

Chapter 8: Confronting “Structures of Violence”: Women’s Empowerment and the Legacy of Paul Farmer

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It is sometimes said that Catholic social teaching (CST) is too vague or too general, and because of its vagueness, its documents are unlikely to have any real impact in the world. Popes are occasionally criticized for failing to offer concrete solutions to the world’s problems and, as a result, for not addressing, in practical ways, the urgent concerns of our time. There is some truth to these claims. Social encyclicals can indeed be rather general; their authors avoiding the danger of getting bogged down in the minutiae of complex realities. But there is wisdom in this approach too. Popes cannot speak in detail about every global problem, nor expected to be an authority on every socio-economic reality.

Rather, CST provides us with a kind of road map, a social vision for what a more just, equitable, and inclusive world might look like. The work of implementing this vision rests with local peoples and achieving it will take different forms in different contexts. This is one of the strengths of CST since its inductive methodology makes it more universally applicable and relevant. An inductive approach facilitates the realization of CST in diverse situations, concretely manifesting the principles it articulates, specifically, participation and subsidiarity. Critically, this inductive dimension reinforces human agency, empowerment, and moral freedom as essential components of the common good.

The work of the late Dr. Paul Farmer provides a vivid example of how the Catholic social vision can find actual expression in the world. Influenced by CST, and by liberation theology in particular, Farmer understood that the liberation of the poor from oppressive economic, political, and cultural structures was key to achieving global health care and human rights. If poverty and ill health go hand in hand, then health

indicators need to be analyzed alongside the marginalization, oppression, and vulnerability of the poor. If we accept this premise, then the empowerment of the world’s poor, especially poor women, becomes a vital step towards securing universal human rights, including access to adequate health care.

In the Foreword to *Pathologies of Power*, Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen writes:

The proposal to distance inequality from poverty is severely challenged by Farmer’s many-sided documentation of the impact of inequality of power on the lives that the subjugated can live. This diagnosis does not, of course, yield any instant solution of the problems; but it does indicate the difficult—and often ignored—social and economic issues that must be firmly faced to eliminate preventable morbidity and escapable mortality. ... The solutions are by no means easy, but they are not beyond the reach of our informed and resolute effort.¹

In this chapter, I seek to examine the ways in which Farmer’s writings can help us reach solutions. His work provides a lens through which we can evaluate the relationship between inequality and injustice and its impact on the health of the world’s poor. This chapter is structured around three themes. First, I explore the connection between injustice and disease, focusing on women in particular and their disproportionate exposure to what Farmer calls “structures of violence.” Second, I argue that women’s empowerment is crucial to long-term health and human rights outcomes. Finally, I consider the implications of Farmer’s work for theological ethics. I draw on his writings throughout, in dialogue with various other interlocutors. His thinking, shaped by his medical experiences working among the poor, provides valuable resources for ongoing health and human rights debates.

¹ Amartya Sen, “Foreword,” in Paul Farmer, *Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), xvi–xvii.

Paul Farmer on Injustice and Disease

With the increased movement of peoples, disease has become more transnational than ever before. We have come to recognize the globalized nature of disease, but what is still not fully appreciated is the inequitable impact of disease globally. The poor bear the greatest burden, both in terms of infection and their inability to cope with the consequences of ill health. For this reason, Farmer coined the phrase “pathologies of power.” Power, or its lack, is one of the key factors determining who becomes ill and who gains access to health care resources. Moreover, the powerful disproportionately benefit from the fruits of scientific research, as Farmer reminds us: “Although pathogens readily cross borders, the fruits of research are often delayed in customs.”²

He goes further, denouncing a double-standard in medical ethics. The recent COVID-19 pandemic illustrates the hypocrisies to which Farmer long objected. On the one hand, the COVID-19 global emergency demonstrated an ability to develop safe, effective vaccines quickly and efficiently. On the other hand, it confirmed an absence of solidarity between the rich countries of the Global North and poorer communities in the Global South. The socio-economic re-opening of Western society, the protection of Western economies, and the profits of transnational pharmaceutical corporations took priority over the fair and equitable distribution of vaccines worldwide. Farmer questioned the extent to which the privileged take seriously the ethical claim that all human beings are made equal. He criticized the ways in which Codes of Ethics and Review Boards regularly failed the most vulnerable: they “often share an unacknowledged agreement that in fact all humans are not created equal and that this inequality accounts for both differential distribution of disease and differential standards of care.”³

Farmer worked on a range of global health concerns and in a variety of contexts. Whether writing about TB in Russian prisons, Ebola in Central

² Farmer, *Pathologies of Power*, 199.

³ Farmer, *Pathologies of Power*, 200.

and West Africa, or HIV/AIDS in Haiti, Harlem, or Sub-Saharan Africa, his analysis was always characterized by a deep concern for the poor and by a desire to ensure that the voices of the most vulnerable were heard. He wrote:

In arguing that health care is a human right, one signs on to a lifetime of work dedicated to erasing double standards for rich and poor. Again, the question of social and economic rights is raised, first and loudly by the poor, and then timidly and reluctantly by the rest of us. It has taken years for the sharp critiques voiced by the poor to begin to work their way into our medical journals and ethical codes.⁴

Among the most vulnerable are women. Lacking the same social, economic, and political freedoms as men, they often find themselves at risk of violence and disease simply because they are female. They often have little say over their reproductive rights and may enjoy minimal control over their bodily well-being and integrity. They remain at higher risk of infection with STDs such as HIV/AIDS. Commenting on this situation, Farmer wrote: "One explanation is that the majority of women with AIDS had been robbed of their voices long before HIV appeared to further complicate their lives. In settings of entrenched elitism, they have been poor. In settings of entrenched sexism, they have been, of course, women."⁵

This is a consequence of what the Christian tradition calls "social" or "structural sin." But Farmer used a much stronger language, referring to it as "structures of violence." In fact, his striking language helps awaken us to the scale and gravity of the issues at hand, arguably more so than the language of "sin." In today's world, and outside a theological setting, one might ask whether the concept of "sin" carries sufficient weight in

⁴ Farmer, *Pathologies of Power*, 201.

⁵ Paul Farmer, *Infections and Inequalities: The Modern Plagues* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 62.

increasingly secular contexts. The language of “violence,” on the other hand, retains a force that is less easy to ignore.

Farmer understood that women for too long have been robbed of their voices. As he notes in discussing women, poverty, and AIDS:

Attentiveness to the life stories of women with AIDS usually reveals it to be the latest in a string of tragedies. ... Their sickness may be thought of as a result of “structural violence,” because it is neither their nature nor pure individual will that is at fault, but rather historically given (and often economically driven) processes and forces that conspire to constrain individual agency. Structural violence is visited upon all those whose social status denies them access to the fruits of scientific and social advances.⁶

Thus, Farmer demonstrates throughout his work that attentiveness to women’s stories must form the basis of strategies aimed at dismantling the violent structures that continue to oppress and marginalize the world’s poor. How are these “structures of violence” revealed, and how do they affect women in particular?

Structures of Violence

Women across the world continue to struggle with unjust burdens arising from their lack of economic, cultural, and social equality. They remain at disproportionate risk of sexual violence and exploitation. They rarely enjoy economic parity with men: they typically work in lower paid jobs, working longer days, with fewer legal protections, while performing three-fourths of unpaid care-work.⁷ At the same time, they have fewer political rights, are more likely to be reliant on a male relative for social security, and have little say over their sexual and reproductive future. And,

⁶ Paul Farmer, “Women, Poverty, and AIDS,” in *Women, Poverty, and AIDS: Sex, Drugs, and Structural Violence*, ed. Paul Farmer, Margaret Connors, and Janie Simmons (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 2011), 23.

⁷ Agnes Brazal, “Ethics of Care in *Laudato Si’*: A Postcolonial Ecofeminist Critique,” *Feminist Theology* 29, no. 3 (2021): 223.

despite educational progress in recent decades, females make up over two-thirds of the world’s 796 million illiterate people.⁸

Globally, fewer girls finish schooling than boys. Child marriage persists with approximately twelve million girls each year being forced into marriage before they reach the age of eighteen. And, shockingly, the home can be the most dangerous place for females. The UN reports that 13 percent of women and girls between the ages of fifteen and forty-nine have been subjected to intimate partner violence in the past twelve months and that one in three women will experience physical and/or sexual violence at least once in their lifetime. Approximately 47,000 women died in 2020 at the hands of a partner or family member, suggesting that poverty and lack of empowerment are forcing women to remain in abusive and dangerous situations.⁹ Although much of this is fueled by economic vulnerability and social disempowerment, it is also connected to increasing levels of misogyny and sexism in society generally, something that transcends class or economic status. Where women’s disempowerment and toxic masculinity combine, violence against women and girls abounds.

Assigned gender roles, therefore, and a concomitant lack of social and economic opportunities create perilous situations for women. Take, for example, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, of which Farmer wrote extensively. Considerable gains have been made in recent years, especially as regards access to antiretroviral medication and educational resources. Nevertheless, infection rates among females remain stubbornly high. In 2021, 54 percent of all people living with HIV were women and girls. Around 4,900 young women aged between fifteen and twenty-four years became infected with HIV every week. In sub-Saharan Africa, which is the poorest region in the world, six in seven new HIV infections among those aged fifteen to nineteen years are among girls. Girls and young women aged fifteen to twenty-four years are twice as likely to be HIV positive than men

⁸ UN Women, “Facts and Figures,” www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/commission-on-the-status-of-women-2012/facts-and-figures.

⁹ UN Women, “Facts and Figures: Ending Violence Against Women,” www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures.

in the same age category. In sub-Saharan Africa, women and girls accounted for 63 percent of all new HIV infections in 2021.¹⁰ Farmer’s work revealed that HIV infection among women is intimately connected to power imbalances in sexual relationships.¹¹ In other words, HIV and violence against women and girls are interwoven.

Importantly, the “structures of violence” that contribute to higher risk of disease and premature death among the poor are constructed and maintained by humans. Moral conversion is needed if we are to dismantle these structures, since, as Farmer provocatively put it, “structural violence requires its apologists.”¹² One must ask, then, whether Catholic magisterial teaching goes far enough in naming these apologists, or can it do more to help eradicate “structures of violence” and the attitudes that underpin them? And does Farmer’s work help fill any gaps in Catholic teaching? I return to these questions in the final section of the chapter.

Integral Human Development and Women’s Empowerment

Church teaching on integral human development provides a potential starting point for considering women’s empowerment and agency. In *Populorum Progressio*, Pope Paul VI proposed a new way of thinking about development, one that did not rely on economic indicators alone but focused on the human person in her totality. The proper goal of development, he argued, was to foster the social conditions in which human flourishing can be realized. Economic progress is important, but economic growth is not the only objective. It ought to be accompanied by an equitable distribution of resources, by the empowerment of people (especially those most marginalized), and by freedom of self-determination. Importantly for Pope Paul, development must be *inclusive*: it ought to promote the good of the whole person and of all peoples, irrespective of gender, religion, sexual orientation, and so on.

¹⁰ These figures are available at UN AIDS, “Global HIV & AIDS Statistics—Fact Sheet,” www.unaids.org/en/resources/fact-sheet.

¹¹ Farmer, “Women, Poverty, and AIDS,” 24.

¹² Farmer, “Women, Poverty, and AIDS,” 26.

And, critically, the advancement of peoples' empowerment, agency, and self-determination helps to act as a counterweight to the "hyper-agency" of the rich. Thus, integral human development, truly understood, ought to help create conditions in which people can realize *their own* potential. It allows people to become "artisans of their own destiny" and "architects of their own development" (*Populorum Progressio*, nos. 65 and 76). It strengthens human agency and fosters the many expressions of human freedom.

Furthermore, in *Octogesima Adveniens*, Pope Paul puts forward a methodology based on what might be called agency "from below." He understood that it was beyond the remit of any pope to provide concrete answers to all the world's social and economic problems. He also realized that responsibility for implementation of the Church's social vision rests with all people of good will, with civil society, government, and local communities all playing a vital role: "It is not enough to recall principles, state intentions, point to crying injustice and utter prophetic denunciations; these words will lack real weight unless they are accompanied for each individual by a livelier awareness of personal responsibility and by effective action" (no. 48).

For Paul VI, development and liberation were achieved through social and political action *as well as* economic improvement. The liberation of the poor required more than their economic advancement. It would be gained within and by communities empowered to work for their own well-being. Thus, we find in Pope Paul's social documents a strong endorsement of the principles of participation and subsidiarity, although, regrettably, he does not explicitly name women's role in the developmental process.

Pope John Paul II made several important statements about women, endorsing their full and equal dignity. In his 1995 *Letter to Women*, he defended the equality of women, denounced the ways in which Sacred Scripture was used to oppress and subordinate women for centuries, and acknowledges the talents and contributions of women in both the home and society. Despite his reference to the "genius" of women, he mostly

failed to see beyond a singular notion of womanhood, one dependent on gender stereotypes that emphasize marriage and procreation (no. 10).

Unfortunately, we see a similar tendency in the documents of Pope Francis. For although he shows a deep concern for the injustices perpetrated against women, he too reverts to gender stereotyping. Perhaps the most obvious examples of this are found in *Fratelli Tutti* and *Querida Amazonia*. In *Querida Amazonia*, he speaks about the strength and gift of women (no. 99 ff). But the overall account suffers from inconsistencies and contradictions. British theologian Tina Beattie names problem when she notes that: “Francis’ concept of ‘woman’ is mired in a sentimental fantasy. While in the real world, gender roles and identities are agile and malleable, he imagines ‘woman’ as an archetype frozen in time, its function being to ‘soften’ male culture with a feminine tenderness and receptivity.”¹³ In *Fratelli Tutti*, Francis reminds us that integral human development ought to be inclusive and equitable. He says:

Social friendship and universal fraternity necessarily call for an acknowledgement of the worth of every human person, always and everywhere. ... Every human being has the right to live with dignity and to develop integrally; this fundamental right cannot be denied by any country (nos. 106–107).

And he goes on to say: “True wisdom demands an encounter with reality” (no. 47). But incorporating women’s voices and taking seriously their lived experiences would have added greater overall weight to *Fratelli Tutti*. It is ironic that the Holy Father observes: “The organization of societies worldwide is still far from reflecting clearly that women possess the same dignity and identical rights as men. We say one thing with words, but our decisions and reality tell another story” (no. 23). This is precisely the problem. Magisterial endorsement of women’s empowerment and agency remains underrepresented in, and often absent from, official

¹³ Tina Beattie, “A ‘Frozen’ Idea of the Feminine,” *The Tablet*, February 22, 2020, 6.

teaching. Church leadership's failure to truly hear the voices of women, and to condemn more strongly the social, economic and political vulnerability of women and girls is unacceptable, weakening the credibility of its teachings on human development, marriage, and sexuality.

Farmer's writings, on the other hand, acknowledge the importance of women's agency. He was acutely aware, however, that arguments in favor of women's agency regularly remain at an abstract level, and he advocated for the need to confront the attitudes and structures that prohibit its full realization. He named the hypocrisy that underpins so much of the discussion: "There is nothing wrong with underlining personal agency, but there is something unfair about using personal agency as a basis for assigning blame while simultaneously denying those blamed the opportunity to exert agency in their lives."¹⁴ For Farmer and others, recognizing the political, economic, and social participation of women, as well as their leadership roles in society, lies at the heart of any credible way forward. However, this needs greater affirmation by Church leadership and must find more prominence in official teaching. It remains one of Farmer's most vital contributions to global health debates.

Implications for Theological Ethics

Undoubtedly, a major strength of Farmer's thinking was his insistence on the need for multi-dimensional, inclusive, and interconnecting strategies, based on the experiences of those most at risk. We see this continue through the cross-disciplinary work of many ethicists today. Moreover, his concern for the vulnerability of women, and in particular poorer women of color, helps highlight a weakness of CST that needs rectifying. However, progress is being made, and Farmer's work is a valuable resource for theological ethics today.

Catholic ethicists are among those who continue to investigate the correlation between injustice and disease. Michael Jaycox, for example, calls for prioritizing the needs of the oppressed, even if that means

¹⁴ Farmer, "Women, Poverty, and AIDS," 29.

sacrificing the preferences of the privileged. This, he explains, is a step towards protecting the common good and promoting global health.¹⁵ For Jaycox, political solidarity, coupled with targeted political intervention, is needed to remedy the glaring disparities within health systems, but this will require a radically new distribution of power and resources.¹⁶

Meghan Clark argues for a “preference for equality” in health care.¹⁷ She tells us that the social and health costs of rising inequality in the United States are seen in reduced life expectancy and increased risk of serious illness among poorer sectors of society. “Greater equality can help us develop the public ethos and commitment to working together which we need if we are to solve the problems which threaten us all,” she writes.¹⁸ Andrea Vicini utilizes CST principles such as the common good and the option for the poor to further the global health conversation. Like Farmer, Vicini believes that an adequate understanding of global health must be diverse and inclusive, recognizing the impact of the ethnic, racial, cultural, political, and religious components of societal relationships.¹⁹

Others have examined the intersection between pollution, climate change, and global health, noting how poverty exacerbates the situation. Studies reveal that climate change is disproportionately affecting the health of poorer women, with some ethicists exploring the connection between women’s empowerment, climate change, and health.²⁰ It is no surprise that

¹⁵ Michael Jaycox, “The Black Lives Matter Movement: Justice and Health Equity,” in *US Moral Theology from the Margins: Readings in Moral Theology No.19*, ed Charles E. Curran and Lisa A. Fullam (New York: Paulist Press, 2020), 252.

¹⁶ Jaycox, “The Black Lives Matter Movement,” 257.

¹⁷ Meghan Clark, “Preference for Equality: How Economic Disparity Threatens our Health,” *America*, October 29, 2012, www.americamagazine.org/issue/preference-equality.

¹⁸ Clark, “Preference for Equality.”

¹⁹ Andrea Vicini, “Global Public Health and the Promotion of the Common Good,” in *Ethical Challenges in Global Public Health: Climate Change, Pollution, and the Health of the Poor*, ed. Philip Landrigan and Andrea Vicini (Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2021), 4.

²⁰ For an excellent account of the relationship between ecology, empowerment, and women’s rights, see Brazal, “Ethics of Care in *Laudato Si’*.”

pollution and environmental deterioration more severely harm the poor. Philip Landrigan explains:

The result of this inequitable pattern is that people in low-income and lower-middle-income countries suffer disproportionately from disease, disability, and premature death caused by pollution. Nearly 92 percent of all pollution deaths occur in these countries.²¹

These are some contemporary voices that are helping to shape the global health care conversation and who, along with Farmer, inform us of the multilayered nature of the challenge.

Farmer realized that those most at risk are women, particularly women of color. He saw the need to create a space for women’s voices to emerge, not just because this will accelerate more effective health care and human rights outcomes, but because he recognized the importance of women’s agency *in se*. Given the lack of agency experienced by women throughout the world, Farmer’s contribution to this issue was both vital and visionary.

In addition to this, one might ask how Farmer’s understanding of “structures of violence” can strengthen our theology of sin, especially what is called structural or social sin. For example, Bryan Massingale has written about the absence of any serious critique of the sin of racism within CST.²² Magisterial documents remain largely silent on this issue, and although Pope Francis does advance the question of race in *Fratelli Tutti*, this remains a largely underdeveloped area within CST. Farmer understood well how racism affects health, identifying how “poverty structured by racism” was fueling the AIDS epidemic in places like Harlem.²³

²¹ Philip Landrigan, “Pollution, Climate Change, and Global Public Health: Social Justice and the Common Good,” in *Ethical Challenges in Global Public Health: Climate Change, Pollution, and the Health of the Poor*, ed. Philip Landrigan and Andrea Vicini (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2021), 52.

²² Bryan N. Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), and “Has the Silence Been Broken? Catholic Theological Ethics and Racial Justice,” *Theological Studies* 75, no. 1 (2014): 133–155.

²³ Farmer, “Women, Poverty, and AIDS,” 20ff.

In her recent book, *Towards a Politics of Communion*, Anna Rowlands provides a robust account of structural sin, drawing from liberation theology, the work of John Paul II, and more recently the teachings of Pope Francis.²⁴ Structural sin is more than simply the social structures, policies, and laws that oppress people; it refers to a pervasive culture that supports formal expressions of injustice, exclusion, and intolerance. It refers to the creation of a culture, a way of seeing, that legitimizes oppression. Speaking about the plight of migrants, Rowlands argues that if we are to rectify our failure to respond adequately to those displaced, we must first come to see our “disorientation.” In other words, we must acquire the ability to first identify our moral blindness before we can dismantle sinful structures and confront the attitudes that underpin them.²⁵

Like Massingale, Rowlands notes several omissions within magisterial accounts of social sin, including the sin of racism.²⁶ But she also identifies clerical abuse within the Catholic Church as another area overlooked: “To speak of human dignity held within the framework of doctrines of sin and salvation and not to address this issue in its social and structural dimensions seems incredible. The abuse crisis is manifestly an example of social sin turned inwards, and we live as yet with an absence of a fully adequate language to address this reality.”²⁷

Catholic ethicists including Heyer, Rowlands, and Massingale are expanding our theology of social sin. But another concern that has yet to be properly incorporated into our theology of social sin is pervasive misogyny and sexism. Social sin is dependent on cultures and ideologies that excuse, or even encourage, violence towards others. A culture of

²⁴ See Anna Rowlands, *Towards a Politics of Communion: Catholic Social Teaching in Dark Times* (London: T&T Clark, 2021), Chapter Four in particular.

²⁵ Rowlands, *Towards a Politics of Communion*, 85. For an excellent account of the application of “structural sin” to the migrant crisis, see also Kristin E. Heyer, *Kinship Across Borders: A Christian Ethic of Immigration* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2012), Chapter Two.

²⁶ Rowlands, *Towards a Politics of Communion*, 103ff.

²⁷ Rowlands, *Towards a Politics of Communion*, 109.

misogyny, including gender norms that limit women’s agency, legitimizes the “structures of violence” of which Farmer spoke. Thus, his work on the empowerment of the poor, and in a particular way the empowerment of poor women of color, might help address a serious gap in Catholic teaching on social sin. Rowlands asks:

How do we think theologically about the calcified structures in our midst, about conditioned cultural forms of thinking and knowing, from which our individual and collective minds naturally shrink? ... Why do we tend to fall silent in the face of a violent and abusive social reality—including within the Church itself—that begs for an account of failure that extends beyond individual wrongdoing? The cost of the failure to grapple with such questions is arguably (still) paid by the victims.²⁸

Part of the answer lies in genuine human encounter with the other, as Kristin Heyer has argued.²⁹ For it is through human encounter that we become better able to look beyond simplistic stereotypes and see the human person before us. Farmer’s life and writings are a vivid illustration of how encounter with, and learning from, the poor can illuminate our understanding of social exclusion, violence, and invisibility. His attention to the vulnerability of women, and by extension the importance of women’s agency, points to an aspect of theological ethics that is in urgent need of magisterial development.

Given poorer women’s heightened social, economic, and cultural vulnerability, some theologians have questioned whether Catholic teaching on the sanctity of marriage in fact protects women. Emily Reimer-Barry has argued that Catholic sexual teaching in fact limits women’s bodily autonomy and undermines their agency. Heavily reliant on a particular theology of “woman” that places disproportionate emphasis on “motherhood,” this teaching reinforces narrow, limiting

²⁸ Rowlands, *Towards a Politics of Communion*, 108.

²⁹ Heyer, *Kinship Across Borders*, 49: “Such metanoia, or conversion, can occur through personal encounters and relationships that provoke new perspectives and receptivity.”

stereotypes.³⁰ In addition, I would argue that magisterial teaching does not go far enough in condemning the “toxic masculinity” which perpetuates gender-based violence and discrimination.³¹ What is needed from Church leadership is strong, clear condemnation of sexism and misogyny in all its forms.

Church leaders must also denounce the violence done to women in and through marriage. One might think of practices such as child marriage, female genital mutilation, and all forms of abuse perpetrated against women within marriage. Julie Clague argues that magisterial teaching on the family is too narrow, focusing largely on divorce, remarriage, and same-sex unions. Consequently, it fails to address the complex problems facing families, and women in particular. There is an opportunity here, Clague asserts, “to broaden Catholic discourse about marriage and family life, and to mobilize Catholic action on behalf of the world’s poorest families and their most vulnerable and victimised members.”³² Official teaching does not go far enough in condemning the violent structures that frequently place women at risk of serious injury and deny them their basic human rights.

It is precisely here that we see the value of Farmer’s work. He reminds us that efforts to resolve complex global problems must be collaborative and inclusive; they must hear the voices of the most vulnerable and those most affected by injustice; and they need to support the empowerment and agency of women. For this reason, Farmer remains an important voice

³⁰ Paper presented at a conference in Rome, May 2022. See my account in *The Furrow*: “Receiving *Amoris Laetitia*: Learning and Listening as a Global Church,” *The Furrow* 73, no.7/8 (2022): 387–394.

³¹ By this I mean male stereotypes that place priority on physical strength and power, as well as views of men as dominant and dominating. At best, such stereotypes contribute to an increase in misogynistic and sexist attitudes; at worst, they contribute to rising levels of violence and abuse against women and girls, often leading to serious harm and/or death.

³² Julie Clague, “*Amoris Laetitia* and the State of the World’s Families,” in Shaji George Kochuthara, ed., *Vocation and Mission of the Family: Reflections on Chavarul and Amoris Laetitia* (Bengaluru, India: Dharmaram Publications, 2020), 260.

in ongoing discussions of health and human rights, as well as within theological ethics.

Conclusion

Catholic social teaching offers a horizon of meaning and a vision for a better world, and provides us with resources to critique the injustices prevalent throughout our world. But we will always need the prophetic voice, the skeptic who refuses to let the debate die. Paul Farmer was one such voice. His work continues to be an invaluable resource in public health care debates. His thinking provides a lens through which we can better understand the complex realities that fuel injustice and disempower vulnerable populations. As Sen remarked earlier, finding solutions will be difficult, but we journey forward with courage, patience, imagination, and hope. Paul Farmer’s work exemplified those virtues, and his life demonstrated vividly what can be achieved in a world that is broken yet filled with possibility.



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