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Book Author(s): CYNTHIA D. MOE-LOBEDA
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Structural Violence as Structural Evil

"The great masquerade of evil has played havoc with all our ethical concepts. For evil to appear disguised as light, charity, historical necessity, or social justice is quite bewildering to anyone brought up on our traditional ethical concepts."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer[1]

♦

"Evil exists as an interstructural web of oppressive relationships."
Mary Hobgood[2]

♦

"Evil is as long as evil has the last say."
Dwight Hopkins and Linda E. Thomas[3]

How does our participation in ecological and economic injustice look when held in light of the God revealed in Jesus Christ? What might we learn about moral-spiritual power for seeing and undoing economic and ecological injustice by examining them through a theological lens? We begin this chapter by identifying theological problems emerging from climate change and economic oppression, and then proceed down two paths. They translate structural injustice into the theological categories best suited to examine it: structural sin and structural evil. Examining structural evil reveals its propensity to remain invisible and its devious mechanisms for doing so. Finally, the paths converge as we hold these insights into sin and evil in the light of structural violence theory.

This delving into sin, evil, and structural violence is based on the premise that by understanding them better, we become more equipped to recognize them, and thereby more equipped to undo them. The theological concepts of sin and evil and the sociological concept of structural violence enable deeper

understanding of ecological and economic injustice, acquiescence with it, and paths for resisting and transforming it. Understanding lays groundwork for what Ivone Gebara terms "an epistemology of evil, a way of telling it, knowing it, trying to denounce it, and also fighting it."[4]

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A LIFE STORY

FREDDIE'S OILY MORNING

In the first thirty waking seconds of my day—between pulling back the sheets on my bed, placing my feet on the carpet, and reaching for my glasses—oil has already played an indispensible role. My sheets are a cotton polyester blend; the cotton was grown in fields dependent upon petroleum-based fertilizers, pesticides, and fungicides, as well as the irrigation systems and machinery to grow and harvest the crop. Afterwards, this cotton was mechanically picked, separated in a mechanical gin, blended with polyester (petroleum-derived) fibers and treated with polystyrene (also derived from crude oil). Finally, it was dyed with petroleum-based chemicals, wrapped in plastic, and transported in an oil-fueled vehicle to a distribution center and then a store. An oil-burning furnace in the basement of my home heats my bedroom. The carpeting on my floor is polypropylene-based with synthetic latex backing, all derived from petroleum. The lenses in glasses that I sleepily don contain ore-based strontium and barium oxide, coated in graphite made from petroleum. Circling the lenses are frames made of petroleum-based plastics and covered with a petroleum-based varnish.

My morning continues as I pull on a polyester-cotton blend shirt, which started out as a few ounces of petroleum.[5] The 1930s saw the introduction of nylon, a petroleum-derived synthetic polymer, into the textile industry. I slip nylon stockings on my legs, followed by shoes with rubber soles made of styrene-butadiene, synthesized from Saudi petroleum and benzene. Breakfast consists of Cheerios, the grains of which were grown, irrigated, and transported with the help of petroleum. Nearly all plastics are derived from oil. After consuming my Cheerios, I reach into my freezer and pull out a plastic drawer containing bags of frozen fruit—enclosed in plastic wrapping made of polyethylene terephthalate, kept from expiring by petroleum-derived preservatives. While eating, I

peruse information on my laptop about my upcoming flight across the country to see my family for Thanksgiving. Little do I know that the round-trip flight will consume about 30,000 gallons of fuel and produce a total of about 0.68 metric tons / 650,000 pounds of greenhouse gases.[6] Divided by some 200 passengers, my share is about 3,250 pounds.

As I step outside, my first inhalation sends traces of traffic-produced petroleum fumes and microscopic particulate matter into my lungs. My car pulls out of the driveway and onto pavement: twelve inches of asphalt from Texas petroleum poured over a graded roadbed. Petroleum fuels my car and about 87 percent of the cars I see on the road, as well as the airplanes flying over my head.[7] The rubber tires of my car came from oil, and the petroleum-based engine lubricant and antifreeze trace my path with a drip line that will end up in the water system after the next rain. The voices on my radio include politicians who are heavily influenced by oil lobbies, reporters announcing a catastrophic oil spill, and guests commenting on a war that depends upon and is arguably fought over, oil.

Living on the outskirts of a city and commuting by car is made possible by the powerful automobile industry's influence on developers.[8] Transportation is the primary use of oil in the U.S. The estimated cost of financial aid given directly or indirectly to the auto and oil industry by each American every year is $2700.[9]

In short, I am a petroleum addict. Facing the moral implications of this addiction means asking, how do we acquire that oil? What happens to people and the earth in the extraction and refining process?

The story continues in chapter 5.

<center>*BACKGROUND TO LIFE STORY*</center>

CLIMATE CHANGE

"Please ladies and gentlemen, we did not do any of these things [lead high carbon-emission lifestyles] but if things go business as usual, we will not live. We will die. Our country will not exist."

<div align="right">President of Maldives, Mohammed Nasheed[10]</div>

The Maldives is a country composed of 1200 islands and atolls in the Indian Ocean, covering about 115 square miles. Its highest point is only eight feet above sea level, making it one of the countries most vulnerable

to sea level rise. In addition to loss of land, the impacts of climate change threaten the Maldives with more powerful tropical storms and higher storm surges, beach erosion, biodiversity loss, and a blow to the fishing industry upon which many livelihoods depend.[11] The Maldives has become a leading nation in calling for serious action around climate change. In 2009 the president and his advisors staged an underwater cabinet meeting in scuba gear, to draw attention to the plight of this nation and other countries that may be first and hardest hit by the effects of unchecked climate change. Sea level rise is just one impact of climate change.

Ocean acidification, caused by dissolved CO_2 from the atmosphere, threatens the bottom rung of the marine food chain by lowering the pH of the entire ocean. Algae and other tiny sea creatures are strongly affected by this phenomenon.[12] Pteropods, for example, have translucent shells that are literally dissolving from the levels of acid in the ocean. As they die off, so do the small fish that feed on them, and the larger fish that in turn feed on the smaller fish. A significant part of humankind's food chain is in a state of invisible jeopardy.

MISSISSIPPI RIVER CHEMICAL CORRIDOR

The Louisiana industrial corridor, aka "Cancer Alley," is a stretch of the Mississippi River lined with petrochemical companies and oil refineries. The ground, air, and water along this corridor are so infused with carcinogens and mutagens that the area has been called a "massive human experiment."[13] Louisiana ranks number one in per capita toxic releases into the environment.[14] The polluting facilities are clustered predominantly in areas with high concentrations of African Americans. Eighty percent of the total African American community in this industrial corridor lives within three miles of a polluting facility. The petrochemical industry denies any responsibility for the noxious odors and ill health effects on the area residents, despite contradictory scientific evidence.

Petrochemical corporations wield tremendous power in the state of Louisiana. The industry's lobby shamelessly uses its power to ensure that the state legislature represents its interests, such as offering tax incentives and loopholes that privilege the industry. In 2000, the Louisiana Shell Corporation had an income of 26 billion dollars and ranked fourth in the state in receipt of tax exemptions.

During a tour of Cancer Alley by the Deep South Center for Environmental Justice, a Nigerian man said, "I cannot believe that this is happening in the U.S. I know that the oil companies exploit my people and degrade and devastate the environment, but I had no idea that this was being done in the U.S."[15]

NIGER RIVER DELTA

Nigeria exported 962,000 barrels of oil per day to the U.S. in 2010.[16]

Oil and violence travel hand in hand in Nigeria, Africa's leading petroleum producer. The Ogoni are a minority ethnic group that have lived in the Niger River Delta for centuries. Today they live daily with oil spills, gas flares, seepage from drilling, soot spewing from the methane gas flares, and constant noise and flickering lights. Their aquatic life is decimated, their waterways are infused with oil, and their mangrove forests are destroyed. They suffer from elevated rates of asthma, bronchitis, pneumonia, skin diseases, and emphysema. Food shortages and limited health services and educational opportunities are their reality.[17] In the industrial city of Port Harcourt, natural gas flares dot the land, acid rain rusts the galvanized iron roofs within two years, and miles of pipeline often burst, sending sticky black oil into the fields. Meanwhile, since 1958, 30 billion dollars' worth in petroleum has been extracted from the four hundred square miles that the Ogoni people occupy. They have seen none of the money but experience all of the devastation. The development of oil resources in Nigeria is undertaken by several multinational oil companies (the biggest of which is Shell), the federal government of Nigeria, and a small handful of local elites.

Opposing the oil production on the land has proven dangerous—even deadly—to the Ogoni people. In May 1994, four prominent Ogoni chiefs were brutally murdered in a clash between federal government soldiers and Ogoni activists. Nine environmental activists, members of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People, were framed and tried by a federal military tribunal that sentenced the innocent men to death by hanging. Prosecution witnesses in the trial later confessed to accepting bribes and job offers at Shell from the Nigerian government. The incident provoked international outrage and talk of sanctions against Nigeria, but Shell Oil proceeded with its drilling and extraction and admitted no responsibility for

the events. In response to lawsuits, in 2009 Shell paid $15.5 million to the victims' families in an out-of-court settlement.[18]

  If drilling were to be done in a manner that did not damage the life and land of the Ogoni people, we would most likely pay a steep price per gallon and buy less gas.

Persian Gulf

Concerns over the United States' control of oil supplies have prompted American military action throughout the world, but especially in the Persian Gulf, and at great cost. Amory and Hunter Lovins point out the finances associated with maintaining military forces abroad in order to protect our supply lines and trade. In 1985 alone, the United States "spent $47 billion projecting power into the Persian Gulf: $468 per barrel imported from the Gulf in that year, or eighteen times the $27 or so that we paid for the oil itself. . . . In fact if we spent as much to make buildings heat-tight as we spent in one year on the military forces meant to protect the Middle Eastern oil fields, we could eliminate the need to import oil from the Middle East" (emphasis mine).[19]

  When Iraq nationalized its oil production in 1972, major oil importers like the United States, UK, and France were no longer able to control and profit from Iraq's oil. A report by policy analyst Gregory Muttitt explores the involvement of foreign oil companies, U.S. and British governments, and a small group of powerful Iraqi politicians in pushing for a system of contracts that would hand over control of 64 percent of Iraq's oil reserves to multinational oil companies. These "production sharing agreements" (PSAs) would cost Iraq hundreds of billions of dollars in revenue and offer rates of return to oil companies as high as 162 percent.[20] *The U.S. State Department heavily promoted these private contracts, and arguably the American invasion of Iraq in 2003 was undertaken to secure these agreements.*[21]

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Moral Crisis as Theological Problems

Climate change presents new theological problems for our young and dangerous species. The monotheistic traditions hold in common the claim that God's creation is fruitful. It spawns and supports life with a complexity and

generosity beyond human ken. Fundamental to Christian faith is the claim that creation is "good," *tov* (Genesis 1). The Hebrew *tov*, while often translated as "good," also implies "life-furthering." Indeed as recent scientific inquiry probes ever further into the mystery of life, it confirms more fully the awe-inspiring, mind-boggling, unfathomably fecund nature of this planet. Its essential quality seems to be its life-furthering capacity. Earth is the only body in our solar system and the only body of which we are aware in the universe that generates the capacity to produce and further life itself.

The great Mystery that we call God must have a voracious, insatiable hunger for life. This God uses even death and destruction to produce *life.* The signature moment of the God revealed in Jesus was to raise up life from a brutal death, execution on a stake. Resurrection is the song of Earth.

The song resounds throughout the earth. After Mount Saint Helens erupted over thirty years ago in Washington State, it was thought that life could never return to the barren volcanic wasteland that once was a mountaintop. To the surprise of all, within a year plants began, as if by miracle, to emerge. Walking in the Olympic rainforest, one occasionally is struck by an absolutely straight line of five or six young hemlocks. Again, death itself spawns life; this string of trees has emerged from the decay of a magnificent cedar fallen to the ground. These logs, known as nurse logs, are a voice in the forest's song of resurrection.

So thirsty for the *tov* (the life-furthering goodness) was this Originating Force that from cold lifeless cosmic space and from cosmic infernos it caused a rocky muddy watery planet capable of generating life to spring forth. But no, not merely life—what came into being was more. It was *life capable of furthering life in ever more complex and life-generating forms.* It was creative and life-creating life. This is the mystery of *tov.* And God says it over and over, seven times: "God saw that it was *tov.*"

Out of nothingness, some fourteen billion years past, spewed forth all the matter and energy that ever would exist. Some four hundred thousand years after the "big bang," as this wildly expanding universe began to cool, free electrons and other subatomic particles combined with nuclei to form neutral atoms. Hydrogen, helium, and traces of lithium were made. By the time of Earth's birth some 4.6 billion years ago, the creative energy and cosmic elements of the universe had formed carbon, nitrogen, oxygen, and all the other elements in the periodic table. Earth thus had all the ingredients to form rocks and water, and to generate life. Yet, lifeless it was.

The creating urge toward life and toward greater complexity forged on. Organic molecules composed of oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen, and carbon (with

traces of sulfur and phosphorus) came into being. As they combined variously to form cells of proteins, carbohydrates, lipids, and nucleic acid, a creative process—beyond human full comprehension—gave birth to life itself. Possibly as "soon" as a billion years after earth formed, single-celled life emerged. This lone planet had become life-generating, Planet Home.

From there the complexity explodes. Cells came together to form organisms. Organisms generated sea creatures. These ancestors emerged from the waters making ever more complex life forms: fish, amphibians, reptiles, . . . and finally birds and mammals. On one lone branch of that family, emerged the brainy mammal, *homo sapiens*. Science today suggests yet another depth of life-generating capacity. Amino acids, the building blocks of living cells, may have the capacity not only to encode and transmit the instructions and patterns that shape life but to alter them based upon learning.[22]

With the evolution of the human animal, the complexity gravitated to the human mind. The creature called human had the ability and fierce urge for something new. It was the impulse for self-reflection and conscious pursuit of the good. Morality was born. With time, the scope of that morality expanded, both temporally and spatially, from tribe to nation to global community, and from things of the present and past to include things of the future.

In the last century, yet another unprecedented human ability emerged. Humankind today possesses the knowledge and resources to *abad* and *shamar* (Genesis 2:15)—"tend and protect"[23]—Earth's life-web on a global scale. That is, we comprehend that actions in one location on Earth have impacts around the globe (deforestation in the Amazon affects the North Pole and North Dakota), and we have the resources to take actions that either "tend and protect" or degrade the planetary garden.

We arrive at the first and haunting theological problem. The primal, first, and most characteristic act of the God proclaimed in Judaism and then in Christianity is not merely to create a magnificent world but a magnificently *life-furthering* world that mirrors and embodies the Life-Creating Energy who brought it into being. The scandalous point is this. We are *undoing* that very *tov*, life-generating capacity. We, or rather some of us, are "uncreating."[24]

A second theological problem concerns the ancient faith claim, present in multiple streams of Christian traditions, that God dwells within creation. If Christ fills Earth's creatures and elements, then the Earth now being "crucified" by human ignorance, greed, and arrogance is, in some sense, also the body of Christ. Are those of us most responsible for global warming, poisoned rivers, the extinction of tens of thousands of species per year, and ocean acidification crucifying Christ?

A third theological problem concerns revelation. Christian traditions hold that God not only creates the Earth and sees it as good, but also reveals Godself in that creation. It is the "first book" of revelation. If to do and be as God would have us, we must receive God's self-revelation, then God's self-revelation is necessary for the life of faith. Yet, humankind is pelting headlong down a trajectory of destroying essential features of God's "first book" of revelation. What do we make of endangering the first and enduring "book" of revelation?

Fourth, Christians claim that human beings are created "in the image of God." Yet, if global warming continues unchecked, we may be, in the words of Catholic moral theologian Daniel Maguire, "an endangered species." How do we make sense of a human trajectory now aimed at destroying the creatures crafted "in the image of God"?

These four unprecedented theological problems are accompanied by a *fifth* that is more familiar. Two millennia of Christians and the Hebrew people before them claimed that God calls Her people to receive Her love and then "to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength (Deut. 6:5)," and "to love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:18). This is our lifework, to receive God's love, and to live that justice-making mysterious and marvelous love into the world. This, according to a widespread understanding of the Christian story, is the human vocation. Love implies active commitment to the well-being of whom or what is loved. Where people suffer under systemic injustice, seeking their well-being entails seeking to undo that injustice.

The implication is shaking: If we fail to recognize the injustice that is damaging neighbor, and hence fail to address it, are we not defying the call to love? If I am professing love for neighbor by feeding the poor and sheltering the homeless, and yet am ignoring the systemic factors that have made them hungry and homeless, am I loving neighbor? Peter Pero, in discussing the global economy puts it starkly: "In ecclesiological terms," he writes, "if the church is the one universal body of Christ, this body of Christ is divided among active thieves, passive profiteers, and deprived victims."[25] What does it mean for the former two to claim "love" for the "deprived victim"?

We have considered five theological problems posed for people of the Global North by the contemporary reality of ecological degradation and economic injustice from which we reap immense material wealth. All five are manifestations of structural sin. We can ignore structural sin and our participation in it or we can face it and repent. To repent is to turn the other way, both in actions and in consciousness. Probing the reality of structural sin—

seeing how it works in human life and how it hides—will provide valuable tools for repentance.

Structural Injustice as Structural Sin

Sin manifest in societal structures that have social and ecological impact is our concern in this inquiry. The salient point, however, is not *that* sin may take structural form. As we will see, this point is well established in contemporary theology. Rather, *the crucial point is that social structural sin makes monumental demands on the practice of faith and of morality, and many of those demands remain largely unacknowledged.* Consequently, in many faith communities, response to sin is aimed at the individual's sin, rather than at social structural sin in which the individual participates simply by living as we do. *To the extent that structural sin is not taken seriously, so too, are central aspects of Christian life ignored.*

Sin has been understood variously throughout Christian history. A common misunderstanding is sin as individual wrongdoings (including thoughts, words, feelings, acts, etc.). Biblical faith holds a far more complex and far-reaching notion of sin. Sin in its fullest sense refers to disorientation from right relationship with God, which then leads to disorientation from right relationship with self, others, and all of creation. That disorientation results in wrongdoings. Sin is dislocating God from the center of reality.

Sin as disorientation may be manifest in serving one's own uncensored desires and perceived interests regardless of the cost to self, others, and Earth, and regardless of what would "displease" God. Paradoxically, sin may be quite the opposite of this "self-centeredness" for people whose full self and center have been denied them. For those who have been socialized or coerced into self-sacrifice, self-denial, or self-hatred, sin may take the form of *not* attending to one's own well-being. The former is sin as defined by patriarchy and the experience of men in positions of domination, while the latter reflects womanist and feminist theologies. Both are valid and powerful expressions of human reality. In either case, sin counters the call to love God with "heart, soul, mind, and strength," and to love neighbor as self.

Martin Luther provides a useful image of sin in the former and more recognized form. Drawing upon Augustine, he taught that human beings tend toward serving their own self-interest above all other considerations and deceive themselves into believing that they are not. He insisted on the pervasive presence of sin, the humanly insurmountable reality of "selves curved in on self" (*se incurvatus in se*).[26]

This idea that sin denotes both the individual's wrongdoings (sins) and the individual's state of profound disorientation (sin) overcomes the problem of reducing sin to wrongdoings. Yet this expanded notion remains inadequate and misleading. The remaining problem is the reduction of sin to a condition of *individuals*. To the contrary, sin exists not only in the individual, but also in the social structural relationships that shape societies and their impact on ecosystems. That is, groups and societies as well as individuals may be agents of sin. Racism, classism, sexism, and imperialism are examples of social structural sin. The increasing destructive power of humankind, seen most blatantly in the buildup of nuclear weaponry and in destructive climate change, calls for probing structural sin and its power more deeply.

The image of many human beings "curved in on" their imagined self-interest speaks directly to the heart of life for people positioned in relative privilege in the global community today. Collectively, we are selves curved in on ourselves. We may long to live according to justice-making, self-honoring love for Earth and neighbor, to live without exploiting neighbor or Earth. But look at us. A species destroying the very life-support systems upon which life depends. A society so addicted to our consumption-oriented ways that we close our hearts and minds to the death and destruction required to sustain them.

Advanced global capitalism gorges on "selves turned in on self." For the global market to continue in its purpose of maximizing growth and accumulating wealth, it must convince people to consume as much as possible. Advanced global capitalism is an engine of "selves turned in on self." It stokes the compulsion to consume, quietly coiling chains of bondage around its unwitting objects.

This understanding that sin exists in both individual and social structural spheres of life is widely accepted in many trajectories of Christian theology, especially since the development of theoretical frameworks for conceptualizing human life in social-systemic terms. Correspondingly, salvation is conceptualized in social or systemic terms as well as individual terms. Such has been the move of liberation theology and other political theologies, in which salvation refers, in part, to liberation from systemically imposed oppression. Given my concerns in this book, however, I expand the understanding of salvation to include not only liberation from oppression but also liberation from *committing or perpetrating* it. Ultimately, salvation entails the restoration of the entire created world to one in which none flourish by degrading others or otherkind.

The church's entry into struggles for ecological well-being has expanded the notion of sin to include degradation of the earth. This move—first made on

an ecclesial level by His Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew, leader of Orthodox Christianity—is now affirmed by many Catholic, mainstream Protestant, and evangelical voices. With this move, sin as "selves curved in on self" expands to include not only individuals and societies but humankind in relationship to the rest of creation. We became a species "turned in on itself," oriented around humankind and human desire as the centerpiece of earthly reality to the detriment of all else. Sin as disoriented relationship with God, self, others, and "the rest of creation" takes on fuller meaning.

Grappling with the meaning of "sin" is no mere intellectual entertainment. The nature of a problem shapes its remedy. How we define sin determines what constitutes salvation, freedom, or liberation from it, and the path toward that freedom. A reduced understanding of sin means a truncated vision of salvation. Moreover, considering sin *per se* may give us insight into a focal point of this inquiry: how particular manifestations of systemic sin—such as economic and ecological violence—so easily hide from their perpetrators, how it is that we so readily acquiesce, and how these forms of structural sin might be exposed and resisted.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MORALITY

Taking seriously the structural nature of sin in social and ecological forms creates daunting demands on morality. This book seeks to shift Christian moral practice and theory in light of them. Structural sin presents four oft-ignored moral challenges. Each arises from a characteristic of structural injustice. Viewing four defining features of structural injustice as structural sin reveals more about their implications for the moral life. These features are:

1. the relative invisibility of structural injustice to those who do not suffer directly from it,
2. the fact that structural injustice continues regardless of the virtue or vice of people involved,
3. its transmission from generation to generation unless exposed and confronted, and
4. its expansion as a result of concentrated power.

Viewing these features of structural injustice theologically as structural sin renders daunting challenges for morality. We examine each in turn.

IF UNSEEN, THEN UNRENOUNCED

The first challenge pertains to renouncing sin. Fundamental to virtually all forms of Christianity is the claim that Christians are called to eschew sin, and

that freedom from sin begins with repentance. Repentance means ceasing the way of sin and "turning the other direction." *Teshuvah*, the Hebrew word often translated as repentance, suggests turning from sinful ways and toward the good by means of turning back to God. It is a powerful act of changing direction that can redirect one's life. The Greek *metanoia* means to think and perceive differently, to have a new mind and consciousness. Repentance then involves a distinct turning away from sin, in both consciousness and action.

Repentance and confession are possible only where sin is acknowledged. One insidious characteristic of structural injustice (structural sin), however, is its tendency to remain invisible to those not suffering from it. If we do not see the structural injustice in which we live, we cannot repent of it. Failing to renounce it, we remain captive to it. Failure to see structural sin breeds complicity with it, and passes it on to the next generation. The call to renounce sin contains a call to "see" the structural sin of which we are a part, in order that we might repent of it, renounce it, and resist it.[27]

Moral vision, therefore, does not simply see the impoverished child of Mozambique or the family displaced by global warming. Moral vision sees also our functional relationship to that child and sees, in particular, whether or not our "way of life" and the public policies and corporate actions that make it possible are contributing to her poverty. Moral vision must extend beyond interpersonal relationships to social structural and ecological relationships.

Herein is a call by Christian faith to develop a structural (or systemic) view of the world. This means that when we imagine who we are in the world and the relationships that shape our lives, we will perceive the threads that bind us to people and ecosystems we never see and whom we may not know exist: the children who do not eat because their lands grow our strawberries, the mothers whose low wages produce our inexpensive consumer goods, the young people whose lives are lost fighting the invasion of their homelands by the oil companies that supply our homes with heat. This is an impossible calling for individuals alone; it is, instead, the work of communities.

THE PARADOX OF PRIVILEGE

The first challenge thickens with the second. It is the paradox of privilege.[28] Even when a person does recognize and repent of structural sin, it is not possible to divest oneself from the impact of the social structures into which our lives are woven. Not by will or intent, I am involved in the sins of economic and ecological exploitation even where I seek to resist them. Regardless of personal repentance through radical changes in how I live, I continue to reap the "benefits" of economic and ecological violence. My life continues to depend,

for example, upon products containing petroleum extracted by destroying the homelands and livelihoods of people in the Niger Delta, Chad, the Gulf Coast of the United States, or elsewhere, or by waging war in Iraq. I cannot refuse all use of petroleum-based roads, fabrics, plastics, fire trucks, public utilities, and medical care, and more that, in today's world especially, depend on petroleum. Social sin transcends *individual* moral agency.

Aida Hurtado, speaking of white privilege, cuts to the heart of the paradox of privilege: "[I]t does not matter how good you are, as a person, if the political structures provide privilege to you individually based on the group oppression of others; in fact, individuals belonging to dominant groups can be infinitely good because they never are required to be personally bad. That is the irony of structural privilege: the more you have, the less you have to fight for it."[29] As a citizen of this nation, I belong to a group that "has an oppressive relationship with" other groups without being "an oppressive person who behaves in oppressive ways."[30] This paradox helps to hide oppression. But that is not the end of the story.

The fact that individual actions are relatively powerless in the face of structural sin does *not* mean that personal efforts to counter it are immaterial, ineffectual, or unnecessary. *To the contrary, the individual's response is essential and effectual.* I cannot overstate the importance of recognizing this paradox: Structural sin, while it cannot be dismantled by individual actions, cannot be dismantled without them. As James Poling notes: Every "system of evil requires personal actions to make it work."[31] Thus every system of evil also requires people to resist their own and others' participation in it, even while acknowledging that their acts of resistance in themselves appear relatively ineffectual. While individual acts will not in themselves change the course of social structures, they are necessary for that change to be achieved. This is powerful knowledge. It makes individuals' actions infinitely important. Living responsibly within this paradox is central to the work of loving neighbor as self in the context of structural sin.

While structural sin transcends *individual* moral agency, it does not transcend collective agency. The imperviousness of structural sin to individual actions "forces us to look beyond individual agency."[32] Social movements demonstrate that people, working together, can indeed counter structural sin. Again, a systemic view of the world is called to the fore as a vital ingredient of moral vision.

From Generation to Generation unless Challenged

The structural sin of socio-ecological injustice is transmitted from generation to generation. Because human beings are inherently social, we establish patterns of interaction. Sociologists refer to these patterns, power arrangements within them, and belief systems by rationalizing them as "institutions" or "social structures." They may be as small as families and as large as economic systems. Members of a society are socialized toward assuming unconsciously that its social structures and attendant values and worldviews are normal, natural, inevitable, and even divinely ordained. In this process of socialization cultural, political, economic, and ideological structures that perpetuate injustice tend to be uncritically accepted and passed on to the next generations as though they were just "the way things are," maintained by a force akin to nature, rather than products of human decisions and actions.

In Christian ethical terms, this process of socialization is considered a process of moral formation and malformation. To illustrate: parents in our society today commonly teach children to make money and make it grow in order to be "successful." Children strive for the material comforts sought by parents and paraded by public idols. Tacit communications teach that poverty or apparent poverty signifies failure. A life of voluntary "downward mobility" in terms of material consumption, if even imagined, would bear the hue of failure in the eyes of society. Thus are we morally malformed away from such a choice.

This dynamic is "crucial in understanding how we become inheritors of previous acts and how our collective acts influence and shape the coming generations."[33] Over time, inherited patterns of human interaction and perceptions become what Marcus Borg refers to as "common wisdom," and Stephen Brookfield as "culturally produced assumptions." Where these patterns are exploitative or oppressive, this structural injustice is passed on.

However, we may choose to intervene and halt that passage. Doing so requires *recognizing* the injustice as such. The call to "see" through a social structural lens echoes a third time.

In this sense the idea of original sin assumes meaning distinct from the ontologically or genetically inherited phenomena postulated by Augustine and later theologians. Original sin may signify the socially transmitted state of being entangled in structural injustice from birth by virtue of participation in a society built on social injustice and ecological violence. That entanglement deepens as one serves as a conduit for transmitting uncritically accepted injustice to future generations, simply by living the life prescribed by society.

CONCENTRATED POWER

Another challenge posed by structural sin faces citizens of the most powerful nation the world has known. We have referred to sin as the human tendency to be "selves curved in on self." Where power collects, so too does power for human beings to serve self-interest and mask the damage entailed.

Reinhold Niebuhr is perhaps the most notable modern theologian to theorize sin as it is manifest in social structures. His conclusions are found wanting from feminist perspectives—including my own—in his separating the public from the private spheres of life and limiting the norm of love to the latter. Yet, his deep and serious theology of sin is invaluable. All human agency, he avers, is subject to the sin of elevating self-interest over all else. Political agency is most vulnerable because it wields power to shift social groups toward injustice in service of self-interest, a societal version of Luther's "self curved in on self."

Perhaps more than any other nation in history, the United States has held power to pursue its perceived interests regardless of the harm to others or to Earth's ecosystems, and to distort that state of affairs into the appearance of a moral "good." Accordingly, we, the nation's citizens, participate in that unprecedented power for committing structural sin. The call to renounce sin entails a hermeneutic of suspicion regarding moves to concentrate power. The movement against the reigning form of economic globalization is in large part a movement against the concentration of economic power (and hence political power). Neoliberal globalization, by concentrating wealth into the hands of a few enormous global corporations, also has concentrated their power for structural sin.

Structural injustice, when it is viewed as structural sin, unearths these four moral challenges. Facing them requires acknowledging the reality of structural or collective sin. Jesus' call to repent entails a call to see the social and ecological systems and collective actions in which our lives are entangled. This notion of a "systemic" moral vision will emerge as central in our quest for moral–spiritual power to counter systemic injustice.

STRUCTURAL INJUSTICE AS STRUCTURAL EVIL

Throughout history, some theologians have distinguished between sin and evil.[34] Others use the two terms "almost interchangeably (to) . . . mean nearly the same thing."[35] While I could argue either perspective, contributing to that debate is not my intention. I use structural sin and structural evil to signify theologically the same reality: structural injustice. That decision is significant;

I draw upon both because each yields distinct insight into structural injustice, and hence into resources for resisting it.

"Evil" has been defined diversely by different theologians. For some, "evil" is shorthand for "moral evil." Others use "evil" as an umbrella category including "moral evil," "natural evil," and "metaphysical evil" (referring to the condition of finitude and limitation). The realities commonly referred to as natural evil and metaphysical evil, I do not consider to be evil. Thus my use of "evil" denotes what some label "moral evil." Beyond that I will not define evil except to make two distinctions. First, my understanding of "evil" differentiates it from "suffering." Christianity has distinguished between the two; suffering is not necessarily evil.[36] Nor does suffering necessarily stem from evil. Secondly, I do not use the term "evil" to denote structural sin *in contrast to* private sin. Rather I hold that both sin and evil can be manifest both in private relationships and in social structures. My concern in this volume is sin and evil as manifest in social structures.

I intend neither a systematic inquiry into evil nor a comprehensive survey of what evil has "meant" at various times in Christian traditions. Nor will I be asking which ways of being and doing are evil and which are not; I am not developing criteria for what is evil. Rather my intent in using the term "structural evil" is a functional one. "Structural evil" is a theological category for what social theory calls "structural injustice" or "structural violence." My inquiry into structural evil then, like inquiry into structural sin, is for the purpose of better understanding structural injustice in the forms of economic and ecological violence, and understanding our ready complicity with it.

What, then, can theological inquiry into systemic evil reveal about what makes it so difficult for people of privilege to recognize structural injustice and our participation in it? What does theological insight into systemic evil teach about seeing and resisting it? Four authors who work with concrete realities of structural evil are useful here. Their intent is enabling resistance to structural evil, as is mine.

Emilie Townes explores how structures of evil are produced and reproduced by the cultural force of racist images that become historical and contemporary "truth." Observing that most analysis of evil focuses on "rational mechanisms that hold oppression and misery in place," she moves instead to examine the power of the "fantastic hegemonic imagination" for producing evil.[37] She exposes the production of stereotypes and caricatures that shape our understanding of the world, ourselves, and others, and that direct our actions toward brutal forms of oppression (evil) lived out in our everyday lives. More insidious, these culturally produced images and assumptions manage to hide

that oppression from the awareness of its perpetrators. Her understanding of hope for resisting these forces will inform later parts of this book.

Eleazar Fernandez develops a theological anthropology responsive to the systemic evils of racism, classism, sexism, and what he calls "naturism."[38] He, like I, uses "evil" and "sin" interchangeably and treats both theologically. James Poling asks what enables some people to resist and survive evil. His interdisciplinary work draws on history, psychology, and theology to examine historical communities who have resisted the power of evil. Poling works in particular with racial and gender oppression, identifying them as evil and suggesting theological resources for resisting them. All three of these authors pay special attention to the institutional and systemic nature of evil, and to its hiddenness from its perpetrators.

Ivone Gebara's concern is how the interpretation of evil has been gendered, and the impact that male perceptions of evil have had on women's lives. She addresses evil "in gender relations, evil in the construction of gender, and, especially, evil as lived and performed by women."[39] Her work is particularly relevant to me in its focus on how evil is woven into the fabric of society through social constructions, and her attention to the role of habit in perpetuating evil.

These authors turn to faith as a source of protection from evil or resistance to it (despite religion's profound participation in perpetuating evil).[40] I join with them and learn from them.

Yet I have a hunch that, beyond their work, there is still more to know about structural evil and about renouncing it if we: (1) include ecological devastation as an ever-present companion of social oppression, (2) put theological inquiry into sin and evil in dialogue with structural violence theory, (3) use both "sin" and "evil" as theological categories, and 4) consider evil through the lens of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's letters from prison. In taking these steps, our primary aim is *insight into how evil manages to hide itself from the consciousness of its perpetrators, or to become acceptable.*

Bonhoeffer, reflecting from prison on the widespread complicity with fascism in Hitler's Germany, provides striking insight into the hiddenness of evil. "The great masquerade of evil has played havoc with all our ethical concepts," he writes. "For evil to appear *disguised as light, charity, historical necessity, or social justice* is quite bewildering to anyone brought up on our traditional ethical concepts, while for the Christian who bases his [*sic*] life on the Bible, it merely confirms the fundamental wickedness of evil."[41] *Its ability to "appear disguised"—to hide—confirms its wickedness.* That is, the cloaked nature of structural evil is at its very heart. Bonhoeffer's words reveal more. They name

four masks behind which evil hides: "light, charity, historical necessity, [and] social justice."[42]

As a Lutheran theologian, Bonhoeffer is steeped in the longstanding theological recognition that, in all things human, evil and good are intertwined. That is, though we strive for the good, the human condition of finitude and fallibility means that never is the good, as a human doing, completely free from evil. This insight draws attention to the ambiguity of what is just and unjust, what is consistent with the ways and will of God and what is not. The call to resist evil is fraught with vexing ambiguity in a world in which all alternatives to an unjust situation may themselves be tainted with injustice and in which what brings well-being to some vulnerable people may bring damage to others. For example, if public advocacy closes down a shale-fracking operation in Pennsylvania because of the many dangers it poses, what becomes of the families whose bread-earners are left unemployed?

Such ambiguity, together with the pernicious presence of sin invading human good, make knowing what is morally good a vexing task. Evil and good intermingle and may seem confoundingly indistinguishable. This ambiguity itself is a fierce draw, pulling the eyes of our hearts and minds away from recognizing injustice where it is so entangled with good. Learning the arts of moral discernment may be a key to critical moral vision.

Recognizing the intertwining of good and evil and the latter's ubiquitous presence in human life yields a point that, while not vital to the argument here, is crucial to the later work of challenging evil. Neither pure evil nor pure good may be attributed to any one person, group, or "side" in a conflict. That is, no one and no group is outside the possibilities of good. Nor can any person or group be treated as less than human based on a claim that she or he is singularly evil.

James Poling, half a century after Bonhoeffer, comes to conclusions strikingly similar to his. Poling too finds evil hiding by "masking itself as good," "claiming necessity," or "remaining intertwined with the good."[43] And like Bonhoeffer, he sees evil's "double character—its existence and its hiddenness."[44] People perpetrating structural evil enable it to hide either by denying its existence or allowing it to remain in the unconscious.[45]

To what extent are these "hiding places" at play in our dangerous overconsumption of oil in spite of the death and devastation it brings forth? Yes, my daily drive to the university "intertwined evil with good." It spewed unacceptable amounts of greenhouse gases into the air. Yet it got me to work quickly, enabling me to be with my children before they set off for school in the morning and to visit my aging aunt after work, while still being on campus for

long hours to meet with students who truly needed attention and to keep the irregular schedule demanded by my campus responsibilities. This set of "goods" may not have been possible had I bused, biked, or carpooled to work. These goods do not justify the evil entailed in my daily drive; rather they illustrate the intermingling of good and evil, and the extent to which that mixing may serve to cloak evil.

Ivone Gebara describes eloquently the hiddenness of evil and adds insight into how "evil present in institutions and social structures . . . is sometimes beyond recognition. One lives with it daily." Evil, she notes, is "so mixed up in our existence that we can live in it without even taking account of it as evil."[46] While Gebara illustrates her point with soldiers fighting in war, I would suggest locating the systemic evil in this case less with the soldiers than with the multitude of people and processes that *place* soldiers in the war and that enable it to continue. Those processes include the economic policies that force many low-income young women and men into the military because it is the only viable way to earn a living or gain an education, society's insatiable demand for oil, citizens funding the war with tax dollars, etc.

Gebara suggests three avenues for evil's slippery escape into obscurity: it may be "accepted as fate, as God's design, or as punishment for hidden sins." Moreover, like Bonhoeffer and Poling, she notes that evil slips into obscurity by intermingling with good: It is "not easy to spot evil's presence" when it is "intermingled in our culture, education, and religion—events or behaviours regarded as normal, common, even good."[47]

Let us see what further help may be gained by placing theological insights in dialogue with social theory, in particular structural violence theory. First, we consider structural violence as it appears in a "life story.

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A Life Story

"Free" Trade and Sweatshops

For generations, the Chantico family of Oaxaca, Mexico grew maize on their three-hectare plot, just as their Zapotec Indian ancestors did for centuries before Columbus landed. This corn fed the family, providing 70 percent of their caloric intake, with some left over to sell in the local market.[48] The Chanticos and their ancestors developed this particular corn cultivar, criollo, *over centuries to suit the area's climate and soil, to resist*

pests, and to provide essential proteins and vitamins. This lifestyle staved off poverty and allowed the Chanticos to provide for themselves and their community.

In 1993 President Bill Clinton signed into law an international trade agreement between American neighbors Mexico, Canada, and the United States called the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). As the name suggests, this trilateral agreement reduced tariffs on trade between these countries in an effort to foster economic growth for all three nations and reduce protectionist policies on certain types of goods or industries. But in practice several measures required by NAFTA prevent the agreement from being fair, beneficial, or effective.

In 1994, the Mexican government enacted a series of "reforms" called for by NAFTA. These included signing away its right to protect its own corn industry. Inexpensive U.S. corn flooded the Mexican market, priced around 20 percent less than Mexican corn. Although the U.S. corn was intended for animal feed, it nevertheless depressed the entire Mexican corn market. American agribusinesses, highly subsidized by its own federal government, bankrupted Mexican farmers like the Chantico family, who were forced off their land—land that had grown indigenous corn for centuries. Their land was bought for a pittance by foreign direct investors who streamlined operations and planted mass monoculture acres of genetically modified, chemical-dependent crops for export—all in order to meet the American demand for off-season fruits and vegetables, and cheap beef. The profits of these exports pad the coffers of foreign-based corporations.

The displaced Chantico family migrated north to the town of Nogales at the border, where rumor spoke of $0.85 per hour factory shifts in the maquiladoras.[49] Many factories in Nogales had formerly operated out of small towns in the United States, but the managers knew costs would now be lower in Mexico. No labor unions, no worker benefits, longer hours, lower wages, no disability benefits, and the possibility of child labor all made the shift an enticing one. Maria Chantico began mind-numbing work in a factory, hunched over for fifteen hours a day and ending her shift at 4:00 am. The youngest children scavenged food and clothing from the nearby trash dump. They lived in a cramped shack made of cast-off materials from the factory, next to a dry riverbed (dry due to the factory's overpumping) that now served as a dumpsite for

industrial waste: copper tailings, unregulated dumped toxic chemicals, and untreated sewage.[50] The people of Nogales experience unusually high rates of cancer, neurological disease, miscarriages, and birth defects. Maria's children scavenge a 55-gallon drum from the factory to contain the potable water brought in on trucks—a drum that used to hold toxic chemicals. In addition to the injuries that Maria and her fellow workers experience due to the elimination of safety devices, many of the women are victims of sexual exploitation and physical abuse.

Meanwhile, Colleen, a young woman living in New Hampshire, shops at her local Old Navy where tank tops are on sale for $5.99. In the clearance section she can buy two and get the third for free. The "Made in Mexico" label was tiny, hard to see. Holding the clean, fresh-smelling shirt in her hands, surrounded by immaculate tile floors, fluorescent lighting, and pleasant music, it's difficult to imagine the series of events that led to the production of this shirt. Colleen knows none of this backstory as she compares the sky-blue racerback tank to the surfboard yellow jersey tee. She has a limited budget and appreciates a good deal. Cheap Mexican labor allows Old Navy's prices to stay low.

Colleen's mutual fund includes companies that invest in maquiladoras, but she is unaware of this. Her parents' income over the years has included dividends from funds invested in the agribusiness now flourishing through attaining new corn markets in Mexico and farmlands formerly owned by Mexican farmers. Many forces conspire to obscure the reality of Maria Chantico, sweating in 104-degree heat, surrounded by loud machines, handling toxic chemicals with her bare hands, only to leave the factory with blurred vision, an aching back, skin sores, and not enough pesos in her pocket to buy food for her family.

As Maria left work, the finished tank top left the factory. It was packaged and transported via truck to a regional transportation center, and then onto a bigger truck that passed through customs and into the United States. Two weeks later it arrived at the Old Navy in New Hampshire.

The transportation process contributed to releasing greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, but this is merely a fraction of the total carbon footprint for one tank top. Two thousand gallons of water produced the pound of conventional cotton in a field in China, not to mention a third of a pound of chemical pesticides and fertilizers.[51] The cotton was then shipped to the gin and pressed mechanically into bales, then shipped to another factory

for spinning into yarn, and then to yet another location where mechanical looms wove it into rough gray sheets of cotton. Heat and chemicals then transformed the sheet into its final look and feel, producing wastewater that was dumped into the local water system. The finished cloth was then placed on a container ship and sent to Mexico where Maria served as one member of an assembly line, shaping it into a women's aqua lace-trim rib-knit tank.[52]

Not merely clothing but appliances, vehicles, household goods, and electronics are produced in maquiladoras in Mexico just south of the U.S. border. In fact, much of Colleen's food comes from Mexico and carries chemicals from pesticides and fertilizers that are outlawed in the U.S. but permitted in Mexico. Ground transportation of goods is an enormous industry in the U.S.

The Chantico family is one of countless families driven north by NAFTA into sweatshop labor. Some were small farmers like the Chanticos. Others owned small businesses that were forced out of business by clauses in NAFTA that allowed large foreign corporate business to come in and undercut the local small businesses.

This story continues in chapter 5.

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STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE THEORY

The term "structural injustice" is effective and vital for describing the dynamics at play in the Chanticos' life situation and countless others like it. The term could serve the purposes of this book well, as it has up to this point. However, I have chosen, henceforth, to use the term "structural *violence*" and evolving structural violence theory rather than "structural *injustice*" and theory related to it. My reasons are three. "Structural injustice" is as variously understood and theorized as is "justice." Using it with integrity would entail untangling a body of theory, which would distract from my central purposes. Secondly, structural violence theory has been used to denote economic inequity and the poverty it causes, and is well suited for expansion to include ecological damage.[53] But most importantly, the concept "structural violence" and the associated body of theory are sharp tools for demystifying moral oblivion, moral passivity,

moral vision, and moral agency in the contemporary context of economic and ecological injustice.

"Structural violence," as a concept, emerged out of peace studies and the work of Norwegian professor of peace and conflict research, Johann Galtung, who also founded the International Peace Institute in Oslo in 1969.[54] In recent decades, the term has figured in political discourse, medical anthropology, clinical medicine, and mental health studies. One prominent theorist is medical anthropologist and physician Paul Farmer. Probing the concept unearths invaluable clues to complicity with systemic evil and to building empowering moral vision.

"Social structure" is a very broad term used to denote the ordering of human relationships on multiple levels from macro (that is, a national economy or social classes) to institutional (that is, an educational system), to micro (that is, a family), to ideological (that is, a value system). A structural perspective assumes that social structures shape human identities, interests, and interactions, providing, to an extent, "both the possibilities and limits for human action."[55]

"Structural violence" refers to the physical, psychological, and spiritual harm that certain groups of people experience as a result of unequal distribution of power and privilege. James Gilligan, Harvard Medical School professor, defines structural violence as "the increased rates of death and disability suffered by those who occupy the bottom rungs of society."[56] Astrophysicist and sustainability leader Robert Gilman describes structural violence as "physical and psychological harm that results from exploitive and unjust social, political and economic systems. . . . Hunger and poverty are two prime examples of what is described as 'structural violence.'"[57] He cites others who estimate structural violence on an international level by asking, "[H]ow many extra deaths occur each year due to the unequal distribution of wealth between countries?"[58] In short, structural violence degrades, dehumanizes, damages, and kills people by limiting or preventing their access to the necessities for life or for its flourishing.

I suggest a second aspect of structural violence: the complicity or silent acquiescence of those who fail to take responsibility for it and challenge it. Herein structural violence refers to these two dimensions—the harm that is done and silent acquiescence to it. Racism, classism, sexism, and heterosexism are common forms.

Paul Farmer vividly illustrates the ways in which structural violence causes extreme poverty and ill health in Haiti. He emphasizes that structural violence is the result of power disparities.[59] This power disparity generally runs along the lines of class, race, and gender. "Structural violence" is his shorthand for "inegalitarian social structures."[60] Power asymmetries determine who is most at

risk for devastation by disease, weather-related disasters, unjust imprisonment, economic downturns, poverty, and other afflictions, including incidents often labeled natural disasters. "These afflictions," Farmer insists, "are not the result of accident . . . they are consequences, direct or indirect of human agency." This agency is not primarily the acts of individuals but of historically developed and often economically driven social processes. The importance of these final points cannot be overstated: *That which is the result of human agency can be challenged by it!* My use of "structural violence" shares Farmer's emphasis.

STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE, DIRECT VIOLENCE, AND CULTURAL VIOLENCE

The presence and nature of structural violence become clearer in contrast to what Galtung refers to as "personal violence" or "direct violence."[61] Whereas in direct violence the perpetrator (person or group) can be identified, in structural (or "indirect") violence, "there may not be any person who directly harms another person in the structure. The violence is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently unequal life chances."[62] "In both cases individuals may be killed or mutilated. . . . But whereas in the [case of direct violence] these consequences may be traced back to concrete persons or actors, in the [case of structural violence] this is no longer meaningful. . . . The important point here is that if people are starving when this is objectively avoidable, then violence is committed, regardless of whether there is a clear subject-action-object relation."[63] Galtung illustrates, "[I]n a society where life expectancy is twice as high in the upper as in the lower classes, violence is exercised even if there are not concrete actors one can point to directly attacking others, as when one person kills another."[64] "Direct violence is an *event*; structural violence is a *process*."[65]

This distinction helps illuminate how easily structural violence remains unrecognized. Recall the story of Colleen and Maria just above. Maria lost her home, and the sense of personhood that accompanies maintaining a family's livelihood. Her unborn child may be born disfigured by toxins released into her new environment by the factories that employ her and others. Her human rights are transgressed and she has no recourse. The same systems that displaced Maria and keep her in inhumane conditions produce for Colleen inexpensive clothing and a growing mutual fund.

And yet Maria's misery is not Colleen's fault. No specific person may be held responsible for what has been done to Maria. No single person was responsible for the NAFTA treaty that destroyed her corn-based livelihood and forced her to move north to the border. No one "forced" her to hire on with the *maquiladora*; she technically is "free" to leave if she wants to avoid

the toxic dangers and sexual overtures of supervisors. The wage structure was set by corporate policy and is not traceable to any one person. Plant managers are simply carrying out their orders and obeying policy; they may even be paying a slight bit more than neighboring plants. The constellation of violence against Maria and countless like her is a process, not a direct act by identifiable individuals.[66] Many people involved in that process and benefiting from it remain oblivious to the impact on Maria.

Structural violence generally is not criminalized. Direct violence is far more likely to be perceived by society as a crime, punishable by legal systems. This status of legality helps to maintain the relative "invisibility" of structural violence.

Galtung's assertion that structural violence is a "process" involving many people over time yields further insight into society's astounding capacity to ignore it. The people involved generally are disconnected from each other and are kept relatively unaware of each other's actions and of other stages in the process. More importantly, many actions required to maintain structural violence are taken by people who may not be responsible for the decisions that mandate those actions. To illustrate: the middle-level manager at Walmart did not make the policy that denies some employees benefits and wages adequate to maintain their health. The gas station employee did not decide to pay militias to kill Ogoni people who protested Shell Oil's desecration of their lands in the Niger Delta.

The insidious nature of structural violence has yet another face. Those who perpetrate one form of structural violence may themselves be victims of another form that precludes their taking opposing actions *without the support of a broader community.* The Walmart middle manager may risk losing her job if she fails to fire the employee who has been unable to work due to illness. The gas station employee may have lost his previous job to downsizing by a corporation whose CEO earned 450 times what this worker earned. Resistance to structural violence calls for change not only in individuals' lives but also in the structures of society—public policy, corporate rights, and institutions. The call to neighbor-love pertains not only to private life but also to the ecological and economic dimensions of life.

Structural violence at any given time stands on a vast array of decisions and actions that began decades, sometimes centuries, ago. Without structural moral vision—vision that enables seeing that history—we march on in moral oblivion.

When structural violence begins to break into public awareness, those responsible for it briskly and effectively deflect that dawning awareness onto more sensational and easily understood acts of *direct* violence. When torture at

Abu Graib prison in Iraq was publicly exposed, the high-ranking people who had decided to make torture an "acceptable" means of interrogation and to socialize young soldiers into accepting it as normal, quickly hid by blaming the individual soldiers at Abu Graib. The powerful people and processes responsible for implanting brutality into the hearts and minds of the young soldiers were off the hook. Blaming direct violence obscures the more dangerous structural violence.

Structural violence theory offers yet another tool for explaining complicity with structural evil. It is the concept of "cultural violence." The term was coined by John Galtung to denote "those aspects of culture . . . that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence. . . . Cultural violence makes direct and structural violence look, even feel, right—or at least not wrong."[67] Direct, structural, and cultural violence form what Galtung calls a tri-fold paradigm of violence. "[A]t the bottom is the steady flow through time of cultural violence, a substratum from which the other two can derive their nutrients. In the next stratum the rhythms of structural violence are located. Patterns of exploitation are building up, wearing out, or torn down. . . . And at the top, visible to the naked eye . . . is the stratum of direct violence with the whole record of direct cruelty perpetrated by human beings against each other and against other forms of life and nature in general."[68] Dismantling structural violence thus calls for identifying the cultural violence that nourishes it.

What is the cultural violence that enables U.S. society to normalize and accept the practice of paying CEOs 450 times the earnings of their lowest-paid workers, especially when that wage does not meet the bare-bone needs of food and shelter? What mesmerizing forces of cultural violence make it desirable for Seattleites to build huge luxurious houses while ignoring the city's six to ten thousand homeless people and lobbying against the movement to effect an income tax on the wealthiest citizens of Washington State? Tom Shadyac in his film, "I Am," calls such cultural violence into question with a brief story: "Here's a story, a true story," he begins, "to show just who we've become."

> Once there was a native tribe that lived in peace and harmony for thousands of years, and every day the routine was the same: the hunters would go out from the tribe, and when they returned, the bounty from the hunt was shared equally by all members of the tribe. No one went hungry when food was available, not even the weak, the sick or the elderly. One day the most skilled hunter said, 'I'm the best hunter. I kill more than my share of deer. Why should I share the bounty of my hunt?' And from that day forward he began storing his

meat in a high mountain cave. And then other skilled hunters said, 'we kill more than our share of deer too. Shouldn't we have the right to keep the bounty of our hunt?' And they too began to store their meat in high mountain caves. And then something began to happen in the tribe that had never happened before. Some people, especially the old, the weak, and the sick began to be hungry while others were well fed. In fact it became so commonplace that no one even thought it unusual that some were starving while others had more than they needed. And what's even more strange, the tribal elders began teaching their young to emulate the hoarding habits of these few. Now that story isn't true because it happened. It's true because it's *happening*.

The concept of cultural violence is invaluable for unlocking the puzzle of complicity with economic and ecological exploitation. The coming chapter unearths faces of cultural violence in our context.

STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE: WHAT IT DOES

Another key to understanding structural violence is its consequences, what it *does*. Where structural violence is at play, it is likely to:

- sharply influence who will be at risk for imprisonment, death in childbirth, poverty, devastation in the face of ill health or weather-related disasters, etc. In Farmer's words, structural violence "influences the nature and distribution of extreme suffering."[69]
- lead to direct violence in the forms of revolutionary violence, riots, "terrorism," domestic violence, hate crimes, war, and more.
- contribute to (as well as grow out of) power imbalance that disadvantages those who hold little power.
- put those who challenge it at risk.
- lead to internalized oppression.
- in its most potent forms, determine who will have the necessities for life with dignity and who will not.
- enable a few people to benefit far more than many others from interactions. In structural violence, "the topdogs get much more . . . out of the interaction . . . than the other, the underdogs. . . . The underdogs may in fact be so disadvantaged that they die (starve, waste away from diseases) from it. . . . Or they may be left in a permanent, unwanted state of misery, usually including malnutrition and illness."

STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE: DEFINING FEATURES

Identifying defining characteristics of structural violence yields still keener insight into how it functions, how it hides, and how we might dismantle it. Not surprisingly, the previously noted features of structural injustice and structural sin turn up again here as the first four features of structural violence noted below. Structural violence:

- is generally invisible to or ignored by those who perpetrate it and or benefit from it.
- cannot happen without the actions of individuals, yet operates independently of the goodness or wickedness of the people perpetrating it.
- is passed on from generation to generation unless challenged.
- becomes more devastating with concentration of power in fewer hands.
- consists of interlocking rather than isolated forms of oppression. Hence one may "benefit" from structural violence along one "axis of oppression" while being victimized by it along another.[70]
- may trap perpetrators by victimizing them in the very structural violence they perpetrate.
- entails ideologies or worldviews, institutional policies, and practices so embedded in society that they *appear* natural, normal, inevitable, or divinely mandated.

These consequences and features of structural violence will provide vital insights as we work toward seeing and dismantling the particular structural violence of concern in this project: economic and ecological violence. These features and impacts of structural violence are manifest in the "life stories" throughout.

STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE CALLS FOR STRUCTURAL MORAL VISION

Severe poverty, extreme asymmetry of wealth, and the compromised life chances they engender are manifestations of structural violence grounded in inequality of power. So too is ecological degradation. Thus, challenging them requires different means than if they were primarily the result of wealthy individuals' greed, insensitivity, acts of direct violence, or lack of generosity, or the result of impoverished people's misfortune, misdeeds, or inadequacies. Trying to solve the problems of structural violence with *individualized* responses not only fails to solve the problem, but also reinforces its invisibility. To counter structural violence, moral vision must, itself, be structural.

<div align="center">In Sum</div>

We noted five theological problems stemming from our complicity in structural injustice, and identified them as structural sin. Viewing structural injustice as structural sin revealed obstacles to overcoming it:

- Where we remain unaware of structural sin/injustice, we cannot repent of it.
- Where awareness leads to repentance, we are faced with the paradox of privilege.
- Structural sin/injustice is passed on from generation to generation unless recognized and challenged.
- Concentrated power renders structural sin/injustice more potent.

Next, seeing structural injustice as structural evil illumined how it is woven into our daily lives and how it hides under the guise of good, inevitability, divine mandate, or social necessity. The lens of structural violence theory confirmed power disparity as a cause of structural injustice, and pointed out the ominous role of cultural violence in breeding and perpetuating structural violence.

These dynamics cry out: A core aspect of Christian faith, renouncing sin, requires a moral consciousness that accounts for the impact of people's collective actions. The structural nature of sin and evil calls forth also a structural understanding of neighbor-love. We will call it love as an ecological-economic vocation.

Notes

1. Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Eberhard Bethge, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (London: SCM, 1967).

2. Mary E. Hobgood, *Dismantling Privilege: An Ethics of Accountability* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2000).

3. Preface to Emilie Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), xii.

4. Ivone Gebara, *Out of the Depths: Womens' Experience of Suffering and Evil* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 71.

5. Alan Durning and John C. Ryan, *Stuff: The Secret Lives of Everyday Things* (Seattle: Northwest Environment Watch, 1997), 20–22.

6. The Energy Information Association of the United States provides the emission coefficient of greenhouse gases for certain types of fuel. A 747 jet releases 30.638 kilograms per kilometer of flight.

7. "Energy: Alternative Fuel: Alternative Vehicles," from Project America website: http://www.project.org/info.php?recordID=237; also: Melissa Hinca-Ownby, "Predicting Sales of

Alternative Fuel Vehicles," *Mother Nature Network*, March 8, 2010. http://www.mnn.com/transportation/cars/stories/predicting-sales-of-alternative-fuel-vehicles.

8. The automobile industry and related industries have exercised considerable control over transportation policies in America over the past century. The 1920s and 30s saw auto and oil companies (specifically GM, Standard Oil, and Goodyear Tire) purchase and disassemble public transportation and light rail systems in several major American cities in order to eliminate competition for the car.

9. Terry Tamminen, *Lives Per Gallon: The True Cost of Our Oil Addiction* (Washington, DC: Island, 2006), 54.

10. Unpublished address presented at UN Summit on Climate Change, September 22, 2009.

11. Justin Hoffman, "The Maldives and Rising Sea Level," ICE Case Studies, Number 206, May 2007. http://www1.american.edu/ted/ice/maldives.htm.

12. *A Sea Change,* directed by Barbara Ettinger (Hudson, NY: Niijii Films, 2009). DVD.

13. Beverly Wright, "Race, Politics, and Pollution: Environmental Justice in the Mississippi River Chemical Corridor," in Agyeman et al., *Just Sustainabilities*, 129.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid., 135–36.

16. U.S. Energy Information Administration, Country Analysis Brief on Nigeria. http://www.eia.doe.gov/cabs/Nigeria/Oil.html.

17. Wright, "Race, Politics, Pollution," 137.

18. Tunde Agbola and Moruf Alabi, "Political Economy of Petroleum Resources Development, Environmental Injustice and Selective Victimization: A Case Study of the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria," in Agyeman et al., *Just Sustainabilities,* 269, 283.

19. Lovins and Lovins, cited by Herman Daly and John Cobb, *For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future* (Boston: Beacon, 1989), 344.

20. Greg Muttitt, "Crude Designs: The Rip-Off of Iraq's Oil Wealth," Report for Platform and Global Policy Forum, November 2005, p. 4.

21. Greg Muttitt, "Production Sharing Agreements—Mortgaging Iraq's Oil Wealth," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 28, no. 3 (2006): 1.

22. *Journey of the Universe*, directed by Brian Swimme and Mary Evelyn Tucker, 2011. DVD.

23. Other translations include "dress and keep," "work it and care for it," "cultivate and watch over it."

24. Later in the text we encounter the "terminator seed," developed by Monsanto. The terminator is designed to be incapable of reseeding itself. Subsistence farmers who have been sold the terminator must rebuy seed each year. Monsanto profits. The terminator seed is the quintessence of "uncreating" the life-furthering capacity of life.

25. Albert Pero Jr., "The Church and Racism," in *Between Vision and Reality: Lutheran Churches in Transition*, ed. Wolfgang Greive (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 2001), 262.

26. Luther is drawing upon Augustine's image of sin as the "heart curved in on itself."

27. I am not raising sin as a problem related to personal "salvation" for life after death. That issue is of no concern to me. I believe that we are forgiven and are assured eternal life after death regardless of the magnitude of sin. Hence we are free from striving toward the good *for the purpose of gaining "heaven" after we die;* we are free to seek the good as a matter of loving God, self, neighbor, and Earth.

28. The phrase comes from Allen Johnson, *Power, Privilege, and Difference*. He uses it with a different meaning than do I.

29. Aida Hurtado, *The Color of Privilege: Three Blasphemies on Race and Feminism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 34.

30. Johnson, *Power, Privilege, and Difference*, 39.

31. James Poling, *Deliver Us from Evil: Resisting Racial and Gender Oppression* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 121.

32. Eleazar Fernandez, *Reimagining the Human: Theological Anthropology in Response to Systemic Evil* (Saint Louis: Chalice, 2004), 68.

33. Fernandez, *Reimagining the Human*, 65.

34. Christopher Morse defines evil as "whatever stands in the way of life taking place" [according to the revelation of God in Jesus' "Incarnation unto the Cross," his "Resurrection," and the "Parousia"], and the word "sin" denotes our complicity in this evil. Christopher Morse, *Not Every Spirit: A Dogmatics of Christian Disbelief* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1994), 239.

35. Ted Peters, *Sin: Radical Evil in Soul and Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 8–9. Edward Farley uses the two more or less interchangeably (see note 36 below, especially 120) using theological inquiry into sin as inquiry into evil. So too does Eleazar Fernandez in his *Reimagining the Human: Theological Anthropology in Response to Systemic Evil*.

36. "Differentiating sin from the tragic [and suffering] is a seminal insight of the Hebraic tradition." Edward Farley, *Good and Evil* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 125.

37. Emilie Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 18.

38. Fernandez, *Reimagining the Human*.

39. Gebara, *Out of the Depths*, 3.

40. "Although religious faith and practice have been used to perpetuate evil, true faith is our only protection against it," writes Poling in *Deliver Us*, 134. "[S]omewhere deep inside each of us we know that perhaps the simplest, yet most difficult, answer . . . is *live your life faithfully*," Townes declares in *Cultural Production of Evil*, 164.

41. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers*.

42. James Poling's account of evil's hiddenness resonates with Bonhoeffer's. Poling notes that "evil hides under claims to goodness or necessity" (119).

43. Poling, *Deliver Us*, 119.

44. Ibid., 119.

45. Ibid., 113.

46. Gebara, *Depths*, 2.

47. Ibid., 2–3, and 58.

48. Peter Canby, "Retreat to Subsistence," *The Nation* (July 5, 2010).

49. This is at low end of the range of hourly wages for maquiladora workers.

50. Giovanna di Chiro, "Living Is for Everyone: Border Crossings for Community, Environment, and Health," *Osiris* 19 (2000): 116.

51. National Resources Defense Council, "From Field to Store: Your T-shirt's Life Story."

52. Ibid.

53. Johan Galtung began to do so in "Cultural Violence," *Journal of Peace Research* (August 1990): 291–305.

54. Johan Galtung, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research," *Journal of Peace Research* 6, no. 3 (1969): 167–91.

55. Todd Landman, *Studying Human Rights* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 45. The extent to which structures constrain individual agency is contested. See Kathleen Ho, "Structural Violence as a Human Rights Violation," *Essex Human Rights Review* 4, no. 2 (September 2007) and Todd Landman, *Studying Human Rights*, 36–55.

56. James Gilligan, *Violence: Reflections on a National Epidemic* (New York: Vintage, 1997).

57. Robert Gilman, "Structural Violence: Can We Find Genuine Peace in a World with Inequitable Distribution of Wealth among Nations?," *Foundations of Peace* (Autumn 1983): 8.

58. Gernot Kohler and Norman Alcock, *Journal of Peace Research* 13 (1976): 343–56.

59. Paul Farmer, *Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004).

60. Ibid., 230.

61. These two categories are not always mutually exclusive.

62. Galtung, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research," 171.

63. Ibid., 170–71.

64. Ibid., 171.

65. John Galtung, "Cultural Violence," 294.

66. Direct acts of violence may also be committed against Maria and others in her situation.

67. Ibid., 291.

68. Ibid., 294–95.

69. Farmer, *Pathologies of Power*, xiii.

70. To illustrate: A homeless white man in Seattle who lost his affordable apartment to high-end condo conversion is the victim of economic injustice. Yet at the same time, he will stand a better chance in court than a homeless black man if the two are picked up as suspects in the rape of a white woman.