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## **Scotosis and Structural Inequality: The Dangers of Bias in a Globalized Age**

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## CHAPTER THREE

# Scotosis and Structural Inequality

## THE DANGERS OF BIAS IN A GLOBALIZED AGE

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*Kate Ward (Marquette University)*

**T**oday's vast economic inequalities are widely believed to signal moral deficits, whether in wealthy individuals, public decision makers, or entire societies. In fact, the connection between economic inequality and moral failure is so widely taken for granted that it is common to hear speakers present statistics on gross inequality as if in themselves they constituted a moral argument. While I am far from averse to pointing out the scandal with a statistic—as will shortly become clear—a problem as widespread and influential as contemporary economic inequality demands more sustained investigation into its moral geneses and harms.<sup>1</sup> This essay will investigate an underdiscussed aspect of economic inequality: its impact on the moral lives of persons and communities. I begin by showing how inequality harms communities and perpetuates itself. Using Bernard Lonergan's understanding of bias and scotosis, I then explore how economic inequality both results from and promotes a biased ignorance of the Other, particularly those who are poor. I will draw on previous theological studies of globalization to propose a positive "globalization of solidarity" with the potential to counter inequality's pernicious moral and practical aspects.

### Background on Inequality

Extreme economic inequality is present both within and across national boundaries and continues to grow.<sup>2</sup> To invoke a morally

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1. Both income inequality and wealth inequality are significant for the purposes of this essay. I use "economic inequality" as a general term to refer to either or both.

2. Pedro Olinto and Jaime Saavedra, "An Overview of Global Income Inequality Trends," *World Bank: Inequality in Focus* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1–4, at 3;

salient statistic, Oxfam International reports that 8 men own the same amount of wealth as the poorest half of the world's population.<sup>3</sup> The U.S. is on track to set a record for inequality by the year 2030, when the top 10 percent of earners could take home 60 percent of national income, with less than 15 percent going to the poorest half of the population.<sup>4</sup> Increasingly, we have come to understand that today's extreme rates of global inequality are not natural or inevitable, but rather are traceable to choices made in societies about whether and how to intervene in markets.<sup>5</sup>

Amid today's vast inequalities, globalization has been portrayed as a harbinger of justice. It is true that countries like China and India are gaining in national income relative to the U.S. and Western Europe. Some understand this increase as a positive force that promises U.S. standards of living to Indian and Chinese workers.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, the reality is less encouraging. Within many of these formerly poor nations now gaining wealth, patterns of inequality appear to mimic those in the U.S.<sup>7</sup> The growth globalization brings can accumulate at the top, leaving the majority of workers who contribute to the growth behind.<sup>8</sup> Globalization has increased average income in many nations, but inequality within growing nations continues to increase as well.<sup>9</sup>

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Greg Mrcroft, "Global Income Inequality: The Story in Charts," *International Business Times*, December 24, 2013, <http://www.ibtimes.com/global-income-inequality-story-charts-1519376>.

3. "Just 8 Men Own Same Wealth as Half the World," Oxfam International, January 1, 2016, <https://www.oxfam.org/en/pressroom/pressreleases/2017-01-16/just-8-men-own-same-wealth-half-world>.

4. Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 264.

5. Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, 20.

6. Tyler Cowen, "Income Inequality Is Not Rising Globally, It's Falling," *The New York Times*, July 19, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/20/upshot/income-inequality-is-not-rising-globally-its-falling-.html>.

7. Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, 326.

8. "Why Globalisation May Not Reduce Inequality in Poor Countries," *The Economist*, September 2, 2014, <https://www.economist.com/blogs/economist-explains/2014/09/economist-explains-0>.

9. "Theorist Eric Maskin: Globalization Is Increasing Inequality," World Bank, June, 23, 2014, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2014/06/23/theorist-eric-maskin-globalization-is-increasing-inequality>.

Should theologians and philosophers accordingly regard inequality as a problem? Some have argued that it makes more sense to focus on addressing poverty, even implying that concerns with how much the wealthy have are nothing more than thinly veiled resentment.<sup>10</sup> However, these arguments collapse in the face of a wealth of scholarship demonstrating that inequality itself correlates to and even causes many significant social problems.

We tend to think of issues like crime, incarceration, drug abuse, worse overall health, and lower average lifespan as problems of poverty. However, in their book, *The Spirit Level*, public health scholars Kate Pickett and Richard Wilkinson showed that these social ills are more closely associated with inequality than they are with poverty. For example, levels of crime and drug abuse rise when inequality increases in a given society, even if the living standard of the poor also improves.<sup>11</sup>

Unequal societies display what is called a “health gradient,” meaning that poor health and early death are disproportionately concentrated in the lives of the poor.<sup>12</sup> Remarkably, however, while inequality does tend to increase such evils *disproportionately* among the poor, by no means is its harm extended *only* to the poor. Middle-class and wealthy people also experience more health problems in highly unequal societies than they do in more egalitarian ones. In unequal societies, say Pickett and Wilkinson, “the effects of inequality are not confined just to the least well-off: instead, they affect the vast majority of the population [. . . In a society with a socioeconomic health gradient, you] could take away all the health problems of the poor and leave most of the problem of health inequalities untouched.”<sup>13</sup> Reducing inequality, and its attendant social dysfunctions, stands to benefit middle-class and wealthy people as well. Pickett and Wilkinson summarize:

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10. See Andrew M. Yuengert, “What Is ‘Sustainable Prosperity for All’ in the Catholic Social Tradition?,” in *The True Wealth of Nations: Catholic Social Thought and Economic Life*, ed. Daniel K. Finn (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 37–62.

11. Kate Pickett and Richard Wilkinson, *The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2011), 310–11.

12. Pickett and Wilkinson, *The Spirit Level*, 12.

13. Pickett and Wilkinson, *The Spirit Level*, 181.



Among the rich developed countries and among the fifty states of the United States, most of the important health and social problems of the rich world are more common in more unequal societies. . . . If—for instance—a country does badly on health, you can predict with some confidence that it will also imprison a larger proportion of its population, have more teenage pregnancies, lower literacy scores, more obesity, worse mental health, and so on. Inequality seems to make countries socially dysfunctional across a wide range of outcomes.<sup>14</sup>

Again, in every case Pickett and Wilkinson examined, inequality of wealth or income predicted these social evils *better* than poverty rates. This is true whether the societies studied were as large as countries or as small as U.S. zip codes.

Another reason to worry about inequality is that it perpetuates itself. As economist Thomas Piketty famously demonstrated, inequality self-perpetuates through the formula  $r > g$ ; that is, investments over time grow more quickly than economies as a whole.  $R > g$  means that those who have wealth to invest will always gain wealth faster than those starting from a poorer place. This increases inequality and threatens societal peace and stability.<sup>15</sup>

Inequality also self-perpetuates by reducing economic mobility. The more unequal a society, the less likely a poor person is to move up in income or a wealthy person is to move down.<sup>16</sup> Finally, inequality self-perpetuates by increasing the political voice and power of wealthy people relative to poor and middle-class ones. This makes it difficult for lower-income people to defend their own interests relative to those of the wealthy.<sup>17</sup> To return to my earlier question, yes, inequality is a problem worthy of concern in its own right, because

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14. Pickett and Wilkinson, *The Spirit Level*, 174.

15. Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, 10.

16. "Inequalities in economic status are quite persistent across generations, especially among children of low-income parents and, most especially, in the United States" (Timothy M. Smeeding, Markus Jäntti, and Robert Erikson, "Introduction," in *Persistence, Privilege, and Parenting: The Comparative Study of Intergenerational Mobility* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2011), 2).

17. Kay Lehman Schlozman, Sidney Verba, and Henry E. Brady, *The Unheavenly Chorus: Unequal Political Voice and the Broken Promise of American Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

it self-perpetuates and because of its strong causal relationship with many serious social ills.

Inequality harms human flourishing and that alone recommends it to theologians' attention.<sup>18</sup> It shapes the physical destiny of persons in societies, often for the worse. That suggests it may shape our moral destinies as well. A theological perspective might usefully ask: what does the existence of today's vast inequalities say about the state of a society's moral life?

The question has been asked before. In his apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii gaudium*, Pope Francis diagnosed inequality as both symptom and cause of a morally fatal indifference to the poor.<sup>19</sup> My own current book project explains how inequality affects virtue formation by exacerbating the moral impacts of wealth and poverty. As I mentioned earlier, a theological intuition clearly suggests that vast inequality must be the result of moral failure. Still, we have not yet fully understood how present inequality shapes moral development. In what follows, I will show how Bernard Lonergan's work can help us better grasp the moral impact of inequality on persons and societies.

## Lonergan on Bias

For Lonergan, the quest for insight is a signal feature of meaningful human life. But the process of reasoned discourse and testing of ideas that should lead to insight is neither naturally nor automatically successful. Indeed, it is frequently disrupted by bias, which takes four forms: individual, dramatic, group, and general bias.

In individual bias, the subject experiences free intellectual searching, but only in the quest for solutions that benefit herself,

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18. Addressing inequality's harmful effects, Protestant theologian and economist Douglas Hicks said inequality is excessive when it obstructs meaningful participation in society, and Pope Benedict XVI called inequality a "scandal" opposed to human dignity. Douglas A. Hicks, *Inequality and Christian Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 232; and Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* [Encyclical on Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth], June 29, 2009, §22. See also Kate Ward and Kenneth R. Himes, "'Growing Apart': The Rise of Inequality," *Theological Studies* 75, no. 1 (March 1, 2014): 118–32.

19. Kate Ward, "Pope Francis' *Evangelii Gaudium* in Context: Theological Responses to Inequality," September 15, 2014, unpublished paper available upon request.

failing to pursue solutions that benefit the whole of society. She is conscious of her use of reason and of her self-imposed limitations on the conclusions that reason can reach.<sup>20</sup> Group bias, Lonergan says, "leads to a bias in the generative principle of a developing social order." Insights accepted by the group are those that "either meet with no group resistance or else find favor with groups powerful enough to overcome what resistance there is."<sup>21</sup> In the same way that individuals sort the information they absorb to reach personally convenient conclusions, "so also the group is prone to have a blind spot for the insights that reveal its well-being to be excessive or its usefulness at an end."<sup>22</sup> In other words, insights that would encourage the group to voluntarily accept a lower status or a lowered opinion of itself are conveniently ignored.

Dramatic bias describes the way the self manipulates new information to conform it to pre-existing, personally important understandings.<sup>23</sup> At this level of bias, Lonergan says subjects suffer from scotosis, an unconscious process through which individuals exclude knowledge that challenges their own common-sense, limited understanding of self and the world.<sup>24</sup> A scotoma or blind spot results from the self's own efforts to consciously or subconsciously reject information that would expand its worldview in ways that feel threatening or challenging.<sup>25</sup>

Finally, the general bias of common sense focuses on practical methods to the exclusion of broader issues and higher goals.<sup>26</sup> M. Shawn Copeland explains: "With its penchant for the 'quick-fix'

20. Bernard J.F. Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, vol. 3, eds. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 244-7.

21. Lonergan, *Insight*, 249.

22. Lonergan, *Insight*, 248.

23. Lonergan, *Insight*, 214-5.

24. Lonergan, *Insight*, 215. An example is the failure of white Catholics to treat Black Catholics as fellow full members of the Body of Christ or for white theologians to take the contributions of Black Catholic theologians seriously. M. Shawn Copeland, "Guest Editorial," *Theological Studies* 4, no. 61 (December 2000): 605.

25. Lonergan, *Insight*, 215.

26. Lonergan, *Insight*, 198-202, 250-1.

and the short-term solution, the *general bias of common sense* colludes with group bias to disregard innovative and good ideas that might come from non-privileged groups. General bias regulates social arrangements to the immediate well-being of the dominant racial group and thereby despoils the common good.<sup>27</sup> While directed specifically to racial injustice, Copeland's analysis aptly describes general bias as a broader phenomenon.

It should be clear that bias in Lonergan's thought is not simply a matter of individual prejudice. Since developing insight is a communal process which bias disrupts, bias insinuates itself into the structures of society. Now we will explore how economic inequality both results from and contributes to group bias, dramatic bias, and general bias.

## How Inequality Results from Bias and Scotosis

It is fairly self-evident how processes of scotosis and group bias can contribute to economic inequality. Theologians and social scientists alike have observed this process in action. Inequality can result from preexisting moral blind spots, including the failure to recognize others as human. Aspects of today's global inequality date as far back in history as colonization, a process driven by persistent group and general biases of European people against the peoples of Africa, Asia and the Americas.<sup>28</sup> Sebastian Kim, a theologian in the United Kingdom, rightly notes that the church's history of missionary expansion accompanied and is inseparable from this colonial legacy. He says the church "shares the responsibility for [today's global] inequality when it is either silent on the issue, or when it accumulates wealth at the expense of others."<sup>29</sup> Racism and dehumanization along racial lines contribute to inequality as well. Piketty shows the roots of

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27. M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 14. Copeland wrote "the dominant racial group." Without intending to distort her words out of their intended meaning, I believe the general bias of common sense can be applied more broadly—for example, to defend the interests of the wealthy at the expense of those who are not.

28. Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, 70–71, 121.

29. Sebastian Kim, "Editorial," *International Journal of Public Theology* 7 (2013): 1–4.

contemporary U.S. inequality in the Atlantic slave trade, when the purportedly egalitarian U.S. maintained levels of inequality similar to those of socially stratified Europe.<sup>30</sup>

Several theologians have explored how economic inequality has a root cause in dehumanizing bias. Paulinus Odozor, a theologian from Nigeria teaching in the U.S., finds that factors internal and external to African society contribute to high levels of inequality in many African countries. External factors include destructive trade and development policies from Western countries. Internal cultural tendencies perpetuating inequality include government misallocation of resources and a persistent failure to recognize the humanity of outsiders or others.<sup>31</sup> Failing to recognize the humanity of others also contributes to economic inequality in the U.S., argues Mary Elizabeth Hobgood, when systemic racism distracts white U.S. Americans from the extent and causal factors of their own "economic disempowerment."<sup>32</sup> Similarly, Bryan Massingale argues that racism, individualism, and consumerism shape a "cultured indifference to the poor" unique to the U.S. context.<sup>33</sup>

Lonergan himself explicitly details how group bias results in stratified societies where the best and worst off enjoy radically different opportunities and qualities of life.<sup>34</sup> This is because those excluded by group bias will struggle to have their own insights accepted by the broader society. Hobgood paints a vivid picture of

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30. Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, 152. Piketty acknowledges that this is a disturbing calculation to make but believes that it serves the cause of justice today to understand the historical U.S. economy, and modern U.S. duplicity about our own history, as accurately as possible. I agree on all counts.

31. Paulinus I. Odozor, "Truly Africa, and Wealthy! What Africa Can Learn from Catholic Social Teaching about Sustainable Economic Prosperity," in *The True Wealth of Nations*, 267-87.

32. Mary E. Hobgood, "White Economic and Erotic Disempowerment: A Theological Exploration in the Struggle against Racism," in *Interrupting White Privilege*, eds. Laurie M. Cassidy and Alex Mikulich (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007), 48.

33. Bryan N. Massingale, "An Ethical Reflection upon 'Environmental Racism' in the Light of Catholic Social Teaching," in *Challenge of Global Stewardship: Roman Catholic Responses*, eds. Maura A. Ryan and Todd David Whitmore (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 234-50.

34. Lonergan, *Insight*, 249.

how well-off people in unequal societies exercise bias to justify their own advantages. She writes:

It becomes easy to justify our positions and the unearned privileges we enjoy, as well as the suffering of the lazy or unlucky 'unfortunate' others. We learn that self-discipline and hard work usually pay off, and due to our own hard work and individual merit, we are entitled to things that other people do not have. . . . The ideology protecting our privileges in the upper tiers of the working class conditions us to deny attention and feeling to those we have learned are unworthy.<sup>35</sup>

Group bias and scotosis are both operative when those who benefit from inequality accept their unearned privilege and ignore the harm, even the deadly harm, inequality deals to the less fortunate. General bias, privileging views that appear to be common sense, tempts those who benefit from inequality as well as those who are harmed by it to believe that the current economic situation is natural and inevitable, even desirable, rather than probing further to realize that economic structures are created by human societies and can be shaped to promote more just outcomes.

## How Inequality Promotes Bias

Inequality is shaped by human choice, including choices about whether and when to intervene in markets. It also shapes human behavior in categories as basic as trust, health, and crime and punishment. Inequality is to a certain extent a creature of bias, but as it impacts societies, inequality can promote and foster bias as well. It warps our cognition and understanding, insinuating itself into social structures to shape what those in power regard as common sense. Inequality increases violence and punitive behavior within societies and contributes significantly to what Pope Francis has dubbed "the globalization of indifference."<sup>36</sup> Unequal societies are those whose structures encourage the development of group bias and scotosis by

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35. Mary E. Hobgood, *Dismantling Privilege: An Ethics of Accountability* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2000), 82.

36. Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* [Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World], November 24, 2013, §54.

keeping different "Others" out of sight and out of mind from those with power.

Pickett and Wilkinson suggest that inequality is responsible for increasing violence, sensitivity to shame, and fear of others in society. They found that violence is more common in societies with higher levels of inequality.<sup>37</sup> Summarizing a variety of sociological findings to explain why this might be, they write:

Although everybody experiences disrespect and humiliation at times, they don't all become violent; we all experience loss of face but we don't turn round and shoot somebody. In more unequal societies more people lack these protections and buffers. Shame and humiliation become more sensitive issues in more hierarchical societies; status becomes more important, status competition increases and more people are deprived of access to markers of status and social success.<sup>38</sup>

The impact of inequality on violence begins in childhood. In more unequal societies, children are likelier to report being the victims of bullying, to get in physical fights, and to feel their peers are not "kind and helpful."<sup>39</sup>

Further evidence that inequality promotes bias is found in the higher incarceration rates of more unequal nations. Pickett and Wilkinson continue,

In societies with greater inequality, where the social distances between people are greater, where attitudes of 'us and them' are more entrenched . . . public and policy makers alike are more willing to imprison people and adopt punitive attitudes towards the 'criminal elements' of society. . . . And as prison is not particularly effective for either deterrence or rehabilitation, then a society must only be willing to maintain a high rate (and high cost) of imprisonment for reasons unrelated to effectiveness.<sup>40</sup>

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37. Pickett and Wilkinson, *The Spirit Level*, 140–41.

38. Pickett and Wilkinson, *The Spirit Level*, 140–41.

39. Pickett and Wilkinson, *The Spirit Level*, 139.

40. Pickett and Wilkinson, *The Spirit Level*, 155.



As evidenced by variance in incarceration rates, inequality in society accompanies a lack of empathy and a punitive mindset on the part of the powerful toward those without power. This indicates a failure to incorporate relevant information, or bias.

Pope Francis acknowledges the way inequality can create a destructive spiral of violence, punitive repression, and more violence. He writes in *Evangelii gaudium*, "Until exclusion and inequality in society and between peoples are reversed, it will be impossible to eliminate violence" (EG 59). He goes on to say, "When a society—whether local, national or global—is willing to leave a part of itself on the fringes, no political programmes or resources spent on law enforcement or surveillance systems can indefinitely guarantee tranquility" (EG 59).

Inequality in society leads to a blithe exclusion, a widespread social scotosis through which the wealthy forget the poor and, in the process, themselves become less human. This claim is beautifully demonstrated by the Nigerian theologian, Olubiyi Adeniyi Adewale, in his essay on the parable of Lazarus (Lk 16:19–31). Adewale's African perspective adds incisive detail to Jesus' criticism of the rich man's behavior in the parable. Lazarus's suffering and need were compounded by an illness so dire that, in Luke's telling, "dogs came and licked his sores." Adewale says that in an African worldview, the saliva of dogs can be helpful for healing and notes that Jews in Jesus' time believed this as well. So, the dogs who licked Lazarus's sores were actually helping him. Meanwhile, the rich man did not help him at all. Mired in scotosis by his obsession with money, the rich man unwittingly reveals himself as less human than the dogs.

Adewale compares Christians in wealthy societies to the rich man in the parable. As globalization facilitates instant communication, he says, "like the biblical Lazarus, the poor in Africa have been laid at the gate of the rich brethren of the developed countries. . . . Unfortunately, to date, a large percentage of the believers in the developed countries seem to have decided not to 'see' their covenant brethren in distress."<sup>41</sup> Even when globalized media allow for the encounter with new information that should facilitate insight, those who benefit from

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41. Olubiyi Adeniyi Adewale, "An Afro-Sociological Application of the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31)," *Black Theology* 4, no. 1 (Jan 2006): 27–43, at 40.



global inequality maintain their scotosis, like the rich man who feigns ignorance of Lazarus's name until he himself is in need.

Evoking the parable, shocking anecdotes from several wealthy countries suggest that today's rates of social inequality have bred a disturbing lack of empathy for those in poverty. In Spain, soaring unemployment has led to an increase in hungry people "dumpster diving" in trash bins to find food. Officials in one city diagnosed such practices as offensive to human dignity and fixed the problem by installing locks on municipal trash cans.<sup>42</sup> A management company in London installed metal spikes on sheltered areas of its property, treating people experiencing homelessness like animal pests.<sup>43</sup> The National Coalition for the Homeless has documented over 50 U.S. cities where policies punish or restrict sharing food with homeless persons in public places.<sup>44</sup> The rich man's scotosis—his indifference to Lazarus—courses throughout wealthy societies.

As these disturbing anecdotes suggest, unequal societies are ones where wealthy people think so little of poor persons that they prefer not to see or encounter them at all. How apropos is Lonergan's statement that "to prevent insights, repression will have to inhibit demands for images."<sup>45</sup> Economic segregation—rich and poor people living in different, separate areas—increases as inequality increases. This harms economic mobility as poor people lose opportunities to connect with those better off and damages quality of life in many other ways. As Pickett and Wilkinson write, "The concentration of poor people in poor areas increases all kinds of stress, deprivation

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42. Suzanne Daley, "Hunger on the Rise in Spain," *The New York Times*, September 24, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/25/world/europe/hunger-on-the-rise-in-spain.html>.

43. Ben Quinn, "Anti-Homeless Spikes Are Part of a Wider Phenomenon of 'Hostile Architecture,'" *The Guardian*, June 13, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/jun/13/anti-homeless-spikes-hostile-architecture>.

44. The National Coalition for the Homeless and The National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, "A Place at the Table: Prohibitions on Sharing Food with People Experiencing Homelessness," July 2010, [http://nationalhomeless.org/publications/foodsharing/Food\\_Sharing\\_2010.pdf](http://nationalhomeless.org/publications/foodsharing/Food_Sharing_2010.pdf); and Mary Emily O'Hara, "More US Cities Are Cracking Down on Feeding the Homeless," *VICE News*, June 8, 2014, <https://news.vice.com/article/more-us-cities-are-cracking-down-on-feeding-the-homeless>.

45. Lonergan, *Insight*, 216.

and difficulty—from increased commuting times for those who have to leave deprived communities to find work elsewhere, to increased risk of traffic accidents, worse schools, poor levels of services, exposure to gang violence, pollution and so on.”<sup>46</sup> Another way that economic segregation degrades the common good comes through a phenomenon economist Robert Reich calls “the secession of the successful.”<sup>47</sup> Wealthy elites, able to pay privately for access to goods such as education and security, withdraw from the commons and frequently withdraw their support for the public funding of these goods, harming those who cannot afford to pay for them.

The racial and economic segregation fostered by inequality is a social structure that enables widespread scotosis. Keeping the poor separate from wealthier populations ensures that those with access to economic and social power will not think about the poor, their needs, or their suffering. Inequality perpetuates its own continued growth by making the status quo seem like common sense. As Copeland explains, under the influence of bias, “members of the privileged group are conditioned to withdraw from unnecessary experiential contact with ‘other’ non-privileged members of society, thereby depriving themselves of the potential of human and humane relationships.”<sup>48</sup>

Inequality influences social structures and persons within them, encouraging bias against those in poverty. As Pope Francis movingly describes the “globalization of indifference”:

Almost without being aware of it, we end up being incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor, weeping for other people’s pain, and feeling a need to help them, as though all this were someone else’s responsibility and not our own. The culture of prosperity deadens us; we are thrilled if the market offers us something new to purchase. In the meantime all those lives stunted for lack of opportunity seem a mere spectacle; they fail to move us (EG 54).

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46. Pickett and Wilkinson, *The Spirit Level*, 163.

47. Robert B. Reich, “Secession of the Successful: How the New U.S. Emphasis on ‘Community’ Legitimizes Economic Inequality,” *Other Side* 31, no. 4 (July 1995): 20–26.

48. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 14.

Morally significant processes of knowledge formation are bound up with economic structures. Economic inequality both results from and promotes biased horizons of knowing. However, created by God as free, humanity never fully loses that freedom, even if our freedom is certainly conditioned and determined by surrounding circumstances.<sup>49</sup> Solutions for the relationship of inequality and bias do exist. Since inequality is both a structural and moral problem, I will propose one structural and one moral solution.

## Structural Solutions

On a structural level, the first step in fighting the inequality created by scotosis is greater financial transparency within and among nations. OXFAM credited transparent, accountable governments for reduced inequality in Latin America in recent years, while inequality rose elsewhere.<sup>50</sup> Piketty's proposal for a modest global tax on capital, intended to slow inequality's rapid growth through  $r > g$ , drew immense attention when his book was published.<sup>51</sup> What often got lost in the discussion around this provocative proposal is how much of Piketty's justification for a global wealth tax had to do with transparency. Piketty pointed out how the limitations of public reporting hamper our understanding of inequality. For example, it can be difficult to accurately surmise just how large the fortunes in the highest tax bracket are. A global tax on capital would help. It would especially benefit poorer countries, which are likelier to suffer from corruption,<sup>52</sup> and would aid in prosecuting those who "rake off" profits gained in trade by concealing assets from taxation.<sup>53</sup>

If bias manifests itself when we reject information that is detrimental to our self-understanding, transparency fights it. I have

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49. See Lonergan's discussion of effective and essential freedom in *Insight*, 631–647. Thanks to Lucas Briola for this recommendation.

50. Ricardo Fuentes-Nieva and Nicholas Galasso, "Working for the Few: Political Capture and Economic Inequality," Oxfam International, January 20, 2014, <http://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/bp-working-for-few-political-capture-economic-inequality-200114-en.pdf>, 24–25.

51. Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, 471.

52. Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, 539.

53. Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, 522.

explained how inequality self-mystifies; it makes it easier for the wealthy to ignore the poor and to ignore the harms caused by inequality itself. A Harvard Business School study showed that most Americans underestimate the true extent of national inequality: they think the U.S. is significantly more egalitarian than is in fact the case. Encouragingly, most U.S. people would prefer the economy to be more equal than they already think it is, that is, far more egalitarian than the reality.<sup>54</sup> This shows the value of challenging our assumptions. Transparency is not a complete solution to willed bias, but it is the first step in a process inviting persons and societies to authentic insight, to confronting the many harms of globalized inequality.

Loneragan describes how bias limits our horizons and our ability to know and gain insight, but holds out hope that moral conversion is possible. Conversion is envisioned not as a one-time “road to Damascus” moment, but an ongoing process throughout one’s life. It follows religious conversion, a response of “yes” to God’s offer of love—whether or not this “yes” is consciously understood as religious belonging.<sup>55</sup> Moral conversion means conversion from selfish goals, from a horizon limited by individual and group bias, to a horizon or set of goals that includes the interests of others, particularly different others.<sup>56</sup> As Robert Doran has proposed, it entails conversion to collective responsibility, each for the good of all.<sup>57</sup>

## Moral Solution: A Globalization of Solidarity

I have discussed how economic inequality both issues from and promotes bias and scotosis. As a structural and moral problem, the impact of economic inequality on bias demands structural and

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54. Michael I. Norton and Dan Ariely, “Building a Better America—One Wealth Quintile at a Time,” *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 6, no. 1 (2011): 9–12; and Elizabeth Gudrais, “Loaded Perceptions: What We Know about Wealth,” *Harvard Magazine*, December 2011, <http://harvardmagazine.com/2011/11/what-we-know-about-wealth>.

55. Robert M. Doran, “What Does Bernard Lonergan Mean by ‘Conversion?’,” 2011, <https://www.lonerganresource.com/pdf/lectures/What%20Does%20Bernard%20Lonergan%20Mean%20by%20Conversion.pdf>, 7–8.

56. Doran, “What Does Bernard Lonergan Mean by ‘Conversion?’,” 15–16.

57. Doran, “What Does Bernard Lonergan Mean by ‘Conversion?’,” 18.

moral solutions. To conclude, I'll return to a theme of this volume, a humane globalization, and discuss what moral conversion to the poor Other would look like concretely. Pope John Paul II popularized the term, the "globalization of solidarity," which Pope Francis has enthusiastically embraced.<sup>58</sup> Catholic social thought does not hesitate to make concrete, specific suggestions, aware that moral conversion issues forth in action. So, what does a globalization of solidarity look like?

- It begins with protecting weaker nations and groups of people from the harmful consequences of economic globalization.<sup>59</sup>
- It means including every nation into the globalized economy on terms that allow members of that nation to benefit. This requires the reduction of ruinous international debt for nations and access to credit for poor individuals.<sup>60</sup>
- It demands the reduction of inequality within nations. As Pope John Paul II wrote, "If the aim is globalization *without marginalization*, we can no longer tolerate a world in which there live side-by-side the immensely rich and the miserably poor, the have-nots deprived even of essentials and people who thoughtlessly waste what others so desperately need. Such contrasts insult the dignity of the human person."<sup>61</sup>
- It incorporates interreligious dialogue and a widespread awareness that religion means responsibility for human flourishing.<sup>62</sup>

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58. Based on incomplete historical research, I believe this term originated with now-Cardinal Oscar Andrés Rodríguez Maradiaga. See "Synodus Episcoporum Bulletin of the Commission for Information of the Special Assembly for America of the Synod of Bishops," Vatican Website, December 16, 1997, [http://www.vatican.va/news\\_services/press/sinodo/documents/bollettino\\_17\\_speciale-america-1997/02\\_inglese/b06\\_02.html](http://www.vatican.va/news_services/press/sinodo/documents/bollettino_17_speciale-america-1997/02_inglese/b06_02.html).

59. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in America* [Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Encounter with the Living Jesus Christ: The Way to Conversion, Communion and Solidarity in America], January 22, 1999, §56.

60. John Paul II, John Paul II, *From the Justice of Each Comes Peace for All* [1998 World Day of Peace Message], January 1, 1998, §4, 6.

61. John Paul II, *From the Justice of Each Comes Peace for All*, §4.

62. John Paul II, "Meeting with the Representatives of Other Religions," November 7, 1999, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/travels/1999/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_07111999\\_new-delhi\\_meeting-other-religions.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/travels/1999/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_07111999_new-delhi_meeting-other-religions.html).

- It encourages nations and groups to promote their own legitimate rights as long as those rights are not enjoyed at the expense of others. This translates into “the voluntary limitation of unilateral advantages so that other countries and peoples may share in the same benefits.”<sup>63</sup> If group bias tends to exclude information that would encourage a group to lessen its own status, a globalization of solidarity resists its effects.

A globalization of solidarity will also include learning from societies where cultural values strongly inculcate solidarity, the option for the poor, and other authentically Christian values that are less welcomed in the individualistic, wealthy West. For theologians, this means attending to voices from the Global South who have made it quite clear what their cultures can teach wealthy societies in our unequal age. For example, Tanzanian theologian Laurenti Magesa finds that Catholic social thought resonates considerably with an indigenous African communitarian ethic; both perspectives envision economies that put human relationships at the center.<sup>64</sup> Teresia Hinga, born in Kenya and now teaching in the U.S., explains that responding to global poverty in a globalized age demands Christians become “better Samaritans.” While “good Samaritans” provide aid in response to immediate need, “better Samaritans” accompany those in need to discover that the root causes of poverty often lie in the exploitation of nations by global economic forces skewed toward the wealthy West.<sup>65</sup> Similarly, Indian theologian Shaji George Kochuthara confronts cozy notions of aid when he notes that the duty of wealthy nations to help poorer ones is not a gift but a “justice of restitution,”

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63. John Paul II, “To the Secretary General and the Administrative Committee on Coordination of the United Nations,” April 7, 2000, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2000/apr-jun/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_20000407\\_secretary-general-un.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2000/apr-jun/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20000407_secretary-general-un.html), §3.

64. Laurenti Magesa, “African Indigenous Spirituality, Ecology, and the Human Right to Integral Development,” in *The World Market and Interreligious Dialogue*, eds. Catherine Cornille and Glenn Willis (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 170–71.

65. Teresia Hinga, “Becoming Better Samaritans: The Quest for New Models of Doing Socio-Economic Justice in Africa,” in *Applied Ethics in a World Church: The Padua Conference*, ed. Linda Hogan (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 85–97.

given the international history of resource extraction along colonial patterns.<sup>66</sup> In a globalized age, the horizon of those from historically poorer nations is, by default, drawn to include the wealthy West. For those of us who benefit from global inequality, a globalization of solidarity means extending our horizons to incorporate insights that our biases and scotoses would rather exclude.

## Conclusion

Lonergan explained how understanding proceeds from knowledge of facts to knowledge of value and then to action.<sup>67</sup> We have explored how economic inequality is bound up with our processes of understanding. It is historically shaped by understandings limited by bias. It continues today to shape the moral knowing of persons in societies, encouraging violence, cruelty, and the willed indifference that Lonergan calls scotosis. Nevertheless, structural change and moral conversion—meaningful efforts toward the globalization of solidarity—are always possible.

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66. Shaji George Kochuthara, "Economic Inequality: An Ethical Response," *Religions* 8, no. 8 (August 2017): 141.

67. Ryoko Tamura, "Interiority Analysis as an Integrated 'Meta-Cognition': A Way of Self-Recovery from Poor Educational Achievement," in *Grace and Friendship: Theological Essays in Honor of Fred Lawrence*, eds. M. Shawn Cope-land and Jeremy D. Wilkins (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2016), 280–81.