

1. Introduction

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Around the world, women experience disproportionate rates of violence, hunger, and illiteracy; carry an inordinate burden of care for children and the elderly; and suffer from inadequate health care that leads to what the late Dr. Paul Farmer described as “stupid deaths”—that is, deaths that result from tragic, unfair, and preventable causes.¹ In this collection of essays, scholars trained in the Catholic moral tradition seek to reflect on the suffering unique to women, with a special focus on human reproduction as a site of suffering, inequality, and violence. In this volume’s introduction, we, Emily and Simeiqi, explain the origins of the contributors’ collaboration, introduce two guiding frameworks (re-productive justice and Catholic social thought), and describe the book’s organization.

Origins of and Development of the Virtual Table

In October 2019, a group of scholars met in Munich, Germany, to envision a way forward for the Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church network that would facilitate international collaborations without necessitating expensive in-person conferences.² Those in attendance

¹ “Dying in childbirth because obstetric care cost too much was dying a stupid death; worldwide, there are five hundred thousand of these each year,” Farmer wrote in “Landmine Boy and Stupid Deaths” (2008), in *Partner to the Poor: A Paul Farmer Reader*, ed. Haun Saussy (Oakland: University of California Press, 2010), 409–426. See also UN Women, “Facts and Figures,” www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/commission-on-the-status-of-women-2012/facts-and-figures.

² Founded by Jesuit moralist and teacher James F. Keenan, SJ, the Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church network is an international community of ethicists that has become a catalyst for re-envisioning how we investigate ethics and how we report our findings better by

shared a vision for bringing together scholars across continents to think together about the most pressing social issues facing the church and the world by creating ‘virtual tables.’ These spaces of ongoing debate and discussion were to be intentionally international and formative of younger scholars in the field. Emily attended the Munich conference and began planning a virtual table on reproductive justice and the common good soon after³ and asked Simeiqi He to co-convene the virtual table.⁴

Our virtual table began to meet in July of 2020, in the pedagogical style of a round table. Unlike a rectangular table with a clear position of authority designated at the so-called ‘head’ of the table, when a group gathers in the round, each has the opportunity to see one another. No position has higher or lower status. Feminist scholars have for some time noted the value of “circle” discussions, or dialogues “in the round,” which capture this framework of mutual listening and learning.⁵ A round table

being better connected globally. Keenan has encouraged each of us to “talk about matters that others do not think should be discussed” and to support one another in our shared vocation. To read more about the virtual tables see the CTEWC website catholicethics.com/virtual-tables/. We thank the entire CTEWC leadership team for their support and encouragement as we sought to contribute to theological ethics in a world church. Special thanks to Linda Hogan, Andrea Vicini, SJ, Kristin Heyer, Shaji George Kochuthara, Suzanne Mulligan, Alexandre A. Martins, M. Therese Lysaught, and Jason King.

³ Emily’s travel was funded by an International Opportunity Grant (International Center, University of San Diego); her contributions to the volume were supported by a research sabbatical and the Steber Fellowship. Special thanks to the Dean’s Office of the College of Arts and Sciences and the Provost Office, both of the University of San Diego.

⁴ We had advertised the opportunity through the Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church network and described it as an English-speaking closed group that would protect the identity of participants so that those present could speak freely about ongoing research questions related to reproduction, feminism, and social justice. While some members speak multiple languages, our group’s dialogues proceeded in English. The conversations are inevitably shaped by this limitation. It was also shaped by practical considerations including the difficulty of scheduling synchronous meetings across different time zones.

⁵ A notable example is the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (often simply called ‘the Circle’), which is a Pan-African academic association of women researching, publishing, and interacting with communities on issues relating to religion and theology. Founded in 1989 under the vision of Mercy Amba Oduyoye, the Circle creates spaces for

communicates the idea that every voice matters.⁶ In our virtual table Zoom meetings, we sought to practice this kind of circle methodology, beginning with “check-ins” and enabling dialogue on the theme of the day. In our first meeting, we discussed our experiences of the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on our work and family lives thus far, with special attention to issues of gender injustice. Emily described the challenges of online teaching in the spring of 2020 while her elementary-school aged children were also learning at home. Simeiqi shared the challenges of her experience giving birth and discussed the difficulties of finding diapers and wipes in the grocery stores after welcoming a newborn child.⁷ Personal sharing enabled us to create a space of mutual listening, solidarity and shared activism as together we reflected on what we were witnessing and experiencing from our various contexts around the world.

We decided that for the first year we would meet eight times for conversations around shared texts, working papers, and time for discussion and reflection.⁸ Our conversations were wide-ranging, covering

women from Africa to do communal theology. For more information, see Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (2024): www.circlekenya.org/ and circle.org.za/.

⁶ For this reason, many found it significant that in the Synod on Synodality meetings in Rome, the seating arrangements were designed to be inclusive, with delegates seated at round tables. Nicole Winfield, “Vatican Document Highlights Need for Concrete Steps for Women, ‘Radical Inclusion’ of LGBTQ+,” *AP News*, June 20, 2023, apnews.com/article/vatican-synod-women-lgbtq-pope-abuse-63b13399c4cd363a7a086c7b513e6283.

⁷ For a powerful reflection on spiritual lessons from a traumatic birth experience, see Simeiqi He, “Mother of One, Mother of All,” *Mothering Spirit*, March 11, 2024, motheringspirit.com/2024/03/mother-of-one-mother-of-all/.

⁸ For example, some of the texts we read and discussed together include Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* (2016); United Nations Population Fund, “Covid-19: A Gender Lens,” March 2020, www.unfpa.org/resources/covid-19-gender-lens; Margaret A. Farley, RSM, “Liberation, Abortion, and Responsibility,” in *On Moral Medicine: Theological Perspectives in Medical Ethics*, 2nd ed., ed. Stephen E. Lammers and Allen Verhey (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998): 633–638; Farley’s “Presidential Address to the Catholic Theological Society of America: The Church in the Public Forum: Scandal or Prophetic Witness?,” *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 55 (2000): 89–101; Loretta J. Ross, “Conceptualizing Reproductive Justice Theory: A Manifesto for Activism,” in *Radical Reproductive Justice: Foundations, Theory, Practice, Critique*, ed. Loretta J. Ross, Lynn Roberts, Erika Derkas,

such topics as gender norms in *Amoris Laetitia*, child care, ecofeminism, contraception, clericalism and seminary curricula, conscience formation, politics, racism, and population control. We did not initially have a book project in mind. Rather, we slowly came to understand, over a three-year conversation, that our conversations were unique, and could contribute fruitfully to global conversations in Catholic theological ethics. While some participants in the virtual table were not able to participate in the book project because of other writing commitments, their voices shaped the chapters that follow, and we remain grateful for each person who shared their stories, expertise, and hope for a better world throughout our multi-year collaboration. As we began to plan for a published collection, we reflected on how we might convey our dialogical method in published form. We decided to write single-authored chapters as well as roundtable discussions in which participants respond to the same prompt from their particular context. This approach can show how theologians from various positions around the table both share common concerns and propose variable solutions to complex problems.

Why Reproduction and the Common Good?

Reproductive health is a complex issue. To speak of human reproduction requires reflection on the body, on intimate relationships, on health and

Whitney Peoples, and Pamela Bridgewater Toure (New York: Feminist Press, 2017); Loretta J. Ross and Ricki Solinger, *Reproductive Justice: An Introduction* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017); Rickie Solinger and Mie Nakachi, eds., *Reproductive States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Sisters in Islam and Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women, *Child Marriage: Its Relationships with Religion, Culture, and Patriarchy* (2018): arrow.org.my/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/National-Report-Child-Marriage-Single-Page.pdf; Agnes M. Brazal, "Ethics of Care in *Laudato Si'*: A Postcolonial Ecofeminist Critique," *Feminist Theology* 29, no. 3 (2021): doi.org/10.1177/09667350211000614; United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), *Seeing the Unseen: State of World Population Report 2022*, 38–41, www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/EN_SWP22%20report_0.pdf; and an earlier version of a chapter later published in Lorraine Cuddeback-Gedeon, *The Work of Inclusion: An Ethnography of Grace, Sin, and Intellectual Disabilities* (London: T&T Clark, 2023).

wellbeing, and on the nature of community and the care for future generations. To speak of reproduction and the common good is to ask about our obligations to one another in the human family. It requires inquiry into themes of social responsibility, social structures, welfare, interdependence, concern for the vulnerable, and justice. Human reproduction can be a site of immense joy, bonding, and life-affirming care, but it is not always so. Further, feminist discourse requires attention to power, agency, and the relationship between the personal and the political. As theologians who seek to better understand the signs of our times regarding human reproduction, we have come to see how—to adopt the language of *Gaudium et Spes*—the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, are also the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ (no. 1). The work of human reproduction cannot be equitably shared and thus raises additional questions about which bodies—which persons—can or should be asked to carry communal burdens.⁹ From the beginning, we sought to discuss these complex themes by holding together the concrete realities of human experiences and the wisdom of the Catholic intellectual and spiritual traditions. We also sought to hold together the importance of particularity—including recognition of our own positionality and context—while also approaching our conversations with a focus on dialogue in the midst of difference. While this volume brings together voices from around the globe, it cannot possibly capture the varied experiences of all Catholics around the world. Each of us speaks from a particular place, embedded within particular relationships and institutions

⁹ See Cristina L. H. Traina, “Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Unwanted Pregnancy, Mercy, and Solidarity,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 46, no. 4 (2018): 658–681; Patricia Beattie Jung, “Abortion and Organ Donation: Christian Reflections on Bodily Life Support,” in *Readings in Moral Theology, no. 9: Feminist Ethics and the Catholic Moral Tradition*, ed. Charles E. Curran, Margaret A. Farley, and Richard A. McCormick (New York: Paulist Press, 1996): 440–480; Lisa Sowle Cahill, “Abortion and Argument by Analogy,” *Horizons* 9, no. 2 (1982): 217–287.

that shape us and our moral imaginations.¹⁰ We share explicitly feminist commitments, including defense of the dignity of women and a desire for women's voices and experiences to shape Catholic theological ethics now and in the future. Writing about reproductive justice together is an act of collective resistance to patriarchy.

Okay, but What is Reproductive Justice—Really?

We decided to build our conversations around reproductive justice because of the fruitful overlap between commitments of Catholic social teachings and the reproductive justice movement. Reproductive justice is a social movement that brings together diverse individuals and community organizations to foster holistic flourishing, especially for persons marginalized by race and class. The movement builds on the work of womanist and Black feminist scholars of the 1960's in the United States, who pointed out the multi-faceted and layered oppressions that women of color experienced in the US.¹¹ Loretta J. Ross and Toni Bond, early leaders of the reproductive justice movement, explain that when Black women came together to organize around their needs in the US in 1994, abortion was just one of a constellation of complex issues that they discussed.¹²

¹⁰ On positionality and intersectional methods in Catholic moral theology, see Meghan J. Clark, Anna Kasafi Perkins, and Emily Reimer-Barry, "Special Issue on Intersectional Methods and Moral Theology: Introduction," *Journal of Moral Theology* 12, Special Issue no. 1 (2023): 1–18, doi.org/10.55476/001c.75198.

¹¹ Frances M. Beal, "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female" (1969), reprinted in *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement*, ed. Robin Morgan (New York: Random House, 1970); Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1 (1989): scholarship.law.columbia.edu/faculty_scholarship/3007/; and Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 1984).

¹² The main catalyst that brought scholar-activists together in the early 1990's was dissatisfaction with Democratic leadership on issues of Black women's holistic health and frustrations that the pro-choice community focused too narrowly on abortion rights instead of holistic flourishing in community. See Chicago Public Library, "Toni Bond: The Fight for

Loretta J. Ross and Rickie Solinger explain that founders of the reproductive justice movement were inspired by the human rights movement and, especially, the international coalition of activists who prioritized gender equity in the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China, in 1995, which resulted in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.¹³ Further, they attend to the ways that neoliberal capitalism and white supremacy negatively impact persons marginalized by race and class. The movement seeks to center the stories of persons on the peripheries, including people who are vulnerable because of complex systems of oppression and domination.

Committed to achieving human rights for all, the leaders of the reproductive justice movement prioritized three rights in particular: the right to have a child; the right to not have a child; and the right to parent children in safe and healthy conditions.¹⁴ Ross and Solinger explain that people who reproduce and become parents require a safe and dignified context for these most fundamental human experiences. Reproductive justice expands reflection to include a broad range of factors that impact women's decisions regarding reproduction, including health care access, housing, education, political structures, and the safety of one's environment.

Today, reproductive justice remains a holistic framework for seeking justice for vulnerable women and children. The threats to reproductive justice are experienced differently around the world. Migration, polluted environments, human trafficking, gender based violence, political violence and war, and many other social issues impact the decisions women make about their fertility. Reproductive justice advocates work to transform

Women's Reproductive Rights," June 24, 2022, www.chipublib.org/blogs/post/the-fight-for-womens-reproductive-rights/; Loretta Ross and Rickie Solinger, *Reproductive Justice: An Introduction*; and Zakiya T. Luna, *Reproductive Rights as Human Rights: Women of Color and the Fight for Reproductive Justice* (New York: New York University Press, 2020).

¹³ United Nations, *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, 1995* (New York: United Nations, 1996), www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/Beijing%20full%20report%20E.pdf.

¹⁴ Ross and Solinger, *Reproductive Justice*, 9.

unjust social structures so that people flourish in healthy sexual relationships and parents have all they need to care for their children.

Okay, but What Does that Have to Do with Catholic Theology?

As Catholic theologians, we draw on the breadth of the Catholic moral tradition as we address different aspects of the reproductive justice debates going on around the world. We bring to this conversation a special concern for those most marginalized, most traumatized, most impoverished, and least able to join the conversation in their faith communities. Gender inequality structures women's lives and constrains women's choices. This too must be a factor in ecclesial discernment about how to foster reproductive justice in an unjust world. All-male episcopal conferences rarely attend adequately to women's lived experiences when addressing these complex issues in their own pastoral letters. Unfortunately, Vatican dicasteries don't always get it right either.¹⁵ In our work, we seek out areas of common ground while also pointing to needed developments in church teachings.

Catholic social teaching refers to the authoritative documents of the Catholic Church dealing with social issues.¹⁶ Four principles of Catholic

¹⁵ M. Therese Lysaught, "Vatican's Own Gender Ideology Makes 'Dignitas Infinita' Incoherent," *National Catholic Reporter*, April 26, 2024, www.ncronline.org/opinion/guest-voices/vaticans-own-gender-ideology-makes-dignitas-infinita-incoherent. For theological analysis of papal teachings on gender and family life, see *Modern Catholic Family Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations*, ed. Jacob M. Kohlhaas and Mary M. Doyle Roche (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2024).

¹⁶ Since the promulgation of *Rerum Novarum* by Leo XIII in 1891, Catholic leaders have condemned social injustices and sought to inspire the faithful to address issues of inequality, exploitation of workers, consumerism, war, and environmental destruction. The method of Catholic social teaching is not legalistic and top-down. Thomas Massaro explains: "Catholic social teaching is not a set of preprogrammed answers that anticipate all of life's challenges but rather a remarkably flexible and open-ended set of tools." See Massaro, *Living Justice: Catholic Social Teaching in Action*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2012), 145.

social teaching shaped our collaborative conversations: the common good; human dignity; preferential option for the poor and vulnerable; and solidarity. In the rest of this section, we briefly explain each principle and name some of the ways it intersects with reproductive justice scholarship.

The principle of the common good is rooted in a theological anthropology that sees the human person as inherently social and interdependent.¹⁷ The common good indicates “the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily” (*Mater et Magistra*, no. 65). According to the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, “Everyone also has the right to enjoy the conditions of social life that are brought about by the quest for the common good” (no. 167). John Paul II explained that the common good seeks the “good of all and of each individual” (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, nos. 38–39). Moreover, governments have important roles to play in securing the common good. “The government of each country has the specific duty to harmonize the different sectoral interests with the requirements of justice” (*Compendium*, no. 169). The principle of the common good intersects with reproductive justice in compelling ways because both are rooted in an understanding of the social nature of the human person and both see an important role for the government in safeguarding the welfare of all. This leads activists within both frameworks to advocate for policies such as the paid family leave, nondiscrimination policies, distributive justice through taxation, and a strong social safety net for the vulnerable.

A second shared principle between Catholic social teaching and reproductive justice is the defense of human rights. In Catholic teachings about labor justice, the principle of human dignity yields slogans such as “persons over profits!” and “work is for the person, not the person for work!” As the *Compendium of the Church’s Social Doctrine* explains, “The whole of the Church’s social doctrine, in fact, develops from the principle

¹⁷ For example, *Gaudium et Spes* taught that human beings were created for life in community (no. 32).

that affirms the inviolable dignity of the human person” (no. 107). In Catholic teachings, the human person is created *imago Dei*—that is, in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26). Recognition of basic human rights emerges from this recognition in the sacred dignity of the human person. In *Dignitatis Humanae*, the church affirms rights of religious freedom, family life, and freedom from unjust coercion (nos. 1, 2, 5, 9). John XXIII, in *Pacem in Terris*, defended a human rights framework that included the right to bodily integrity and “to the means necessary for the proper development of life, particularly food, clothing, shelter, medical care, rest, and, finally, the necessary social services” (no. 11). Reproductive justice scholarship intersects in important ways with this rights-based approach. Previously we noted that reproductive justice advocates for the right to control one’s fertility and the right to safe and healthy conditions for family life. These conditions include the very same conditions laid out by John XXIII: food, clothing, shelter, medical care, and so forth.

A third key principle of Catholic social teaching that intersects with the scholarship of reproductive justice is the preferential option for the poor and vulnerable. This principle explains that we have a special duty to give priority to those most marginalized. In the words of the Latin American bishops at Puebla, “We affirm the need for conversion on the part of the whole Church to a preferential option for the poor, an option aimed at their integral liberation.”¹⁸ Christians through the centuries have asked what it means to see the face of Christ in the person who is hungry, thirsty, a stranger, sick, or imprisoned (Matthew 25: 40–45). In the papacy of Francis, this means care for those on the peripheries. Jesuit moralist Thomas Massaro explains that “advocating for social change by encouraging structural reforms that will benefit those on the periphery” has been a central focus of Francis throughout his ministry.¹⁹ In addition, the papacy of Francis has focused on inclusion, accompaniment, and mercy, which

¹⁸ Conference of Latin American and Caribbean Bishops (CELAM) Puebla (1979), 1134: celam.org/.

¹⁹ Thomas Massaro, SJ, *Mercy in Action: The Social Teachings of Pope Francis* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 178.

demonstrate important aspects of his agenda for the church in the world and provide a welcome emphasis on pastoral sensitivity and dialogue with women (*Evangelii Gaudium*, nos. 103–104, 112, 169–175, 179). This approach resonates well with the reproductive justice movement’s prioritizing of women of color made vulnerable by the compounding oppressions of racism and sexism.

Finally, a fourth principle that links Catholic social teaching and reproductive justice is the principle of solidarity. John Paul II explained that solidarity is not just a “vague feeling” of compassion or pity for another, but instead is “a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good” (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, no. 38). If Jesus is the role model for solidarity, then discipleship means being willing to take up one’s cross, engage in risk-taking, challenge unjust oppression, and face the consequences of one’s actions. Catholic theologian Meghan J. Clark explains that solidarity is not one-way; rather, solidarity is a social virtue because it requires mutuality. We practice solidarity with others, not alone. Solidarity is when we join another’s struggle for justice within a community; in Clark’s words, neither the individual nor the common good can be eliminated or sacrificed in solidarity that is directed towards its proper end.²⁰ Since solidarity is so central to the reproductive justice movement, solidarity featured prominently in our virtual table discussions, as we sought to identify how we were being invited, called, and inspired to practice what Catholic theologian Cristina Traina describes as “compassionate solidarity,” meaning “compassion in action, urging justice.”²¹

Okay, but Why Now?

This volume is timely for a number of reasons. First, the implementation of *Amoris Laetitia* continues to invite Catholic leaders around the world

²⁰ Meghan J. Clark, *The Vision of Catholic Social Thought: The Virtue of Solidarity and the Praxis of Human Rights* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014), 114.

²¹ Traina, “Between a Rock and a Hard Place,” 677.

to enter into the realities of everyday people's lives instead of taking an approach to the moral life that ignores difficult questions or seeks simplistic solutions. Second, nation-states are in flux with regard to laws and policies, and episcopal conferences have been significant actors in shaping public conversation about church teachings on reproduction in particular contexts (not always for the better). Theologians should help to frame these issues in a more nuanced way than bishops often achieve. Third, our collaboration after three years of discussing reproductive justice in a CTEWC virtual table seeks to model respectful engagement of difficult issues even when disagreement emerges. We invite readers to explore complex issues from multiple perspectives and to resist simplistic solutions. It is our hope that seminary students, undergraduate students, theology professors, and vowed religious engaged in work with marginalized populations around the world will find in this text resources for thinking about complex topics in reproductive justice and social ethics.

How is the Book Organized?

The volume is divided into three parts. In the first, scholars lay the groundwork by presenting theoretical and theological categories that inform approaches to ethical analysis of reproduction. These include critical realism, reproductive justice, Catholic social thought, sin-talk, social sin, reciprocity, mutuality, social narrative, virtues of resistance, complementarity, love, and more. The second part of the volume presents two roundtable discussions. In the first roundtable, we asked participants to respond to the questions: "What are the threats to women's dignity and moral agency in your context? Is reproductive justice a helpful framework for addressing those threats?" Authors from the Philippines, United States of America, and Nigeria responded by noting different threats to women's flourishing and some of the possible ways that a framework of reproductive justice can provide meaningful categories for social action. In the second roundtable discussion, we posed the questions: "What should be the role of the Catholic Church in advancing justice with regard to

reproduction? In your context, is the Catholic Church a resource or a roadblock?” Scholars from China, the Philippines, United States, India, and the United Kingdom speak to this question from their locations. Teachers may find these particularly useful for course adoption, as they reflect various perspectives on the same question from ethicists in different parts of the world. The roundtable discussions serve as a bridge between the foundations laid out in the first part and the in-depth treatment of particular issues in the third. Here we provide a brief overview of the single-authored chapters in the volume.

Julie Clague (UK), in “Structural Inequality and the Social Determinants of Unintended Pregnancy,” analyzes the social drivers of unintended pregnancy and discusses the nature of these inequalities and their consequences for women’s health and wellbeing. Since female empowerment can reduce the high numbers of unintended pregnancies, Clague points to what this means in practical terms for women and girls at risk of unintended pregnancies.

Kate Ward (USA), in the essay “Never Just a Choice: Three Theoretical Approaches to Economic Constraints on Family Formation,” analyzes the impact of economic realities on decisions around partnership, commitment, and raising children in the US context. She examines three theoretical approaches—critical realist social theory, reproductive justice, and Catholic documentary tradition on families. Pointing out the common ground and distinctions among these three approaches, Ward argues that none of them thoroughly succeeds at describing pursuit of the human good of family formation by persons facing social constraint. Regardless, she proposes a positive vision in light of the contributions made by each of the three approaches that moves beyond the restriction-only approach by the US Catholic Church.

Kathryn Lilla Cox (USA), in “Reproductive Injustice as Social Sin: Mapping Sin Discourse into Debates about Fertility Decisions,” suggests that theological work around reproductive justice requires re-thinking sin-talk so that we can more properly name the nature of communal sins that influence individual moral decisions. She unpacks scriptural metaphors

for sin, analyzing both the contributions and limitations of these inherited categories. By reflecting on the story of “Miriam,” the essay demonstrates how sin-talk matters for vulnerable women.

Hoon Choi (USA/Republic of Korea), in the essay “Fatherhood, Reproductive Justice, and Strategic Invisibility of Men,” points to the invisibility of men in women’s reproductive stories, while calling for a better response from them to participate in reproductive justice through a genuine reciprocity. He employs an exercise of imagination, where demands faced by women—subjecting them to anguish, enforcement, and torment due to external controls over their bodies and agency—are made on men. By doing so, Choi seeks to evoke distress caused by the absurdity of these demands, so men are motivated to not only recognize the double standards in how society thinks about human bodies and bodily integrity but also acknowledge their role in reproductive justice with all its complexity. Choi proposes that genuine reciprocity called for by Francis in *Amoris Laetitia* provides an opening for the construction of a more just paradigm where men can responsibly contribute to personal and social transformation.

Suzanne Mulligan (Ireland), in the essay “Thinking about Reproductive Justice in Contexts of Violence,” examines the relationship between violence towards women and reproductive justice. Drawing on the understanding of social narrative forwarded by Traci C. West and Anne E. Patrick, Mulligan challenges the extent to which human dignity is a genuine social value within our communities. Analyzing the case of Magdalene Laundries in Ireland, Mulligan shows the weaknesses of a Catholic approach to reproduction that fails to address adequately the underlying injustices women experience.

Simeiqi He (China/USA), in the essay “Reconceptualizing Human Reproduction beyond John Paul II,” analyzes the evolution of the concept of human reproduction in the teachings of the magisterium, from John Paul II to Francis. She uncovers tensions and inconsistencies within John Paul II’s approach to human reproduction and describes how the Church’s magisterium has since developed, with a more recent focus on

the primacy of love as the central norm. When we reconceptualize human reproduction as part of a holistic anthropocosmic vision then human reproduction becomes the reproduction of love. Such a move invites new reflection on human reproduction ordered to the common good, making space for a deeper understanding of justice in Catholic approaches to reproduction.

Stephanie Ann Puen (Philippines), in the essay “Considerations for a Comprehensive Sex Education Grounded in Catholic Social Thought for Reproductive Justice in the Philippines,” reflects on the challenges of implementing the Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act of 2012 in the Philippines. Puen argues that the Catholic Church—given its teaching on integral human development—should meet the country’s need for comprehensive reproductive health education (CRHE). She demonstrates the importance of a CRHE in line with Catholic social thought, while urging an integration of sexual ethics with Catholic social thought, a serious critique on the cultural and religious assumption about women and family and an attention to the value of teaching moral decision-making and discernment.

Karen Peterson-Iyer (USA), in the essay “Reproductive Justice and Agricultural Labor Migrants,” gives special attention to migrant farmworker women in the US and their reproductive struggles. Peterson-Iyer employs reproductive justice as an analytical lens to demonstrate the numerous challenges faced by migrant farmworker women, such as family poverty, lack of access to adequate health care and reproductive health care, material precarity, compromised housing and working conditions, sexual harassment and abuse, punitive immigration policies, high degree of exploitation, and risk for the health and safety of their children. Upon examining Catholic teaching on reproductive ethics, labor and immigration ethics, and the importance of family life, Peterson-Iyer argues that Catholic ethics must widen its reproductive lens to incorporate the categories illuminated by reproductive justice. She further offers some preliminary suggestions for concrete policies to promote justice for migrant farmworker women.

Mary M. Doyle Roche (USA), in the essay “Rachel is Weeping for Her Children: Theological Reflections on Reproductive Justice and Maternal Health,” advocates for an intersectional reproductive justice framework from a Catholic perspective. Calling attention to the devastating reality of morbidity and mortality for Black mothers and children in the United States, Roche demonstrates its root in the history and ongoing impact of white supremacy. She appeals to the biblical image of Rachel, while uniting it with Black mothers and their children harmed by and lost to reproductive injustice. Arguing that the Black Lives Matter movement captures the heart of reproductive justice and a preferential option for the poor and vulnerable, Roche suggests that reproductive justice can serve as a comprehensive approach for Catholic ethics, given the latter’s attention to the dignity of the person, the common good, and solidarity with the vulnerable.

Mary Lilian Akhere Ehidihamhen (Nigeria), in the essay “Reclaiming Women’s Agency for Reproductive Justice in Nigeria Today: Flourishing for Mother and Child in Situations of Constraints,” discusses the importance of reclaiming women’s agency for reproductive justice in Nigeria. She points out that Nigerian women face numerous constraints on their agency, and she details patriarchal cultural assumptions and religious teachings, as well as systemic challenges like poverty and conflict, that hinder flourishing. Confronting these constraints and their negative impact on the reproductive life of Nigerian women, Ehidihamhen takes inspiration from Marshall Rosenberg’s needs-based theory to advocate a needs-based approach in advancing reproductive justice and the flourishing of mother and child. She contends that a needs-based approach offers women the opportunity to reclaim their reproductive agency in a just and nonviolent way. Observing the deep affinity between the needs-based approach and the teaching of the Catholic Church on human dignity and bodily integrity, Ehidihamhen urges a broader way of being Church that advances reproductive justice in Nigeria.

Eric Marcelo O. Genilo SJ (Philippines), in the essay “Risking Women’s Lives, Denying Women’s Experiences: CDF Statements on Sterilization in

Catholic Hospitals,” conducts a close examination of three documents of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith with regard to sterilization in Catholic hospitals spanning forty-three years. Genilo points out that these documents neglected significant realities that affect the capacity of women to safeguard themselves, their children, and their marriages. He argues that the solidly probable opinion developed by Ford and Kelly to justify the removal of a damaged uterus to prevent a future risky pregnancy acknowledges women’s experience and rights and is more consistent with medical standards of care, Christian charity, and common sense than the three CDF responses. Genilo calls for a retrieval and revival of their moral argument and personalist approach in addressing the dire situations women face.

Emily Reimer-Barry (USA), in “Catholic Health Care and Reproductive Justice: Whose Conscience Has Priority When Conscience Claims Collide?,” describes the footprint of Catholic health care in the US context and explores the impact of Catholic directives on patient care. In particular, she examines institutional conscience claims that seem to compete with the conscience claims of medical providers and patients. Reimer-Barry forwards the argument that communal discernment is needed in such difficult cases and that bishops should not dictate to the consciences of patients.

Virginia Saldanha (India), in “Religio-Cultural Underpinnings of Gender and Reproductive Injustice and their Impact on Women’s Agency in India,” utilizes a Catholic feminist methodology to reveal how patriarchal religious teachings within Hinduism and Christianity empower men to dominate over women in the family, in the workplace, and in Indian society. An approach to reproductive justice in India must be holistic and action-oriented. Saldanha forwards the argument that threats to women’s flourishing in India are complex but that the women’s movement is on the front lines of addressing the needed social transformation.

Concluding Reflections

We could not be comprehensive in this volume—a comprehensive treatment would fill libraries—but we sought to use our theological training to help our colleagues, students, and ecclesial leaders see the ways in which the wisdom of the Catholic tradition can fruitfully intersect with and engage the scholarship and activism of the reproductive justice movement. Throughout our discussions, we have been keenly aware that the questions we were raising had been raised by others before us. We knew that our work was building on the work of many brave theologians who had wrestled with the complexities and ambiguities of reproduction and social justice long before virtual tables existed. In our virtual table meeting dedicated to reading and discussing Margaret Farley’s trailblazing work in Catholic theological ethics, Simeiqi read aloud from Farley’s 1986 book *Personal Commitments*,

There are, of course, no final answers to most of the questions I have traced and no complete solutions to the life-situations I have described. It is possible, however, to do two things whenever we come face to face with unanswerable questions for which we need answers (without which we cannot go on) and irresolvable situations which we must resolve (or we cannot endure). It is possible, first, to expand our horizons—to push back the dimensions of the problem, gain light by turning it this way and that, broadening its context into a larger world and life. It is possible, second, to enter more deeply into the questions—to take a lantern, as it were, and walk into what may ultimately be a mystery to us, but which we do not deserve to call a mystery until we have entered it as far as we can go.²²

We can, of course, offer no “final answers” in this collection of essays. Instead, what we have endeavored to do is to look at complex problems

²² Margaret A. Farley, RSM, *Personal Commitments: Beginning, Keeping, Changing* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990), 11.

from multiple perspectives, and to ask how we might proceed in a way that honors what it means to believe in a just and merciful God in the midst of systemic injustice. Farley inspires us to “enter more deeply into the questions” and to trust that by doing so, we will not be alone. We hope this book inspires readers to think critically, lament prayerfully, and seek to collaborate in the transformation of unjust structures. This book is dedicated to our teachers and mentors, who created brave spaces in the guild of Catholic theological ethics, with our deep gratitude.



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