022/01/19/pope-francis-tenderness-mercy-st-joseph-242226.

[196] Cahill, *Global Justice, Christology and Christian Ethics*, 41, drawing on the work of Hannah Arendt.

[197] Laurie Cassidy, "Contemplative Prayer and the Impasse of White Supremacy," in *Desire, Darkness and Hope: Theology in a Time of Impass*, ed. Laurie Cassidy and M. Shawn Copeland (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press), 114-15.

[198] In this volume, see, Susan Abraham with an integrated response from Tracy Sayuki Tiemeier, "Saving (Catholic) Higher Education: Critical Pedagogies of Hope and Resilience," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 78 (2024): 15-30; and Carlos Mendoza Álvarez, "Social Salvation as Re-existence: The Resistance of Survivors, Theological Imagination, and the *Potentia* of Sacramentality," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 78 (2024): 1-14.

[199] Roberto Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesús: Toward a Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 195.

[200] Elizabeth Agnew Cochran, "'Misfitting' and Friendship in the Virtuous Life: Neurodiversity and Moral Formation," *Journal of Disability & Religion* 27, no. 4 (2023): 2.

Holy Spirit and each baptized person,[201] and an "outgoing theology" to correspond to an "outgoing Church,"[202] may we with relative power consider our hidden woundedness, rather than assume oil is ours to pour on others' wounds, and labor together toward empowering, lasting healing. For if we are saved as a people, our web of relationships must be marked by mutuality, living "our faith in reference to others," as Jon Sobrino puts it, "bestowing it on them and receiving it from them again."[203] Entrenched in multivalent structural sin as we are, may we welcome tenderizing dislocations that prime us for a divine "heart transplant."[204]

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[201] Synod of Bishops, "For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission: Preparatory Document" (September 7, 2021), https://www.synod.va/en/news/the-preparatory-document.html.

[202] Jonathan Liedl, "Pope Francis calls for 'paradigm shift' in theology for world of today," *Catholic News Agency,* November 1, 2023, https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/255887/pope-francis-calls-for-paradigm-shift-in-theology-for-world-of-today.

[203] Jon Sobrino, *Spirituality of Liberation: Toward Political Holiness*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 100.

[204] John Day, "Ezekiel and the Heart of Idolatry," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164 (2007): 25, 32. Day indicates how the heart is seen as the seat of idolatry, and thus there is the need for a divine "heart transplant."