

Introduction: Touching the Wounds

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The painful wounds of the world are Christ's wounds. If we ignore pain, poverty, and suffering in our world, if we turn a blind eye to them out of indifference or cowardice, if we are unwilling to acknowledge the injuries we inflict (including the injuries inflicted in our churches), and conceal them from others . . . then we have no right to say to Christ, like Thomas the apostle when he touched Jesus's wounds: "My Lord and my God."

In the Gospels, the resurrected Jesus identifies himself with his wounds. They are proof of his identity. The wounded Christ is the real, living Christ. He shows us his wounds and gives us the courage not to conceal our own. . . . And whoever, like "doubting Thomas," gazes from the gloom of doubts at the wounds on the body of our world and in the hearts of our neighbors—precisely through that wounded humanity, through that image of the humanity that the Son of God took upon himself—see God. "I and the Father are one," said the one who bore our wounds.¹

SO WRITES THE CZECH PRIEST, SOCIOLOGIST, PHILOSOPHER, AND theologian Tomáš Halík, in his powerful Lenten meditation *Touch the Wounds: On Suffering, Trust, and Transformation*. Halík unfolds the thickly recursive interplay between Christ's embodied wounds as the *sine qua non* theological hermeneutic and the wounds of the world as a privileged Christological locus. His evocative work echoes and intertwines two recent moments in Pope Francis's emerging vision for theology: *Ad Theologiam Promovendam*'s call for a "paradigm shift" for theology that "commits it, first of all, to being a *fundamentally contextual theology*"; and the encyclical *Dilexit Nos*, his compelling meditation on the mystery of the sacred heart.² Here,

¹ Tomáš Halík, *Touch the Wounds: On Suffering, Trust, and Transformation*, trans. Gerald Turner (University of Notre Dame Press, 2023), xi–xii.

² Pope Francis, *Ad Theologiam Promovendam* (November 1, 2023), no. 4 (emphasis in original; Italian text, original translation); and Pope Francis, *Dilexit Nos* (October 2024), www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/20241024-enciclica-dilexit-nos.html. For further discussion of Pope Francis's vision for theology, see M. Therese Lysaught, "Ad (Synodalem) Theologiam (Moralem) Promovendam," *Journal of Moral Theology* 13, no. 1 (2024): 5–11, doi.org/10.55476/001c.92079.

as for Halik (as well as for the late Gustavo Gutierrez and others before them), it is in Christ's wounds—his pierced heart—where God bridges the distance between God and humanity and we fully encounter the fire of God's unfathomable love. This wounded Christ is equally encountered where people are caught in the broken places of the world: "I never tire of repeating that Jesus told us this in the clearest terms possible: 'Just as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me' (Matthew 25:40). He now asks you to meet him there, in every one of our brothers and sisters, and especially in the poor, the despised and the abandoned members of society. What a beautiful encounter that can be!" (*Dilexit Nos*, no. 213).

This paradigm shift toward the wounds of the world as a privileged *locus theologicus* reverberates throughout this issue of the *Journal of Moral Theology*. Each essay takes as its starting point for analysis and theological development the particularities of different wounds that are simultaneously social, bodily, and ecclesial. From the wounds of depression, moral injury, and trauma, to populist scapegoating in the Philippines and violence in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, each essay first touches a place of woundedness, interrogates the church and received theology, and from there points in new directions for both moral theology and ecclesial practice.

The focal point of this issue is Jessica Coblentz's generative monograph *Dust in the Blood: A Theology of Life with Depression*.³ Coblentz, exemplifying the courage not to conceal her own wounds, provides one of the few critical and constructive theological engagements with the experience and realities of depression. In doing so, she offers a lens for exploring additional psycho-social wounds. This lens is taken up by Catherine Yanko and Stephanie Edwards in the roundtable on her book featured in this issue. In "Investigating Moral Injury: Thinking Beyond the Law-Conscience Binary," Yanko extends Coblentz's narrative and phenomenological framework to the experience of moral injury, deriving important critiques of the facile, abstract, two-dimensional notion of conscience rife in contemporary Catholic moral theology. In "Christian Ethics, Trauma, and *Dust in the Blood*: Moving Toward Enfleshed Counter-Memory," Edwards turns the lens to trauma. Drawing on fifteen years of ministering as a social worker directly serving "adults in various marginalized positions, chiefly the unhoused, refugees and immigrants, woman-identified survivors of violence, and all the intersections therein," she draws on Coblentz to begin to reimagine a Christian social ethic as "enfleshed counter-memory."

³ Jessica Coblentz, *Dust in the Blood: A Theology of Life with Depression* (Liturgical Press Academic, 2022). See also Andrew Staron's review of *Dust in the Blood* in *Journal of Moral Theology* 12, no. 1 (2023): 150–151, doi.org/10.55476/001c.66258.

Coblentz responds to Yanko and Edwards, as well as wider critical engagement with her book, to extend her own analysis in “How (Not) to Theologize Psychological Distress: Lessons from Thinking Across Conditions.” Among her key points, she notes how forms of “psychological” distress are often mistakenly localized to an individual’s mind, interiorized to individual biology. She rightly counters that such conditions equally have social and political dimensions. Via these social wounds Coblentz, like Yanko, challenges the often oversimplified moral and theological categories that do further epistemological and moral violence to those who suffer.

That psychological distress cannot be siloed from politics comes to the fore in Edryan Paul J. Colmenares’s article, “Nebulous Populism and the Constellation of Agencies within the Philippine Catholic Church.” Colmenares’s analysis could not be more timely for US readers. While particularities of the Philippines make clear that each context has its own local history and complicated landscape, studying the dynamics of populism fueled by scapegoating violence in one specific context may illuminate the way it works in others. Nonetheless, mapping the multifaceted ways in which the Filipino Catholic Church has interfaced with local populist movements, particularly under the Duterte regime, promises to be helpful not only to the Filipino church; it also provides a framework for exploring parallel dynamics in the US. At minimum, to extend Colmenares’s conclusion, in both contexts “the elites within the Catholic Church [must] grow in recognition of the disenfranchised masses within their own nation and church community.” They must, in Halík’s words, touch the wounds in new ways.

Such a vision of recognition and connection is captured in Pope Francis’s vision of the “culture of encounter.” This hallmark of Francis’s papacy forms the centerpiece of Martin Owchorukwu Ejiowhor’s “Reimagining Catholic Peacebuilding Through Pope Francis’s ‘Culture of Encounter’: The Case of Nigeria’s Niger Delta Region.” Ejiowhor’s starting point is the socio-politico-economic wound of natural resource-based violence that has plagued Nigeria’s Niger Delta region for the past twenty years (with, of course, much longer tendrils of historic violence as well as psychological sequelae). Like Colmenares, Ejiowhor traces the multiple ways the Nigerian Catholic Church has interfaced with this violence and its surrounding politics, posing Francis’s culture of encounter as the basis for ecclesial conversion. As he notes, a “reinvigorated ecclesial self-identity and prophetic witness, essential for the church’s active contribution to

global conflict transformation and sustainable social peace,” is constitutive of the evangelizing mission of the church.⁴

The authors in this issue do not ignore the pain, poverty, and suffering in our world. They know that these are wounds of the resurrected Christ. As such, Halík challenges us:

Resurrection is not “resuscitation,” the return to a previous state. The Gospels tell us that Jesus was transformed beyond recognition by his experience of death. Not even his nearest and dearest could recognize him at first. He had to prove his identity by his wounds. In this book, I confess that I am incapable of believing in a God without wounds, a church without wounds, or a faith without wounds. Our faith too is constantly wounded by what we experience—in the world and in the church itself. But aren’t its wounds—maybe more than a lot of things—a sign of its authenticity? Can a faith that bears no stigmata, a faith that cautiously avoids the Golgothas of our time, help to heal a wounded world?⁵

I do not doubt that as theology continues to touch the wounds of the world, it will be transformed beyond what we currently recognize as theology. I am equally convinced that only such a theology—bearing the stigmata—will actually help to heal the wounded places of the world and those inhabiting them.

⁴ Martin Oworchukwu Ejiowhor, “Reimagining Catholic Peacebuilding Through Pope Francis’s ‘Culture of Encounter’: The Case of Nigeria’s Niger Delta Region,” *Journal of Moral Theology* 14, no. 1 (2025): 24.

⁵ Halík, *Touching the Wounds*, xvii.