

Social Trust and the Ethics of Our Institutions

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ABSTRACT: Social trust is the basic resource for our institutions and is notably maintained by leaders who have what I call a vulnerable style and a vigilant capacity to recognize ethical challenges on the horizon. The essay follows five steps: a meditation on social trust, an introduction to the notion of style, and a proposal for a vulnerable style so as to become collectively capacious for recognition. Then it turns to the two institutions under examination at the 2022 annual meeting of the Society of Christian Ethics (SCE): the church and the academy. The essay examines both the church on racial justice through exemplars of vulnerable style and the academy on needed recognition of the precarity of our community colleges. So as to advance an interest in diversifying our styles of communicating within the SCE, the essay provides a meditation, an academic account, an academic proposal, a narrative, and a case.

I WANT TO PROPOSE A THESIS THAT SOCIAL TRUST IS THE BASIC RESOURCE for our institutions and that it is notably maintained by leaders who have what I call a “vulnerable style” and a “vigilant capacity to recognize” ethical challenges on the horizon.

I proceed in five steps. I offer a meditation on social trust, an introduction to the notion of style, and a proposal for a vulnerable style so as to become collectively capacious for recognition. Then I turn to our two institutions, the church and the academy. On the topic of racial justice in the church I provide a narrative of two exemplars; I conclude by providing the case of much needed recognition in the academy for the community college.

So as to advance an interest in diversifying our styles of communicating within the SCE, I provide a meditation, an academic account, an academic

proposal, a narrative, a case, and I close with a coda. And while I am addressing this proposal for the institutions we are examining, that is, the church and the academy, I have very much in mind our own institution, the Society of Christian Ethics, which I will turn to in said coda.

A BRIEF MEDITATION ON SOCIAL TRUST

On December 2, as I was preparing this address on social trust, Angela Merkel, in stepping down from her remarkable legacy of sixteen years as Chancellor of Germany, declared, “The most important capital for politics is trust.” Actually, what she said was “Das wichtigste Kapital in Politik ist Vertrauen.” It was music to my ears.

Merkel’s brief text began in this way. “Standing before you here today, I feel two things above all: gratitude and humility—humility towards the office that I had the honor of holding for so long, and gratitude for the trust that was placed in me. Trust—of this I was always keenly aware—is the most important capital in politics. It should never be taken for granted. And I am most deeply grateful for it.”

She added, “Our democracy thrives on both our ability to engage in critical debate and to self-correct. It thrives on the constant balancing of interests and on mutual respect. It thrives on solidarity and trust—including trust in facts—and it thrives on the fact that protest must arise wherever scientific findings are denied and conspiracy theories and hate speech are spread.”¹

Similar insights were raised elsewhere about trust. Francis Fukuyama, who wrote the best-selling book *Trust: The Social Virtues and The Creation of Prosperity*,² was invited last year by *The Atlantic* to address “The Thing That Determines a Country’s Resistance to the Coronavirus,” and emphatically declared: “Trust is the single most important commodity that will determine the fate of a society.”³

¹“Speech by Federal Chancellor Dr Angela Merkel at the military tattoo given in her honour in Berlin on 2 December 2021,” Press and Information Office of the Federal Government of Germany, December 2, 2021, <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/news/speech-by-federal-chancellor-dr-angela-merkel-at-the-military-tattoo-given-in-her-honour-in-berlin-on-2-december-2021-1988766>; see also Katrin Bennhold, “Angela Merkel’s Parting Message to Germany: Trust One Another,” *New York Times*, December 2, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/02/world/europe/angela-merkel-farewell-germany.html>.

²Francis Fukuyama, *Trust: The Social Virtues and The Creation of Prosperity* (New York: Free Press, 1995).

³Francis Fukuyama, “The Thing That Determines a Country’s Resistance to the Coronavirus,” *The Atlantic*, March 30, 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/03/thing-determines-how-well-countries-respond-coronavirus/609025/>.

Kenneth Arrow noted fifty years ago: “Virtually every commercial transaction has within itself an element of trust, certainly any transaction conducted over a period of time.”⁴ Trust is transactional.

More recently in their report on trust, Esteban Ortiz-Ospina and Max Roser write: “Trust is a fundamental element of social capital—a key contributor to sustaining well-being outcomes.”⁵

In short, trust is the fundamental resource that provides the stability, the development, and the sustainability of any institution. Without it, the institution does not function; with it, it can thrive.

As in any meditation, there are points to direct the meditation, and besides considering the security and stability that trust provides, I just want to give three such points, that I hope stay with you as we move on.

First, in their studies Ortiz-Ospina and Roser report that “economic inequality is negatively related to trust.”

Second, they also note that “in all countries those individuals with tertiary education were by far the group most likely to report trusting others. And in almost every country, those with postsecondary non-tertiary education were more likely to trust others than those with primary or lower secondary education.” Education is crucial for trust.

This point requires comment, however, lest it mislead us into thinking that millions of high school graduates are less capable of trust and trustworthiness. Clearly, the high school educated working class, with greater economic equality and opportunity, are evidently exemplars of trust. Still, the data highlights the American problematic of (financial) access to higher education.

In our country, where private tertiary education is so cost prohibitive, and access to solid public tertiary education depends upon where you live, the lack of access to education pivots the entire matter of social trust in terms of class barriers. Indeed, as we will see in the final section of this essay, since more skills-oriented forms of education in community colleges are so precarious, the matter of higher education further alienates our working class. In my book, *University Ethics: How Colleges Can Build and Benefit from a Culture of Ethics*, I demonstrated that “access to a major university diminishes year by year for lower-income and working-class people.”⁶ There I argued that our elite campuses remain privileged and that American higher education is simply a powerful force

⁴Kenneth J. Arrow, “Gifts and Exchanges,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1, no. 4 (Summer 1972): 343–362.

⁵Esteban Ortiz-Ospina and Max Roser, “Trust,” Our World in Data, 2016, <https://ourworldindata.org/trust>.

⁶James F. Keenan, *University Ethics: How Colleges Can Build and Benefit from a Culture of Ethics* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), 208, see 208–217 and the chapter on “Commodification,” 173–200.

for reinforcing advantage. These barriers to equal opportunity impact greatly the matter of social trust.⁷

Third, trust, then, is based on a mutual vulnerability and mutual recognition. As Kevin Vallier and Michael Weber note on the first page of their volume entitled *Social Trust*: “Most scholars see trust as a product of durable mutual expectations about cooperative moral behavior.”⁸

I conclude this meditation noting that Angela Merkel is an exemplar: Like her, we need to be mindful of social trust. Unfortunately, we need to recognize that social trust in the academy and in the church, as well as in other social and political institutions, has suffered considerably. Additionally, we have only begun to see that the social trust each of us have in our institutions depends very much on the social location of each of us. Finally, we need to recognize how dependent we are in our guild on social trust. It is in facing that social trust that I want to pursue in this address.

INTRODUCING STYLE FOR PROMOTING SOCIAL TRUST

Before studying theological ethics, I was trained by the Jesuit historian John O'Malley who has written extensively on the Councils of Trent, Vatican I, and Vatican II, as well as the Society of Jesus.⁹ O'Malley's interests have always been in reform movements.¹⁰ His first major work was an award-winning study of the rhetoric, style, and substance of sermons delivered in the papal court in Renaissance Rome.¹¹

Besides wanting to know what was said in those courts and councils, O'Malley became more interested in how it was said and what matter it made. The first interest, which was at first about the type of rhetoric used, he later identified as “style.” The second interest was about impact.

In 1980, at Weston Jesuit School of Theology, he proposed a course to examine the styles of three major figures: Aquinas, Luther, and Erasmus. Though he called it three theological cultures, he was more interested in the style of each, that is, not the social context that engendered these theologians and their work,

⁷I wish to thank the helpful reviewer who insisted that I develop this point to highlight how education impacts social trust.

⁸Kevin Vallier and Michael Weber, eds., *Social Trust: Foundational and Philosophical Issues* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 1.

⁹John W. O'Malley, *Trent: What Happened at the Council* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013); *Trent and All That: Renaming Catholicism in the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

¹⁰John W. O'Malley, *Giles of Viterbo on Church and Reform: A Study in Renaissance Thought*, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought, vol. 5 (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1968).

¹¹John W. O'Malley, *Praise and Blame in Renaissance Rome: Rhetoric, Doctrine, and Reform in the Sacred Orators of the Papal Court* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1979).

but rather how they communicated their claims. Style was much more descriptive of the way these theologians taught and how they communicated the values inherent in the lessons being taught. Finding the right style is integral to the process of delivering the research; it is basically the method and sometimes the media used to achieve the ends of one's teaching. In a way, following the insight that form follows function, classical education always recognized that grammar or content of the wisdom tradition was not enough for learning; rhetoric, the study of how to communicate wisdom and truth, was always taught alongside grammar.

Scholasticism develops out of Abelard's famous *Sic et Non* wherein Abelard considered over 150 theological theses that each had a pro and a con. Aquinas, like scholastics before him, needed to make sense of a tradition that had as many contradictions as it had categories, and found in the interrogative style of the *Summa* a way of acknowledging that there was always a "*sed contra*," and that no matter what position you took, you still had to address the objections. Aquinas's style was analogous to a scientific investigation seeking truth and whatever stability it could offer in the midst of debate. Erasmus's humanistic style would embrace agency and eloquence by experimenting with a wild array of styles: from the epistle to the treatise, from the colloquy to the handbook. Erasmus's *Enchiridion*, a word that means both dagger and handbook, was designed to be carried by the vigilant pilgrim needing a guide along the pathways of discipleship. Finally, Luther's breaking open of the word as a prophetic challenge finds in the sermon, above all, a way of allowing Christ to interrupt our lives.¹²

By attending to this issue of style, we become more responsible in promoting social trust. Indeed, many of us are already attentive to style. Cathleen Kaveny, for instance, explores a vigorous style in the Jeremiad in *Prophecy without Contempt: Religious Discourse in the Public Square*; there she describes the Jeremiad as a prophetic indictment in the form of what she calls "moral chemotherapy."¹³ Not unlike her own research, Kaveny expresses a variety of styles whether in her other remarkable treatises, her long-standing column in *Commonweal*, or her occasional scimmages with those whom she disagrees. Similarly, in *Forming Humanity: Redeeming the German Bildung Tradition*, Jennifer Herdt investigates

¹²John W. O'Malley, *Four Cultures of the West* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); O'Malley, "The Style of Vatican II: The 'How' of the Church Changed during the Council," *America*, February 24, 2003, 12–15; Catherine E. Clifford, "Style Is Substance: Origins of John W. O'Malley's Contribution to the Interpretation of Vatican II," *Theological Studies* 79, no. 4 (December 2018): 745–60. On Vatican II, see John W. O'Malley, "Reform, Historical Consciousness, and Vatican II's *Aggiornamento*," *Theological Studies* 32 (1971): 573–601; O'Malley, "The Hermeneutic of Reform: A Historical Analysis," *Theological Studies* 73 (2012): 517–46; O'Malley, "Vatican II: Did Anything Happen?" *Theological Studies* 67 (2006): 3–33; O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

¹³Cathleen Kaveny, *Prophecy without Contempt: Religious Discourse in the Public Square* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

a variety of styles, from accounts of Rhineland mysticism to Pietist introspective handbooks, from popular fiction to “Secular scripture,” to locate the sources that influenced the development of the German *Bildung* tradition. These diverse styles were integral to fostering dialogical encounter and mutual recognition so as to promote enlightened moral formation.¹⁴

At the 2022 SCE annual meeting, we honored Stanley Hauerwas, who developed his own inimitable style of teaching and writing. I personally want here to acknowledge Stanley. While I was at the Gregorian University from 1982–1987, where the style of teaching was almost without exception the read lecture, I began reading Hauerwas. Interestingly, I purchased his *A Community of Character: Toward A Constructive Christian Social Ethic* near the entry of St. Peter’s Square, at the legendary Ancora bookstore. I returned there to buy four other works that he published during my studies.¹⁵ His essays were different not only in content but in style, and like his own claims of virtue ethics, they were unlike anything I was learning in Rome. Later Hauerwas further developed his style from the autobiography of *Hannah’s Child: A Theologian’s Memoir* to the sermons, to the self-interrogatory with Brian Brock, and finally to the exquisite epistolary engagement in *The Character of Virtue: Letters to a Godson*. Indeed, when *Syndicate* invited me to post my own review of it, I reciprocated and wrote Stanley a public letter.¹⁶ As you can see, O’Malley has done me well to be mindful of style.

Let me conclude that O’Malley uses style sometimes in referring more narrowly to the method an author uses, but other times he uses it as in capturing the general way a person proceeds. He has, of late, remarked for instance on the style of Pope Francis. But he has also used it metaphorically when he refers to the style of Vatican II. One could, therefore, talk about Stanley’s style as a particular method for writing or, more generally, to refer to his way of proceeding as a theologian. Similarly, we could talk about the styles of presentations at the SCE, but we might also talk metaphorically about the SCE’s overall style of proceeding, a style worth examining.¹⁷

¹⁴Jennifer Herdt, *Forming Humanity: Redeeming the German Bildung Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019).

¹⁵Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward A Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981); Hauerwas, *Truthfulness and Tragedy: Further Investigations into Christian Ethics*, with Richard Bondi and David Burrell (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977); Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983); and finally, Hauerwas, *Suffering Presence: Theological Reflections on Medicine, the Mentally Handicapped, and the Church* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1986).

¹⁶James F. Keenan, “Letters, Virtues, and Relationality,” *Syndicate*, September 16, 2019, <https://syndicate.network/symposia/theology/the-character-of-virtue/#james-keenan>.

¹⁷Christoph Theobald, *Le Christianisme Comme Style: Une Manière de Faire de la Théologie en Postmodernité*, 2 vols. (Paris, France: Cerf, 2007).

PROPOSING A VULNERABLE STYLE

Integral to choosing style is the question of the intended impact of our project, or what the Germans called the “*Wirkungsgeschichte*,” that is, the history of effects of one’s work. This question is not simply whether something is received or how it is received but also interrogates the capacity of the interlocutors to see whether and how they will be open to receive and recognize the presenter’s claims. Indeed, Aquinas, Erasmus and Luther each sought their styles not only to bear the values and virtues they wanted to promote but also so as to connect with those most in need of receiving these works. Style, then, is fundamentally about how we interrelate as we teach and research and is in a way about how we promote social trust so as to communicate well the values and virtues we need to promote within our institutions.

Over the past four years I began interrogating the *effectiveness* of my own teaching style. It seemed to me that in my ethics courses I was teaching people to think ethically, but while the students may have learned the material well, I wasn’t sure that they would, in the end, actually act ethically. I was teaching material so that they could conscientiously act. But invariably I found that some students were subsequently responsive to another’s need for moral assistance, but others were not. If they all take courses on ethics, why is it that afterwards some respond to the need for moral assistance and others do not?

To make a long story short, I began to study how matters of vulnerability and recognition help in matters of moral agency and began to pursue a style that would elicit another’s vulnerability so as to recognize the need for moral responsiveness. That is, I began to pursue a vulnerable style that would awaken in my students their own vulnerability, and in that way, they might better recognize the need for moral responsiveness. This vulnerable style I believe has good effect in promoting social trust.¹⁸

¹⁸I develop this position in “Building Blocks for Moral Education: Vulnerability, Recognition and Conscience,” in *Conscience and Catholic Education*, ed. David DeCosse (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2022). See also James F. Keenan, “Vulnerability and Hierarchicalism,” *Melita Teologica* 68, no. 2 (2018): 129–142, which was published in September 2019 though the issue was predated 2018 and reprinted in *Asian Horizons* 14, no. 2 (2020): 319–332; Keenan, “Le questioni teologiche morali più rilevanti per affrontare i problemi nel dibattito globale degli ultimi trenta anni,” *Teologia* 44 (2019): 194–210; Keenan, “Integrare la vulnerabilità per combattere gli abusi,” *Aggiornamenti Sociali* (August–September 2019): 562–572; Keenan, “The World at Risk: Vulnerability, Precarity and Connectedness,” *Theological Studies* 81, no. 1 (2020): 132–149; Keenan, “Linking Human Dignity, Vulnerability and Virtue Ethics,” *Interdisciplinary Journal for Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society* 6 (2020): 56–73; Keenan, “Rethinking Humanity’s Progress in Light of COVID-19,” *Asian Horizons* 14, no. 3 (September 2020): 713–735; Keenan, “Vulnerable to Contingency,” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 40, no. 2 (2021): 221–236; Keenan, “Vulnerability, Hierarchicalism, and Recognition,” in *Clericalism and*

In exploring vulnerability, I rely mostly on Judith Butler's claims that vulnerability is not to be confused with precarity, or instability, or weakness, but rather is a capacity to be open to and to recognize and to respond to the other. Her work and now Erin Gilson's¹⁹ have helped me and my doctoral students to engage the conditions of possibility to encounter those not yet vulnerably disposed to recognize and respond to some others. I have not worked alone but benefitted from the explorations of vulnerability by Hille Haker, Enda MacDonagh, Roger Burggraeve, Vincent Leclercq, Daniel Fleming, and Charles Mathewes.²⁰ Additionally, I acknowledge Linda Hogan who as co-chair of Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church closed our third international Conference in 2018 in Sarajevo where she invited us into an ethics of vulnerability.²¹

This capacious vulnerability very much functions on a two-way street; I can only awaken another's vulnerability by myself being vulnerable. If I want to engage my students, not only in their thinking but also in that level of openness that leaves them receptive to the other, then I need to be disclosive: I need to model that vulnerability to them. This I think captures the transactional insight we saw in social trust. And, though I will turn in a moment to recognition and though

Sexuality, ed. Philip McCosker, Luigi Gioia, and Travis LaCouter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

¹⁹Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence* (Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2004) and Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005); Butler, "Precarious Life, Vulnerability, and the Ethics of Cohabitation," *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 26, no. 2 (2012): 134–151; Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti, and Leticia Sabsay, eds., *Vulnerability in Resistance* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016); Catriona Mackenzie, Wendy Rogers, and Susan Dodds, eds., *Vulnerability: New Essays on Ethics and Feminist Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Erinn C. Gilson, *The Ethics of Vulnerability: A Feminist Analysis of Social Life and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

²⁰Hille Haker, "The Fragility of the Moral Self," *The Harvard Theological Review* 97, no. 4 (2004): 359–381 and Haker, *Towards a Critical Political Ethics: Catholic Ethics and Social Challenges* (Würzburg, Germany: Echter Verlag, 2020); Enda McDonagh, *Vulnerable to the Holy: In Faith, Morality and Art* (Dublin, Ireland: Columba Books, 2005); Vincent Leclercq, AA, *Blessed are the Vulnerable: Reaching out to Those with AIDS* (New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2010); Roger Burggraeve, "Violence and the Vulnerable Face of the Other: The Vision of Emmanuel Levinas on Moral Evil and Our Responsibility," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 30, no. 1 (1999): 29–45; Daniel J. Fleming, *Attentiveness to Vulnerability: A Dialogue between Emmanuel Levinas, Jean Porter, and the Virtue of Solidarity* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2019); Charles Mathewes, "Vulnerability and Political Theology," in *Exploring Vulnerability*, ed. Heikke Springhart and Günter Thomas (Bristol, CT: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017), 165–184.

²¹Linda Hogan, "Vulnerability: An Ethic for a Divided World," in *Building Bridges in Sarajevo: The Plenary Papers of Sarajevo 2018*, ed. James Keenan, Kristin Heyer and Andrea Vicini, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2019), 217–222.

Jessica Benjamin and others have written at length about mutual recognition,²² I believe that in good teaching there is and needs to be mutual vulnerability.

This vulnerable style, as a style, is, as I already noted, two-fold: it is about the specific form of my writing or teaching (is it a sermon, a lecture, a letter, a confession, a poem, a treatise?) and it is about the general way I normally interact with others, that is, my regular way of proceeding.

Capturing a vulnerable style that is capacious, open, confident in its core so as to be disclosive without need for defenses strikes me as a form or style of leadership that conveys or occasions social trust. But vulnerability cannot be idle. If it stands alone, it breeds narcissism, becoming self-disclosive for no simple reason but self-reference. Indeed, moral leadership embodies a vulnerable style generally and specifically precisely to make others aware of something which has not yet been recognized. By being vulnerable to and with others we invite them to see what we see and to recognize what has been overlooked, discarded, or ignored. Moral vulnerability leads us to recognition and the one who embodies moral vulnerability is invariably vigilant to recognizing the other often overlooked, not incorporated, not engaged, and/or not treated with human dignity. Philosophers like Charles Taylor, Paul Ricoeur, Paddy McQueen, Axel Honneth and Nancy Fraser²³ argue that recognition entails an awakening from a tendency to overlook or ignore to an acknowledgement of the rightful dignity of others. They propose that we respond through an encounter of mutual recognition to the dignity of others who have not yet been given their social due. Besides these philosophers, I find in the work of the theologian Hille Haker enormous resources. I thought her paper at the SCE in 2021 was remarkable in its scope and claims and find in her new book, *Towards a Critical Political Ethics*, uncanny wisdom.²⁴ Let me now turn to how such a vulnerable style expresses itself.

²²Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination* (New York: Pantheon, 1988); Benjamin, *Beyond Doer and Doing To* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

²³Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); David Pellauer and Paul Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts* (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 1995); Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, eds., *Redistribution or Recognition: A Political-Philosophical Exchange*, trans. Joel Golb, James Ingram, and Christine Wilke (London, England: Verso Books, 2003); Paddy McQueen, "Social and Political Recognition," *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed January 1, 2022, https://www.iep.utm.edu/recog_sp/. I have found very helpful Michael Sohn, *The Good of Recognition: Phenomenology, Ethics, and Religion in the Thought of Lévinas and Ricoeur* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014).

²⁴Hille Haker, *Towards a Critical Political Ethics: Catholic Ethics and Social Challenges* (Basel, Switzerland: Schwabe Verlag, 2020) and Haker, "Recognition and Responsibility," *Religions* 12, no. 7 (2021): 467.

VULNERABLY RECOGNIZING RACIAL INJUSTICE IN OUR CHURCHES

I would like to experiment with style by turning to a narrative so that I can give two portraits of vulnerable styles that have helped me to be more active in recognizing racial injustice in society in general and in communities of faith, specifically. I think that if we are interested in repairing social trust in both the church and the academy, then we need to attend to not only what we do but also how we act. It is for this reason that the vulnerable style that teaches recognition strikes me as such an imperative for the promotion of social trust.

As with any good narrative, we begin in the middle of the story. In the spring of 2012, one of my advisees in the Boston College Theology Graduate Program, Katie Grimes, had finished her comprehensives and was preparing to draft her dissertation proposal. A very promising candidate, she had already submitted to *The Journal of Religious Ethics* a rather provocative essay entitled “Butler Interprets Aquinas: How to Speak Thomistically About Sex.”²⁵

During her first three years of study, we had worked well together, but as she was going forward, Grimes wanted to write a dissertation on race, one that would eventually investigate what happens to a church, its members, its sacraments, and the people that it excludes and attacks when a church is marked by anti-Blackness and White supremacy. I felt confident being her advisor on a multitude of topics: virtue ethics, Thomas Aquinas, sexual ethics, etc. But race, White supremacy, anti-Blackness, could I direct her for such a dissertation?

One day, sitting in my office, Grimes shared with me the same dilemma. Since she had been studying with my colleague and friend, Professor M. Shawn Copeland, Grimes wondered whether I or Copeland should be the director, with the other becoming the first reader. I responded by acknowledging to her my own concern about the matter and proposed to talk with Copeland, who I knew was in her office that day. I went to Copeland’s office and, after exchanging a variety of pleasantries, I shared with her my and Grimes’s dilemma. With honest exasperation Copeland said, something to the effect of, “I would love to see that someone from the esteemed ethics area of the BC Theology Department would one day direct a dissertation on race.” I thanked Copeland and returned to Grimes to tell her that I would be the director and Professor Copeland would be a reader. Grimes eventually did a noteworthy dissertation that was later developed into a book entitled *Christ Divided: Antiblackness as Corporate Vice* and since then has been a remarkable writer on both racial injustice and queer theology.²⁶ I want to acknowledge that Copeland was a very helpful and supportive first reader.

²⁵Katie Grimes, “Butler Interprets Aquinas: How to Speak Thomistically About Sex,” *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 42, no. 2 (2014): 187–215.

²⁶Katie Walker Grimes, *Christ Divided: Antiblackness as Corporate Vice* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017).

For years Copeland had been prompting me, without my adequately appreciating it, to recognize my responsibility to investigate the ethical issues around racism. Indeed, fifteen years earlier in 1999, Joseph Kotva and I invited her and twenty-five other Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox theologians to contribute to a collection of essays about the need for ethics in the church entitled *Practice What You Preach: Virtues, Ethics and Power in the Lives of Pastoral Ministers and Their Congregations*. Surprisingly, Copeland provided an essay not on the church but on the academy. She wanted us to look at that other institution that also taught ethics, but like the church, the academy needed to practice what they taught. In her essay, entitled “Collegiality as a Moral and Ethical Practice,” Copeland wrote about a young Black woman theologian who found that her White colleagues were as strikingly naïve about their privilege as they were about her own challenges. She focused not only on the so-called “innocent” self-understanding of racists, but on the isolating character of our training and of our working in the academy.²⁷ Her contribution prompted me to begin recognizing the ethical issues of both race and the academy.

Later, by having directed Grimes and also Michael Jaycox in his dissertation on social anger and racial justice,²⁸ with both defending in 2014 and both subsequently writing considerably on racial justice,²⁹ I was able to develop some competency to write on racism as well.

²⁷M. Shawn Copeland, “Collegiality as a Moral and Ethical Practice,” in *Practice What You Preach: Virtues, Ethics and Power in the Lives of Pastoral Ministers and Their Congregations* ed. James F. Keenan and Joseph Kotva, Jr. (Franklin, WI: Sheed and Ward, 1999), 315–332.

²⁸Michael Jaycox, “Righteous Anger and Virtue Ethics: A Contemporary Reconstruction of Anger in Service to Justice” (PhD diss., Boston College, 2014). See also Michael Jaycox, “The Civic Virtues of Social Anger: A Critically Reconstructed Normative Ethic for Public Life,” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 36, no. 1 (2016): 123–143; Jaycox, “The Black Lives Matter Movement: Justice and Health Equity,” *Health Progress* 97, no. 6 (2016): 42–47, reprinted in Charles E. Curran and Lisa A. Fullam, eds., *Readings in Moral Theology no. 19: U.S. Moral Theology from the Margins* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2020); Jaycox, “Black Lives Matter and Catholic Whiteness: A Tale of Two Performances,” *Horizons* 44, no. 2 (2017): 306–341; Jaycox, “Payback, Forgiveness, Accountability: Exercising Responsible Agency in the Midst of Structured Racial Harm,” *Religions* 10, no. 9 (2019): 528; and Jaycox, “Nussbaum, Anger, and Racial Justice: On the Epistemological and Eschatological Limitations of White Liberalism,” *Political Theology* 21, no. 5 (2020): 415–433.

²⁹Katie Walker Grimes, *Fugitive Saints: Catholicism and the Politics of Slavery* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017); Grimes, “‘But Do the Lord Care?’ Tupac Shakur as Theologian of the Crucified People,” *Political Theology* 15, no. 4 (2014): 326–352; Grimes, “Breaking the Body of Christ: The Sacraments of Initiation in a Habitat of White Supremacy,” *Political Theology* 18, no. 1 (2017): 22–43; Grimes, “Racialized Humility: The White Supremacist Sainthood of Peter Claver, SJ,” *Horizons* 42, no. 2 (2015): 295–316; Grimes, “Let Black People Be: A Plea for Racial Specificity in the Afterlife of Slavery,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 46, no. 3 (2018): 496–520; Grimes, “How the Uncanny Kinship Between Prison and Slavery Requires Catholic Social Teaching to Re-Consider Its Stance on Crime

None of that would have happened if Copeland had on any occasion simply given up on me or had she simply decided that indeed for the sake of competency, she should direct Grimes. Copeland has an extraordinarily vulnerable style and she gave me the answer, the space, and the support I needed. In a way, Grimes too was vulnerable in her open willingness to have me as her potential director and then later in her acceptance of the decision that Copeland and I made.

When I began to write on racial justice, I knew I had to do it in *Theological Studies*.³⁰ I did so because in 1997, Bryan Massingale had famously called *Theological Studies* to account for decades of ignoring racism, particularly in the midst of the civil rights movement. Notably, he critiqued the well-read “Moral Notes” that appear annually in the Jesuit quarterly.³¹ As Charles Curran notes, Massingale argued that “the issues of race relations and social justice were not pressing or significant concerns for American Catholic ethicists.”³²

Three years later, Michael Fahey, the Jesuit editor of *Theological Studies* introduced the last volume of 2000 by writing: “After a long silence, Theological Studies has begun to make amends for its shameful avoidance of the evil of racism in the United States.” With those words, he introduced the guest editorial by Copeland for an entire volume dedicated to “Black Catholic Theology.”³³ Copeland, Massingale, Cyprian Davis, Diana Hayes, Jamie Phelps, and James Cone each contributed essays to the memorable collection.

Massingale developed considerably his call that ethicists recognize racism when he gave a plenary in 2010 at the Second International Conference of Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church, which gathered 600 Catholic

and Punishment,” *Journal of Catholic Social Thought* 16, no. 1 (2019): 39–63; and Grimes, “Antiblackness,” *Theological Studies* 81, no. 1 (2020): 169–180.

³⁰James F. Keenan, “Redeeming Conscience,” *Theological Studies* 76, no. 1 (2015): 129–147, reprinted in *Asian Horizons* 9, no. 1 (2015): 25–56. In this article, I noted that the failure of the American conscience to acknowledge its guilt in slavery and racism had actually led to a pervasive arrested development of the American conscience itself. After it appeared in *Theological Studies*, I wrote a more accessible essay for *America* magazine: “The Arrested Development of the American Conscience,” *America*, January 2, 2017, <https://www.americamagazine.org/arts-culture/2016/12/22/arrested-development-american-conscience>. More recently, see my “Rethinking Humanity’s Progress in Light of Covid 19,” *Asian Horizons* 14, no. 3 (2020): 71–735 and “The Color Line, Race and Caste: Structures of Domination and the Ethics of Recognition,” *Theological Studies* 82, no. 1 (2021): 69–94.

³¹Bryan N. Massingale, “The African American Experience and US Roman Catholic Ethics: Strangers and Aliens No Longer,” in *Black and Catholic: The Challenge and Gift of Black Folk*, ed. Jamie Phelps (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1997), 79–101.

³²Charles E. Curran, *Diverse Voices in Modern US Moral Theology* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2018), 203.

³³M. Shawn Copeland, “On the Catholic Reception of Black Theology,” *Theological Studies* 61, no. 4 (December 2000): 603–608; see Bryan N. Massingale, “James Cone and Recent Catholic Episcopal Teaching on Racism,” *Theological Studies* 61, no. 4 (December 2000): 700–730.

ethicists from 72 countries in Trento, Italy. There Massingale noted that on the few occasions when previous generations of Catholic ethicists did address racism, they “treated black people as *objects* of white study, analysis, and charity—and rarely as *subjects* capable of independent thought or creative analysis.” Noting that the voice and agency of Black people “are muted, absent, erased—and at the same time opposed, feared, and resisted” in the Catholic moral discourse of the past—he challenged the assembly to understand that Catholic theological ethics cannot “give an adequate account of present controversies and moral responsibilities—much less develop a Catholic theological ethics for a world church—if [it] fails to attend to the voices of the dark bodies that hover over and haunt our histories despite our embarrassed silence and studied neglect.”³⁴

Then again in 2014 Massingale was invited back to *Theological Studies* to contribute this time to the “Moral Notes” that he earlier investigated. In “Has the Silence Been Broken? Catholic Theological Ethics and Racial Justice,” Massingale referred to the conference in Trento where “concerns regarding race, racial justice, and racism emerged.” He then noted, “Happily, there is now a critical mass of recent literature to consider, and the contours of a distinctive Catholic approach to racial issues are coming into clearer focus. Yet, much remains to be done.”³⁵

As a Jesuit I found Massingale’s original indictment of *Theological Studies* and then his subsequent contribution to the journal twice remarkably vulnerable, patient, and forgiving. Similarly, I have wondered many times why he and other Black theologians had not just given up on the enduring silence of so many White theologians, Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox, on issues of racial injustice. Likewise, I wondered how he put up with the condescension of Whites when we failed to engage Black theologians as colleagues and leaders. But like Copeland, Massingale continued to call for racial justice with a patient vulnerability, while neither muting his indictment nor his prophetic collegial summons to break the silence. Massingale, along with Copeland, helped me and many students and faculty to open our eyes, our mouths, and our writing and teaching capabilities to recognize what was so long overlooked, that Black Lives Matter and that White supremacy must be dismantled. These colleagues embody the style of vulnerability I am trying to capture as the needed means to recognize racial injustice in this country and in our communities of faith.

I would like to underline one virtue that promotes a vulnerable style.

Aware of the work of Lisa Fullam and Margaret Farley on epistemic humility, I define humility as knowing my place in God’s world. This understanding of humility invites the agent to think about oneself in relation to others in the light

³⁴Bryan N. Massingale, “The Systemic Erasure of the Black/Dark-Skinned Body in Catholic Ethics,” in *Catholic Theological Ethics Past, Present, and Future: The Trento Conference*, ed. James F. Keenan (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011), 116–24.

³⁵Bryan N. Massingale, “Has the Silence Been Broken? Catholic Theological Ethics and Racial Justice,” *Theological Studies* 75, no. 1 (2014): 135.

of God's will. One example of this is found in the hymn of Luke's Magnificat where Mary very much understands her agency in the context of God's pursuit of redemptive justice. This humility, I think, informs and shapes the vulnerable style of colleagues like Copeland and Massingale.

What they, Copeland and Massingale, did happens again and again as any number of ethicists call out the rest of us, directly or indirectly, for our reluctance to act on any number of institutionally critical issues dealing with race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, climate change, or with the corruptive activities of the academy or the church. In that patient, humble, uncompromised vulnerability, they rightly place their expectations on us that we recognize with them what they see and experience. It is their vulnerable witnessing and their vigilant recognition that is the mettle of the social trust of this, our guild. I will return to this point in closing, but first let us turn to a case for recognition.

THE CASE FOR RECOGNIZING THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE IN THE CONTEXT OF UNIVERSITY ETHICS

While we theological ethicists comment with greater frequency on the ethics of our communities of faith, there is still an overall reluctance to recognize the problems of higher education. While the plight of the contingent faculty is progressively being recognized both at the SCE and hopefully within the institutions we work and in the entire network of higher education, I think it is fair to say that, overall, our recognition of the unethical in the academy is still fairly incipient. We are only beginning to recognize but not yet address, for instance, the escalating tuition rates, the make-up of our board of trustees, the emergence of the university corporate model, the education of our collegiate athletes, and the profound gender, racial, and class social inequity issues that pervade most layers of the academy.³⁶

The one topic with the least recognition in university ethics is the community college, the unacknowledged elephant in the room. For instance, in writing an essay on this topic I found no writing whatsoever by any ethicist, theological or philosophical, on the matter of the community college.

Still, did you know that 12 million students are at community colleges? They make up 41 percent of the general undergraduate student body in the

³⁶For more on this topic, see James F. Keenan, *University Ethics: How Colleges Can Build and Benefit from a Culture of Ethics* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), 37–56; Matthew Gaudet and James F. Keenan, eds., “University Ethics,” special issue, *Journal of Moral Theology* 9, no. 2 (2020); Steve Cahn, ed. *Academic Ethics Today: Problems, Policies, and Prospects for University Life* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2022); James F. Keenan, “Coming Home: Ethics and the American University,” *Theological Studies* 75, no. 1 (March 2014): 155–169.

United States.³⁷ Is that fact surprising? Routinely I ask colleagues to give an educated guess about the percentage of the undergraduate population in higher education in community colleges. Most have no idea of the scope of the legacy of the community college.³⁸

One reason why we know so little about community colleges is because we do not even recognize them as belonging to higher education. For instance, the historian Philo Hutcheson reports that “In general, historians of higher education have paid little, if any, attention to the community college. A careful search of the literature revealed only three scholars who substantially addressed community college history.”³⁹ Why so few? Remarkably, Hutcheson notes that historians see community colleges as an extension of the public school system, that is, an extension of K–12 and not an entry into the field of higher education.

The ethics of recognition is itself the first step toward establishing an ethical social order. Our human dignity is established socially by an appreciation of our interrelatedness, our mutual vulnerability, and our shared responsibility. For this reason, then, much depends on us recognizing that interrelatedness in the first place. When groups of persons and their social networks begin to be ignored, we effectively leave them outside the consideration of our social goals and their relationship to the common good. For this reason, Charles Taylor argues that in the context of shared human dignity, due recognition is not then just a courtesy we owe people, which we can confer or reserve at will, but rather, it is a vital human need.⁴⁰ Failure to recognize is itself an alienating act.

When we think of higher education, most people, if they are not from the working class, do not think of the community college; for the most part, the working class turn to the community college because of the costs of higher education in the US. But just as we overlook their predicament, similarly, we overlook their institutions. Having been raised in the working class and having listened to two nephews and a niece about their struggles with their community colleges, I now share with you the need we have to recognize what we have long overlooked.

³⁷American Association of Community Colleges, “AACC 2019 Fact Sheet,” March 2019, www.aacc.nche.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/AACC2019FactSheet_rev.pdf.

³⁸For a more expanded treatment on the topic, see James F. Keenan, “The Community Colleges: Giving Them the Ethical Recognition They Deserve,” *Journal Of Moral Theology* 9, no. 2 (2020): 143–164, <https://jmt.scholasticahq.com/article/18040-the-community-colleges-giving-them-the-ethical-recognition-they-deserve>. Also, James F. Keenan, “Overlooking Community Colleges and the Working Class,” in *Academic Ethics Today: Problems, Policies, and Prospects for University Life*, ed. Steve Cahn (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2022), 135–144.

³⁹Philo A. Hutcheson, “Reconsidering the Community College,” *History of Education Quarterly* 39, no. 3 (Autumn 1999): 307–320.

⁴⁰Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition,” 26.

Of course, the pervasiveness and the seduction of the recruitment rhetoric for community colleges could keep us from asking whether the recruitment is actually based on truth? The recruitment rhetoric is based on one simple insight: if you belong to the working class or to the middle class, or even if you are just fiscally conscious of the expense of higher education, then spending the first two years at a community college and later transferring to a four-year university is simply the wisest move one could make. When we dig deeper, however, we find that this is not the case.

For instance, community colleges are, indeed, remarkably good for some as an end in themselves than as a pathway to a four-year degree. Jeffrey Selingo notes that “Only 17 percent of community-college students end up earning a bachelor’s degree within six years of starting school.”⁴¹ Clearly, as a pathway to a baccalaureate degree, that statistic deflates some of the hype we may have heard. Still, as an end in itself, sometimes the community college is a good. Selingo reports: “Community colleges are the gateway to the jobs of tomorrow that can’t be easily automated by robots. Most of those are ‘middle-skills jobs’ that demand more than a high-school diploma but less than a bachelor’s degree. There are roughly 29 million of these jobs today.” Moreover, the job openings continue to remain available. “Despite the demand, a lot of these jobs in advanced manufacturing, health care, and information technology remain open because employers can’t find qualified candidates with enough education to fill them.”⁴² Selingo points out that students “who have a wide variety of choices about where to go to college are increasingly landing at two-year schools.”⁴³

However, 83 percent of the student population in community colleges enter to eventually transfer into a four-year institution. That population is a labor-intensive body, not unlike the precarious faculty whom we will meet in a moment. About 80 percent of community college students work, with 39 percent working full time. Yet only 2 percent of community college students receive any Federal work-study aid, compared with 14 percent of undergraduates at private nonprofit four-year colleges.⁴⁴ Even some full-time students work full time. Their work

⁴¹Jeffrey J. Selingo, “What’s wrong with going to a community college? How two-year colleges can be better than four-year universities,” *The Washington Post*, June 29, 2015, www.washingtonpost.com/news/grade-point/wp/2015/06/29/whats-wrong-with-going-to-a-community-college-how-two-year-colleges-can-be-better-than-four-year-universities/.

⁴²Selingo, “What’s wrong.” See also Louis Jacobson, “Improving Community College Outcome Measures,” *Challenge* 54, no. 6 (November–December 2011), 93-117, who points specifically to the possibilities in Florida for securing better jobs through local associate degrees.

⁴³Selingo, “What’s wrong.”

⁴⁴“Community Colleges FAQs,” Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University, accessed January 1, 2022, ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/Community-College-FAQs.html.

and family responsibilities often cause them to have to make course selections based on when they are actually free to attend a class.

Not surprisingly, then, as the *Chronicle of Higher Education* notes, “Graduation rates at two-year public colleges are notoriously low, and have long been criticized for inadequately reflecting the value of these colleges to students.”⁴⁵

But say the student does make it to the point of transfer. How successful is that? One researcher explains the situation: “Where past research pointed the finger at community colleges’ focus on vocational training, [contemporary researchers] examined how many credits universities accept from students coming from community colleges. The figures are stark: In their national sample of such students, only a little more than half of the receiving institutions accepted all or most of the credits. One in 10 four-year institutions accepted virtually no credits.” He concludes, “Fix the transfer bottleneck, and graduation rates for students seeking a bachelor’s degree would jump by a quarter.”⁴⁶ As it is, after the transfer, many eventually withdraw because they cannot complete the degree in the expected two years, especially in light of the cost of tuition. As Ryan Craig writes at *Forbes*: “No matter how much policy makers laud community colleges, the fact remains that these institutions are only fulfilling a fraction of their enormous potential. Completion and transfer rates remain abysmal, almost without exception.”⁴⁷

Finally, adjunct faculty at community colleges have miserable existences, running from one school to another, maintaining contracts at two, three, or even four different local institutions.⁴⁸ They are without healthcare benefits, job security, or an office. Grossly underpaid, they are one of the reasons why community colleges are “affordable.”⁴⁹

⁴⁵“How Low Graduation Rates Camouflage Student Success at Community Colleges,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 5, 2020, www.chronicle.com/article/How-Low-Graduation-Rates/247802. *The Chronicle* argues that notwithstanding the rates a variety of modest successes are achieved by very specific schools.

⁴⁶Mikhail Zinshteyn, “Making the Jump to a Four-Year Degree Difficult for Community College Students,” *Education Writers Association*, March 21, 2014, www.ewa.org/blog-educated-reporter/making-jump-four-year-degree-difficult-community-college-students. His research comes from David B. Monaghan and Paul Attewell, “The Community College Route to the Bachelor’s Degree,” *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 37, no. 1 (March 1, 2015): 70–91.

⁴⁷Ryan Craig, “America’s Community Colleges Should Become Placement Colleges,” *Forbes*, January 11, 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ryancraig/2017/01/11/america-community-colleges-should-become-placement-colleges/>.

⁴⁸See more in Matthew Gaudet and James F. Keenan, eds., “Contingent Faculty,” special issue, *Journal of Moral Theology* 8, no. 1 (2019), <https://jmt.scholasticahq.com/issue/1798>.

⁴⁹On the depths of the challenges see Adam Harris, “The Death of an Adjunct,” *The Atlantic*, April 8, 2019, www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2019/04/adjunct-professors-higher-education-thea-hunter/586168/.

Inside Higher Ed's Paul Frain explains: "More than half the nation's most vulnerable college students are in courses taught by part-time, adjunct faculty members who lack the job security, credentials, and experience of full-time professors—as well as the campus support their full-time peers receive."⁵⁰ These faculty are nonetheless dedicated to their students but the profound lack of institutional support they receive leave them unable to answer many of their students' needs.⁵¹ Frain adds, "Community colleges rely on part-time, 'contingent' instructors to teach 58 percent of their courses."⁵² I will add that my nephews and niece told me that over their many years trapped in the inefficiency of the community college, that because of the situation of the precarity of contingent faculty, they had no real advising, particularly, about which courses would be acceptable for transfer to a four-year institution.

How, then, can we "recognize" the community college? Here I have made simply an initial case for recognition, but I propose as a way forward, that after the 2022 annual SCE meeting concludes, the need to form a SCE interest group on university ethics. If the members of the interest group agree, I hope among its first projects will be to recognize and study the community college. Anyone wanting to join the newly announced University Ethics Interest Group can contact me from this moment on. I also imagine that this group will work together with the Contingent Faculty Caucus in furthering the case to recognize the community college.

A CODA

I began by proposing that social trust is the basic resource for our institutions and that it is notably maintained by leaders who have what I call a vulnerable style and a vigilant capacity to recognize the ethical challenges on the horizon. But now I would like to conclude by reflecting briefly with you how the SCE as an institution does and can further promote that social trust by a vulnerable style and a vigilant capacity for recognition.

We have seen the general vulnerable style of exemplary leaders and acknowledged that the Society is replete with members who vulnerably prompt others of us to see what they see on quite a number of horizons. Moreover, on the matter of the particular style of presenting, we have had as the predominant model the

⁵⁰Paul Frain, "Low Expectations, High Stakes: New report sheds light on the oft-ignored adjunctification of community colleges, which may be a barrier to college completion," *Inside Higher Ed*, April 7, 2014, www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/04/07/part-time-professors-teach-most-community-college-students-report-finds.

⁵¹See the riveting report, Susan Bickerstaff and Octaviano Chavarín, "Understanding the Needs of Part-Time Faculty at Six Community Colleges," Community College Research Center, November 2018, 1–12, ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/understanding-part-time-faculty-community-colleges.pdf.

⁵²Frain, "Low Expectations, High Stakes."

forty-five minute long, publishable research papers that serve not only as the foundation for the SCE conference but also for the material for the issues of the *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics*. In both the 2021 and 2022 annual meetings, we decided to tweak the conference a bit by offering for the plenaries not one argument with a respondent but three panelists in conversation with one another and by extension with the members. We did that precisely because in the absence of an in-person meeting, we thought the conversation model might engender a more vulnerable sense of interrelatedness. When we meet in 2023 presumably in person, Massingale, who succeeds me as SCE president, can determine how he wants to go forward on that matter. Still, it is worth noting that the conversation model is often found in the caucuses, interest and working groups, and in the discussions subsequent to the paper presentations.

Also of note, in the 2022 annual meeting, a critical mass of twenty-six poster presentations was met. These poster presentations are a two-stage event. They are first viewed without the author being present; the poster presenter initially lets their argument be seen rather than heard and, as such, the style requires greater attention to how it is seen, designed, and made aesthetically, visually engaging. But the second stage is when the membership goes out to meet, interview, and engage the presenters. We encourage you to take the time to view the posters, as well as meet and engage the poster presenters, during annual meetings.

Regarding other styles of presentation, let me add that while it is refreshing that at the SCE we find space for liturgy and silent meditation, what would it be like if we had space at the SCE for poetry, letters, sermons, or even a jeremiad, to say nothing of hearing a song, listening to rap, or watching a film. We need to investigate, I think, the SCE's meeting to see if we could more creatively engage a variety of styles without compromising our foundational scholarly model. Think here how without surrendering our scholastic style we could seek to also engage a more humanistic or prophetic one.

Lastly, let me suggest that when we first started listing our interest groups in the program in 1977, we were effectively acknowledging that our interest and later working groups existed so as to recognize and respond to the ethical issues and constituencies largely overlooked in our world. Thus, at the 2022 annual meeting we are delighted to recognize the newly formed LGBTQI+ Working Group promoted by Brandy Daniels and Emily J. Dumler-Winckler.

Promoting such recognition with a vulnerable style has been the enduring emphasis of SCE conferences. May we never lose sight of the need to be vulnerable so as to promote the work of recognition and to advance social trust.

Thank you for your participation in and support of the Society.

