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Global Inequality/ies

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This distinction between global inequality/ies and poverty represents a challenge for Christian ethics because, while Christianity has long been concerned about poverty and affirmed God's bias to the poor, inequality has received far less attention. This essay argues that the Christian ethics should (1) reconceive extreme global inequality/ies as symptoms, and the condition, of sin; (2) clarify the moral arguments about what is wrong with inequality/ies; (3) resist any reduction of the ethical challenges to equality as an abstract or arithmetical principle; (4) work toward a systems approach to sin better able to address a finance climate of complexity and uncertainty, connections, processes and interdependency.

1. Global inequality/ies – the facts

'Inequality in its various forms is an issue that will define our time' (United Nations, 2020). For the United Nations (UN), confronting inequalities has moved to the forefront of many global policy debates as a consensus has emerged that all should enjoy equal access to opportunity: "'Leave no one behind" serves as the rallying cry of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development' (United Nations 2020). A recent Oxfam International report shows that the world's 2,153 billionaires have more wealth than the 4.6 billion people who make up 60 per cent of the planet's population (Ratcliffe and Thériault, 2020). While income inequality between countries has improved in recent years, income inequality within countries is getting worse. This matters, says the UN, because rapid rises in incomes at the top are driving and exacerbating within country income inequality:

From 1990 to 2015, the share of income going to the top 1 per cent of the global population increased in 46 out of 57 countries with data. Meanwhile, in more than half of the 92 countries with data, the bottom 40 per cent receive less than 25 per cent of overall income (United Nations, 2020).

Economic inequalities within communities are typically worse for women and girls. Inequality is not tied exclusively to income, however. 'Groups such as indigenous peoples, migrants and refugees, and ethnic and other minorities continue to suffer from discrimination, marginalisation, and lack of legal rights' (United Nations, 2020). Amongst all these groups, inequalities of opportunity affect a person's life expectancy and access to basic services such as healthcare, education, water, and sanitation, and curtail human rights through discrimination, abuse and lack of access to justice. To cite the UN again:

High levels of inequality of opportunity discourage skills accumulation, choke economic and social mobility, and human development and, consequently, depress economic growth. It also entrenches uncertainty, vulnerability and insecurity, undermines trust in institutions and government, increases social discord and tensions and trigger violence and conflicts. There are growing evidence that high level of income and wealth inequality is propelling the rise of nativism and extreme forms of nationalism (United Nations, 2020).

The problems highlighted are not always the result of poverty per se but socio-economic inequality; not only basic survival needs but about how inequality affects societies. The problem of global inequality/ies is not to be conflated with poverty *per se* but refers to economic, healthcare, educational, IT-infrastructure and other differences both between and within countries.

2. When does global inequality/ies amount to evil?

This distinction between global inequality/ies and poverty represents a challenge for Christian ethics because, while Christianity has long been concerned about poverty and affirmed God's bias to the poor, inequality has received far less attention. Hence a newly intense question: When do global inequality/ies amount to evil? The question is not *whether* global inequality/ies of whatever kind amount to evil because inequality/ies could have diverse causes and might be ethically neutral. Identical twins might have unequal savings because one routinely put money in the bank and the other paid for music lessons. A desk-worker is unlikely to be as fit as an athlete. Males and females might typically mature differently with respect to psychosocial development and so have unequal capabilities at any given age. Is what matters ethically is not inequality/ies *per se* but when and why those inequality/ies amount to evil?ⁱ

2.1 *Inequality/ies as symptoms of sin*

Christianity has typically paid less attention to socio-economic inequality than to the evil of poverty but inequality/ies is not an entirely new problem for Christian ethics. Asterius (c.350–c.410 CE), Bishop of Amasea and venerated by Catholic and Orthodox Churches alike, denounced economic inequality as symptoms of the sins of avarice, greed and idolatry:

Avarice is the mother of inequality unmerciful; hating humankind, most cruel (L. *Avaritia mater est inaequalitatis; immisericors, inhumana, summe crudelis*). On account of it, the life of humans is full of inequality (*inaequalitatis*). ... one vomits food which has been too greedily swallowed; while others are in peril through extreme hunger and want. Some lie down under gilded roofs and live in houses that are like small cities, adorned with sumptuous

baths and chambers, and most extensive porches, and every kind of extravagance, while others have not the shelter of two boards. ... Such is the marked disparity in the conditions of life, between those created equal in worth (*eadem honoris*), and the cause of this disordered and anomalous state of things is nothing else than avarice (Asterius, trans. Pearse, 2002: 210).

In a sermon *Against Avarice*, that is extreme greed for wealth, possessions or other material gain, Asterius condemns inequality as the evil consequence of the sins of uncaring and selfish people. Inequality is generated by the worship of money, the protracted enjoyment of luxury and unrighteous love of the goods that belong to another.

Lactantius (c.250–c.325), an advisor to Roman emperor Constantine I, taught that God ‘willed that all should be equal (*L. pares*)’ (Lactantius, trans. Fletcher, 1886: 597). In this politico-legal context, his point is that social inequality tends to compromise earthly justice. Lactantius’s concern is the proper functioning of the judicial system rather than socio-economic inequality per se; he affirms the importance of justice for all before the law: ‘For where all are not equally matched, there is not equity; and inequality of itself excludes justice, the whole force of which consists in this, that it makes those equal who have by an equal lot arrived at the condition of this life,’ and makes the point by arguing that God promises immortality to all and cuts off no-one from heavenly benefits: ‘In His sight no one is a slave, no one a master; for if all have the same Father, by an equal right we are all children (Lactantius, trans. Fletcher, 1886). His appeal to spiritual equality before God translates into the social need for equal treatment of all by earthly judges. Inequalities at law are symptoms of other sins.

John Chrysostom (c. 347–407), teacher and archbishop of Constantinople, severely criticised the tolerated social inequality whilst being in a position to rectify it:

[...] more foolish are we than any, putting golden necklaces about our servants and mules and horses, and neglecting our Lord who goes about naked, and passes from door to door, and ever stands at our outlets, and stretches forth His hands to us, but often regarding Him with unpitiful eye; yet these very things He undergoes for our sake (Chrysostom, trans. Marriott, 1889).

Chrysostom’s appeal is to his hearers’ concern for the own eternal well-being: ‘These things I say continually ... not so much because I care for the poor, as because I care for your souls’ (Chrysostom, trans. Marriott, 1889). The rhetorical focus on inequality is presented as an opportunity for almsgiving and spiritual advancement not an evil because the poorest suffer. Indeed, he even says that the rich would benefit more than the poor by reducing inequality,ⁱⁱ

thereby spiritualising the evil of inequality by posits that the inequality of those in heaven as compared to hell is greater than any inequality on earth: ‘if they be not comforted, but perish by hunger, the harm to them will be no great matter. What did poverty and wasting by hunger injure Lazarus!’ (Chrysostom, trans. Marriott, 1889).

These thinkers rail against the hard-heartedness of the rich that allows poor people to suffer and against bias in social structures, notably the legal system, that disadvantages the already disadvantaged. Yet inequality/ies tends to be treated as indicators of sin rather than sin *per se*.

2.2 Inequality/ies as contrary to divine intention

Fundamentally, however, the doctrinal pull in Christian tradition is toward equality. This for at least two reasons. First, God’s gift of the earth is to all in common:

Tell me, then, whence are you rich? ... From his father and his grandfather. But can you, ascending through many generations, show the acquisition just? It cannot be. The root and origin of it must have been injustice. Why? Because God in the beginning made not one man rich, and another poor. ... but He left the earth free to all alike. Why then, if it is common, have you so many acres of land, while your neighbour has not a portion of it? (Chrysostom, trans. Marriott, 1889).

Chrysostom proceeds to recognise that the children and grandchildren of someone who is acquired wealth unjustly are not guilty of their sins; ‘For you are not responsible for the covetous acts of your father’ (Chrysostom, trans. Marriott, 1889). Nor is wealth *per se* evil. What is evil is that wealth not benefitting the poor:

But is not this an evil, that you alone should have the Lord's property, that you alone should enjoy what is common? Is not the earth God's, and the fullness thereof? If then our possessions belong to one common Lord, they belong also to our fellow-servants. The possessions of one Lord are all common (Chrysostom, trans. Marriott, 1889).

Wealth accumulated down the generations becomes increasingly problematic as socio-economic inequality increases. God gave the sun, air, earth, and water, the heaven, the sea, the light, the stars to all in common. By analogy, earthly rulers must ensure that those things necessary for life in cities are available to all — baths, market-places, walks, and such like (Chrysostom, trans. Marriott, 1889).

Second, the destiny of every human is union with God where earthly inequality/ies are void:

Let us then become heaven ... I do not speak of the poor only, nor the many, but even if there be a general there, even if the emperor be there, we shall not distinguish the emperor,

nor the private person. We shall not know what is gold, or what is silver, or what is silken or purple raiment ... (Chrysostom, trans. Marriott, 1889).

This is another spiritual truth that, for Chrysostom and other ancient figures, ultimately matters more than any human condition: 'For He would have our soul to be a dwelling for Himself, and Himself to be laid round about us as a garment' (Chrysostom, trans. Marriott, 1889). 'The Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, ... did, through His transcendent love, become what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself' (Irenaeus, trans. Roberts and Rambaut, 1885: 526). 'For He was made man that we might be made God' (Athanasius, trans. Robertson, 1892). But spiritual truths have earthly correlates. As Basil of Caesarea wrote:

That bread you hold in your clutches: that belongs to the starving; that cloak you keep locked away in your wardrobe, that belongs to the naked; those shoes that are going to waste with you, they belong to the barefooted; the silver you buried away, that belongs to the needy (Basil the Great, trans. Jackson, 1895).

The movement of salvation is toward a future in Christ wherein which the whole earth will be healed, restored and transformed; hence the demand upon believers to join God's work and take action to bring about more equal socio-economic conditions. As the Sanctifier Teacher of Wisdom, the Holy Spirit provokes believers to more Christ-like action in economic, political and all other affairs (Basil the Great, trans. Toal, 1959: 332).

2.3 Inequality/ies as the condition of sin

In seeking to glean wisdom from the patristic, medieval and modern eras for a newly intense question, we must be aware of obstacles that could hinder progress. One such obstacle is the problematic association of justice with giving to each person their due.

Aquinas is perhaps the most (in)famous advocate of the notion of justice as assigning to each one 'their own', or their due but it was commonplace in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.ⁱⁱⁱ Ancient and medieval societies were ordered according to land ownership, rank and the feudal system of fees paid in return for protection. Social inequality was the order of the day. Hence the incorporation of what was socially due in a feudal context into the practicalities of justice. Aquinas lacks a developed political theology and does not denounce inequality/ies *per se* but we find him nevertheless condemning the love of temporal goods:

For we see that by riches man (*sic*) acquires the means of committing any sin whatever, and of sating his desire for any sin whatever, since money helps man to obtain all manner of temporal goods, according to Ecclesiastes 10:19: "All things obey money": so that in

this desire for riches is the root of all sins (Aquinas, *ST I-II*, Q.84, Art.1, *co.*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 1920)

Significantly, he is clear that sin causes death and destruction beyond the person committing sin:

The Apostle says (Romans 5:12), "By one man sin entered into this world, and by sin death." ... One thing causes another in two ways: first, by reason of itself; secondly, accidentally (Aquinas, *ST I-II*, Q.85, Art.6, *co.*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 1920)

Citing Augustine, Aquinas talks of the original sin of Adam and Eve as forfeiting original justice and subjecting human nature to corruption and death. These are the effects of sin in general that become manifest in society in injustice and poverty. For Aquinas, however, these effects do not require egalitarian redistribution; a king is above a commoner. There are no obligations upon the rich to redistribute wealth to the poor. Respect of persons demands proportionate not egalitarian response: 'For the equality of distributive justice consists in allotting various things to various persons in proportion to their personal dignity' (Aquinas, *ST II-II*, Q.36, Art.1, *ad.2*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 1920). Only urgent need warrants the redistribution of property, that is, one person lawful supply of their own needs by taking from it either openly or secretly:

Since, however, there are many who are in need, while it is impossible for all to be succored by means of the same thing, each one is entrusted with the stewardship of his own things, so that out of them he may come to the aid of those who are in need. Nevertheless, if the need be so manifest and urgent, that it is evident that the present need must be remedied by whatever means be at hand (for instance when a person is in some imminent danger, and there is no other possible remedy), then it is lawful for a man to succor his own need by means of another's property, by taking it either openly or secretly: nor is this properly speaking theft or robbery (Aquinas, *ST II-II*, Q.63, Art.1, *co.*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 1920).

In his context of the feudal system, Aquinas holds that private property can, within divine providence, contribute to the common good. The ethical challenge was not to redistribute wealth but urge each to serve the common good as their circumstances allowed (Aquinas, *ST II-II*, Q.66, Art.7, *co.*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 1920).

Heirs of Aquinas committed to alleviating poverty have jettisoned aspects of his work in reconceiving inequality/ies as the condition of sin. Especially important has been the theology

of liberation that began in Latin America after the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) of the international Roman Catholic Church. The theology of liberation made the release of people from grinding poverty central to the theologico-ethical task. Gustavo Gutiérrez, often dubbed the father of liberation theology, condemns structural sin. Gutiérrez knew from his own experiences in Peru that socio-economic inequality produced chronic poverty, deprivation and dependency (Gutiérrez, 1974). A lifetime spent living and working among the poor of Lima taught him that responses to such questions come from solidarity with the poor. His seminal text *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (1974) teaches *inter alia* that responding in a Christian manner to inequality/ies demands: locating the theologico-ethical task in the actual reality of people in poverty; informed reflection on those inequality/ies that produce chronic poverty, deprivation and dependency; understanding that gross socio-economic inequality/ies are not merely happenstance but an expression of structural sin. Leonardo Boff preaches the reign of God not only as a spiritual reality but also as a universal transformation of the structures of the sinful world; Jesus' disciples must work for change not only in the lives of individuals but in social structures too (Boff, 1974: 79).

Despite some tensions in the intervening years between liberation theology and the Vatican, Pope John Paul II updated Roman Catholic social teaching by urging the faithful to grapple more seriously with sinful structures that contribute to gross socio-economic inequality/ies:

Man . . . is also conditioned by the social structure in which he lives, by the education he has received and by his environment. These elements can either help or hinder his living in accordance with the truth (John Paul II, 1991).

Sinful structures are rooted in personal sin and thus always linked to the concrete acts of individuals who introduce these structures, consolidate them and make them difficult to remove (John Paul II, 1987). As Daniel K. Finn explains in his summary of contemporary Roman Catholic teaching:

Social structures are systems of human relations among (pre-existing) social positions. They are ontologically real, emergent 'things' that exist at a 'higher level' than the individual persons from whose actions they emerge. Structures exert causal impact on persons who take on positions within them by generating restrictions, enablements and incentives that influence the (free) decisions those people make. structures can appropriately be called sinful when their causal impact encourages morally evil decisions (Finn, 2016).

Sins that originates in but exceeds the acts of individuals cry to heaven because they generate violence, disrupt peace and harmony between communities within single nations, between nations and between the different regions of continents (John Paul II, 1999).

3. What should Christian ethics do about global inequality/ies today?

It is no longer acceptable for Christian tradition to tolerate extreme inequality/ies, even when the rich act charitably toward the poor. The facts of global inequality/ies have evidenced for too long that gross inequality/ies are evil per se because of harm to individuals, communities and the natural environment. Wisdom from the patristic and medieval eras equips Christian tradition today to be taking this step, that is, to condemn extreme inequality/ies as inherently evil. Indeed, wisdom from Christian tradition renders unavoidable today a vision of gross inequality as evil. But work is needed to: (1) *clarify the moral arguments about what is wrong with inequality/ies*; (2) *reimagine the ethical implications of doctrinal pulls toward equality*; and (3) *reconnect the link between inequality/ies and sin*.

3.1 Clarifying moral arguments about what is wrong with inequality/ies

Is the harm to individuals, communities and the natural environment entailed in extreme inequality/ies not simply a failure to act charitably but lifestyles of relative prosperity? It would seem so.

3.1.1 Contrary to the reign of God

Consider Jesus' parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk. 16:19-31). Dives, the rich person, lives in relative luxury. Lazarus does not have enough to eat and his body bears the consequences of poverty. As commentator François Bovon observes, 'What the rich man did wrong was not just that he did not take care of the poor man Lazarus, but that he also lived in excessive luxury' (Bovon, 2002: 479). The parable turns on contrasting lifestyles and, although there is no indication that they ever met whilst alive, their paths cross upon death – at which point of judgement a principle of equality is invoked. Abraham says to the rich man: "Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony" (Lk.18:25). The sheer realities of extreme inequality/ies condemn him now to hell.

Readers of the gospel of Luke will be familiar with Mary's song of praise (Lk.1:46-55, cf 1 Sam 2:1–10), commonly called the Magnificat, in which she lauds God her Saviour's action in curtailing extreme inequality/ies:

He has shown strength with his arm;

he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.

While New Testament scholarship has varied in the extent to which Mary's song has been depoliticised and spiritualised (Baulch, 2017: 657)^{iv} the pull of biblical teaching about socio-economic matters, and certainly Lukan imperatives, is overwhelmingly toward equality (Guma, 2017).^v The rich man and Lazarus parable calls for action on the part of the rich to rectify inequality/ies in advance of divine judgment that will ensure a reversal of fortunes (Bovon, 2002: 475-6).

3.1.2 Leaving people behind

Jesus' parable of the rich man and Lazarus is prefaced by an attack on greed and its abomination in the sight of God: 'The Pharisees, who were lovers of money (Gr. φιλάργυροι), heard all this, and they ridiculed him' (Lk.16:14). Prior to that, chapter 15 contains three parables of mercy about no one being left behind – the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the two sons. The spiritual meaning of the parables is explicit: 'Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who need no repentance' (Lk. 15:7). These parables are about Jesus making the good news of God readily available to all who will hear, and especially those excluded from society's norm. Jesus eats with sinners and tax collectors; those excluded by his society's influencers (Lk. 15:1). The parables are about God's preferential option for those left behind. They speak directly about those left behind because of extreme socio-economic inequality/ies. God's preferential option for those left behind extends to those impacted by market forces and/or marginalised as a result of discrimination. Pope Francis emphasises the point:

As long as the problems of the poor are not radically resolved by rejecting the absolute autonomy of markets and financial speculation and by attacking the structural causes of inequality, no solution will be found for the world's problems or, for that matter, to any problems. Inequality is the root of social ills (Francis, 2013: Section 202).

Inequality/ies is a social sickness that cries out for cure. No one should be left to die without notice.

3.1.3 Doing harm

The argument unfolding in this essay is that Christian tradition now demands the condemnation of gross inequality as evil. This is nowhere more evident than inequality/ies across countries and geographical areas exacerbating climate change, thereby doing harm to individuals and the

natural environment. ‘The richest 10 per cent of the world’s population (c.630 million people) were responsible for 52 per cent of the cumulative carbon emissions – depleting the global carbon budget by nearly a third (31 per cent) in those 25 years alone. The poorest 50 per cent (c.3.1 billion people) were responsible for just 7 per cent of cumulative emissions, and used just 4 per cent of the available carbon budget’ (Oxfam Media Briefing, 2020: 2). Climate change is a crisis driven by the lifestyles of the relatively prosperous and impacting the poorest most disastrously: ‘The poorest people on the planet are not only least responsible for causing climate change, they also tend to be the most vulnerable to its consequences and least prepared to cope’ (Oxfam Media Briefing, 2015: 5).

Christian tradition in the West has long taught that evil results in harm to other human beings and the natural order:

All of nature, therefore, is good, since the Creator of all nature is supremely good. But nature is not supremely and immutably good as is the Creator of it. Thus the good in created things can be diminished and augmented. For good to be diminished is evil; still, however much it is diminished, something must remain of its original nature as long as it exists at all (Augustine, IV, 12, trans. Outler, 1955).

Evil is evident in destruction and harm to any aspect of God’s creation. Grossly unequal carbon emissions are devastating people’s homes, lifestyles and livelihoods, the world’s coral reefs and ice masses, and much more. Inequality/ies are causing harm and should therefore be condemned as evil.

3.2 Resisting abstract and arithmetical responses

It is not enough, however, for Christian ethics to advocate equality as an abstract principle or arithmetical principle. To do so could risk repeating and entrenching existing sins and resulting inequality/ies. Consider Immanuel Kant’s discussion of equality in his 1793 essay *On the Relationship of Theory to Practice in Political Right* as indicative of modern, Western commitment to the equality of each with every other. Kant recognises the formal equality of all as subjects before the law but does not elaborate on the substantive meaning of this affirmation. Equality before the law concerns the form of right, that is, the status of each as members of a given state and subjects of the law (Kant, 1793: 75) but makes no demands with respect to the relative socio-economic conditions in which these subjects live. Indeed, this formal recognition of equality was compatible with exclusion of women the exclusion of women from full citizenship, including the right to vote. It was entirely consistent for Kant to

affirm equality at the level of *a priori* right without this making practical difference to the lives of women.

Similarly, it is not enough to advocate equality as a blanket equal distribution of goods. Oliver O'Donovan makes the point:

There is no moral significance in distributing goods equally as such. ... to ask about the justice of possessions is to ask about the human significance, i.e., how they empower the possessor to act ... the children at the meal table may demand fair shares, but... it would make no sense to insist on piling Granny's plate as high as that of the ravenous nine-year-old. ... measures of equal distribution, then, can achieve any momentary states of equality, and not a universal response to poverty (Donovan, 2005: 47).

Abstract egalitarian responses to inequality/ies 'create the illusion of settling questions justly without needing to determine the truth of them' (Donovan, 2005: 33). Far better, he says, to seek an attributive approach to inequality/ies that does right by each situation.

This same point is made by political theorist Nancy Fraser who refuses to accept the abstract principle of equality as an adequate foundation for the alleviation of gross inequality/ies, even when interpreted in judicial terms, to mean the right to equality before the law. The classic modern formal principle of equality cannot sustain an account of justice which permits all persons to participate as peers in social life (Fraser, 2009: 60). Instead, Fraser develops a new overarching normative principle of parity of participation which recognises that people can be impeded from full participation by economic structures that deny them the resources needed to interact with others (distributive justice), by cultural (mis)values that deny the requisite social standing (injustices of misrecognition), and by institutionally entrenched political injustice (injustices of representation). This is all the more important in a globalizing world where transnational frameworks of justice need to do more than recognise a person's citizenship of a particular nation-state.

4. Toward a systems account of sin

What further should Christian ethics do about global inequality/ies today? How is Christian ethics better to learn from the poorest how to reconnect the evil of global inequality/ies with accounts of sin and salvation and thereby challenge the poisonous fruit of unequal economic growth and rebuild fundamental human values? How better to reconceive individual responsibility for sin amidst the complexities of (post-)modern techno-capitalism that all of the relatively prosperous perpetuate and are involved in? As Orthodox scholar John S. Romanides writes: 'Without a correct understanding of the fall of mankind (*sic*), an Orthodox interpretation

of the dogma of redemption is impossible' (Romanides, 1998: 17). Mindful that the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (381) acknowledges 'one baptism for the remission of sins', the challenge is to develop an understanding of sin better able to address a finance climate of complexity and uncertainty, connections, processes and interdependency.

4.1 On the need to (re)confront the power of sin and evil

At issue is whether the most influential accounts of sin in Western Christian ethics are capable any longer of confronting the power of sin and evil. Debate about sin in the West has too often fallen apart between the stereotypes of medieval Thomist emphasis on sin as moral ignorance of that which is good and Protestant, Lutheran preoccupation with the utter corruption of humanity in Adam and Eve.^{vi} These questions are larger than can properly be considered here but questions must be asked because, at their extremes, the former reduces sin to nothing other than ignorance of the good by failing to grasp the true essence of evil, and the latter is unable to develop resources in ethical reasoning available whether for the church or wider society.

4.1.1 Why the power of sin exceeds individual psychology

John Langan argued in the 1980s that nearly all of Aquinas' treatment of sin is adapted from Aristotelian account of appetites and a teleological account of the good with very little said about sin as disobedience to divine commands and the reason for the crucifixion: 'the moral psychology that Thomas takes from Aristotle does not provide him with a satisfactory basis for analyzing a category of sins' (Langan, 1987: 180). Steven Jensen's studies in Thomistic psychology further expose the extent to which Aquinas treats sin as weakness in the power of the will and faculty of reason (Jensen, 2018). Following Aristotle, Aquinas supposes that human choices are always either for some perceived good or result from ignorance of the good:

Because from the very nature of the power, it [*the will – EDR*] is inclined to the rational good, as its proper object; wherefore every sin is said to be contrary to nature. Hence, if a will be inclined, by its choice, to some evil, this must be occasioned by something else. Sometimes, in fact, this is occasioned through some defect in the reason, as when anyone sins through ignorance; and sometimes this arises through the impulse of the sensitive appetite, as when anyone sins through passion (Aquinas, *ST I-II*, Q.78, Art. 3, co. trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 1920).

The agent's poor choice might be due to habitual sin such that the power of choosing well is weakened but sin is ultimately a voluntary action wherein the individual fails to desire the higher good. Sin is potentially reduced to a psychological problem that arises from humans'

defective desire for the good; a problem of human weakness and ignorance, and of choosing immediate or lesser goods over the greater (Langan, 1987: 180).

Applied to global inequality/ies, the Thomist approach suggests that humans all tend to mistake false for true goods, thereby failing to recognise evil. Those of us living relatively prosperously in the West might choose the good of planting an attractive garden without understanding that peat-based compost depletes some of the rarest and most fragile of natural environments and release CO₂ into the atmosphere. The way forward is overcoming ignorance and learning to desire higher goods; the primary approach in the fight against global inequality/ies is the re-education of desire, in the hope that a better informed understanding of *eudæmonia* (Gr. flourishing, well-being) will produce change — the obvious problem being that too few people overcome their ignorance and strengthen their resolve.

4.1.2 Whether the power of sin precludes moral deliberation

By contrast, Luther's view of sin is that it corrupts the entirety of human nature. The tree is rotten. No one is made good by choosing a true good. In his *Commentary on Genesis 1:26*, Luther rails against those who minimise original sin and describes the devastating effects of Adam and Eve's fall on all creation:

Therefore, the image of God, according to which Adam was created, was something far more distinguished and excellent, since obviously no disease of sin adhered to his reason or to will. ... But after the fall death crept like disease into all our senses, so that we cannot understand that image even with our intellect. ...

God announces the punishment: ... "Adam and Eve, now you are living without fear; death you have not experienced nor seen. This is my image, by which you are living, just as God lives. But if you sin, you will lose this image, and you will die" (Luther, 2017).

So we see now what great dangers and how many varieties of death and chances of death this wretched nature is compelled to meet with and to endure in addition to the execrable lust and other sinful passions and inordinate emotions that arise in the hearts of all. We are never secure in God; terror and apprehension cause us concern even in sleep. These and similar evils are the image of the devil, who stamped them on us (Pedersen, 2017: 87).

Sin not only weakens the capacity to choose the good but corrupts human nature such that even good choices tend toward death. As L'ubomír Batka summarises: 'the true nature of sin is to be found entirely in original sin and not in a mortal sin of *peccatum actuale*', that is, particular,

actual sins (Batka, 2014: 238). The power of original sin is such as to overwhelm individual effort. Consequently, Protestant ethics is unable to produce usable ethical criteria.

As James Gustafson said of Protestant ethics in general and Karl Barth's writings in particular:

Protestant theology has gotten into an irrational and morally dangerous ethical position. It has frequently failed to see that general principles and rules and concepts of values are necessary in the Christian life in order to give guidance (if not a sense of moral certitude) to human action (Gustafson, 1978: 44, 46).

Protestant ethics has typically failed in thinking from the resurrection to the practicalities of moral reasoning using general moral principles and clear concepts of moral values. Nigel Biggar makes a similar point:

But if the content of God's command cannot be expressed in terms of moral principles or rules that are always applicable to appropriate cases, if its meaning cannot be specified in terms of kinds of acts, if it has no intelligible constancy, then there can be no way of charting one's way through moral perplexity by distinguishing good and bad acts in terms of their characteristic features. If there can be no legitimate reflection upon the nature or content of the good, if there can be no legitimate deliberation about which possible action is the right one, then there can be no substantive moral advice (Biggar, 1993: 22).

Applied to global inequality/ies, it is difficult to do more than hope that Jesus' disciples will proclaim his name more intensely and thereby discern appropriate courses of action.

4.1.3 Why good intentions are not enough

Developing the critical function of faith requires a more robust understanding of sin. Neither predominant Thomist nor Protestant accounts of the relationship between sin and global inequality/ies are adequate to meet the global inequality/ies defining issue of our times.

At their best, Western traditions of original sin demand that Christian ethicists inquire into the effects of sin and the corruption of death because, while sin is the peculiar privilege of each person alone, humanity has received mortality from our ancestor's sin and all are heirs to the corruption of death. Practically this means that, while every individual retains responsibility for sin, we are all somehow more deeply involved in it than any individual can comprehend. Good intentions are not enough to counter the sickness of death that far exceeds individual or collective choice. The mythical New Testament language of 'powers and principalities' (1 Cor. 15:24; Col. 1:16, 2:8-10-15; Eph. 1:20-22, 3:10; 6:11ff.; 1 Pet. 3:22) and Christ's lordship over the spiritual powers of the universe (Rom. 8:38; 1 Cor. 15:24-27; Eph. 6:12; Phil. 2:10)

reenforces a sense of sin acquiring power beyond human comprehension; ‘the elemental spirits of the universe ... not according to Christ’ (Col. 2:8).

4.2 For the forgiveness of sins

A question presented by the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed is whether Christian ethics has an adequate understanding of the full scope of Christ’s work of redemption for the forgiveness of sins. The facts of global inequality/ies, many of which amount to evil, have not outgrown the divine work of redemption but the need is urgent for an understanding of sin and salvation capable of addressing these realities.

Recent papal statements indicate awareness of the global interconnections across economies, cultures, politics, and more, that reinforce and worsen inequality/ies:

Another problem arises from the persistent inequalities in economic sectors, in wages, in commercial and speculative banks, including institutions and global problems: it is necessary to maintain deep concern for the poor and for social justice (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 201). It requires, on one hand, significant reforms that provide for the redistribution of the wealth produced and universalization of free markets at the service of families, and, on the other, the redistribution of sovereignty, on both the national and supranational planes (Francis, 2014).

The Vatican also condemns creating inequality and new poverty in the very countries considered the wealthiest, thereby suggesting that the relatively prosperous should look harder close to home (Francis, 2014). But the facts of global inequality/ies demand increasing awareness of how each of us might unwittingly be contributing to the worsening of inequality/ies; how better to conceive the long- and short-term negative effects of the sins of greed, covetousness, etc; how to uncover the root causes of chronic, complex problems, and expose the hypocrisy entailed in many quick fixes; how to understand the contribution of racism, xenophobia and discrimination to inequality/ies, and more (Caccia, 2021).

5. Conclusion

While Christian tradition historically has emphasised poverty as an evil rather than the brute fact of socio-economic inequality, the ethical work of exposing how extreme inequality/ies are both the symptoms and condition of sin is unspeakably urgent. Inequality/ies hurt people by undermining social solidarity and relationships both within and between countries, and across generations. An ethical response to global inequality/ies is impossible in Christian ethics without an adequate understanding of sin because, when confronting the inequality/ies that are causing death and destruction to so many, we are speaking of the sin-bound human condition

from which the creeds confess that only the resurrection can release us. Mindful of the inseparability of Christian ethics from doctrine, this essay has called for the continuing development of Christian ethics in order better to expose, condemn and reduce global inequality/ies, and for soul-searching about the causal influence of many and diverse evils. All this because:

The Lord kills and brings to life;
 he brings down to Sheol and raises up.
The Lord makes poor and makes rich;
 he brings low, he also exalts.
He raises up the poor from the dust;
 he lifts the needy from the ash heap,
to make them sit with princes
 and inherit a seat of honour (1 Sam. 2:6-8).

ENDNOTES

ⁱ That which is evil ruins and destroys God's creation and is contrary to divine God. Evil is a relative term that might be different for different people and situations, but always opposes good. Heb. *ra'*; Gr. *ponēros* (adj) = wickedness causing distress, injury, wrong; destructive of that which is good. Gr. *kakopieō* (verb) = to do harm or wrong; to injure or to sin.

ⁱⁱ Paul Ramsey made a similar point against Augustine's advocating neighbour love ultimately for one's own sake; 'self *inverted*' love' (Ramsey, 1953:100 - emphasis original).

ⁱⁱⁱ Cicero, *De Inventione III*, c. 53. '*Iustitia est habitus animi, communi utilitate conservata, suam cuique tribuens dignitatem*'. See also Aristotle (*NE*, 1129a33; 1129b10; 1130a26; 1133b31; 1134a4 ;7f).

^{iv} E.g., Richard A. Horsley (1989) offers a highly politicised reading of Mary's song as compared to Raymond Brown's more personalised reading as a hymn of praise (1993).

^v Leonardo Boff, in chapter 12 of his work *The Maternal Face of God* presents Mary as a liberating model of faith by associating her with the poor and dispossessed (Boff, 1987).

^{vi} Western Christianity is understood to be the Latin Church, otherwise known as the Roman Catholic Church, and the various branches of Protestantism. The contrast is with the various traditions of Eastern Christianity, in the Middle East, Egypt, parts of Africa, Asia Minor, the far East and elsewhere. Eastern Christianity includes the many Orthodox churches, Syrian churches, Coptic churches, and parts of the Western Church that retain close cultural links with their localities in these regions of the world.

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