

Eminences Cardinal Parolin and Cardinal Marx, Madam President of the Centesimus Annus pro-Pontifice Foundation, Professoressa Tarantola, Excellencies, distinguished authorities, Ladies and Gentlemen. Good evening, Bona Sera:

It fills me with joy and gratitude that you have considered my book "*Vulnerability: Towards a More Human Ethics*" worthy of the prestigious international award for economics and society from the Centesimus Annus pro-Pontifice Foundation. The truth is that I never expected or imagined this, and being a woman theological ethicist working at the forefront of interdisciplinary dialogue on topics that are not easy to challenge, this award is encouraging and hopeful for me - and for other academics like me - in many ways.

Adriana Cavarero (1947), an Italian philosopher, states in her book "*Horrorismo*":

"The human being is vulnerable as a singular body open to injury. However, the term 'vulnerability' does not imply any necessity inherent in the wound it signifies, but rather signifies the perpetual potentiality of injury, always imminent and contingent upon circumstances. As a corporeal entity, the vulnerable remains so throughout life, constantly exposed to the possibility of injury. This inherent potentiality also exposes the vulnerable to both healing and a relational ontology that confers meaning. Inevitably poised between vulnerability to injury and the potential for healing, the vulnerable exists entirely within the tension of this dichotomy."

With this citation from, I somewhat capture what I have extensively elaborated upon in the first section of the book: the renewed ethical definition of the category of vulnerability. This understanding encompasses human potentiality inexorably open to injury, to healing, and to relational ontology, which imbues deep significance while rooted in the historical contingency of each human biography.

The research presented in the book delves into human vulnerability defined as both an anthropological and ethical-theological category, proposing it as a fundamental axis for the development of an ethics of vulnerability. Throughout the extensive exploration undertaken to define and elucidate the inexhaustible richness of this category, my ultimate aim was to establish that a moral theology constructed around the notion of human vulnerability leads to a more humanizing, more humane ethical-religious experience.

The primary justification for the interest in this topic lies in the fact that human life, all human life, is constitutively permeated by the inherent vulnerability intrinsic to being human. As corporeal and therefore mortal creatures, we are exposed to illness, injury, disability, and dependence on the care of others. As social and affective animals, we are emotionally and psychologically vulnerable, susceptible to various forms of harm such as loss, pain, neglect or abuse, rejection, or humiliation. Furthermore, we are vulnerable in love, tenderness, hospitality, to our own emotions, and other expressions that do not carry the negative connotation often associated with vulnerability in general. As socio-political beings, we are vulnerable to exploitation, manipulation, oppression, and the violation of our rights, yet vulnerability also brings us together and enables the construction of common social projects. Lastly, we are vulnerable to the environment, to the impact of nature which at times devastates, but also to the devastation wrought by our own technology.

Vulnerability is essential, in my opinion, for the development of a more humane ethics and is also a due task in contemporary fundamental morality that, until now, had only tangentially incorporated it. Moreover, it is a polyvalent, countercultural concept deeply rooted in universal humanity and its singular, biographical, and narrative expressions.

I have mentioned the essential and pending nature of the topic. It is necessary to add to these adjectives "fascinating" and "transversal". Over the past ten years, I have been studying and teaching the category of vulnerability, and it appears to be an endless wellspring. Always approaching it from a multi- and interdisciplinary perspective, the breadth, and nuances of one discipline and another constantly enrich the understanding of the concept. My motivation has been primarily to enrich the field of moral theology by introducing this category as fundamental to understanding the greater humanity it enables. It implies a way of fundamental moral reasoning that begins as multidisciplinary, by presenting each discipline separately, but ultimately proposes a transdisciplinary approach, in which common language emerges as the product of the contributions of many. That said, the core importance of this research is that, if it meets its demands, it guides, directs, and brings us closer to a more humane ethics.

Taking the time to investigate what has been developed in other disciplines, in order to formulate our own conception of Christian ethics regarding vulnerability and how it can permeate the moral orientations that we, as a Church, choose to live by, can be a significant contribution to the field of moral theology. The underlying hope behind the sustained effort to understand, deepen, and clarify a multifaceted concept according to the disciplinary approach with which it is addressed, is to be able

to outline some elements that lead the discourse of Christian ethics towards greater understanding and, above all, towards a greater integration of human vulnerability. I believe that this contribution to moral theology is in line with what is increasingly emerging from the sciences, philosophy, ecology, and even the Magisterium itself. Indeed, it resonates with the morality of the Gospel.

Counter-culturally, despite the reigning myth of autonomy that permeates us all, by returning to this universal human quality—vulnerability—and understanding it more fully, doors are opened for links with the self, with others and with the transcendence of God. Also, incorporating some aspects of Latin American bioethics and of the Episcopal Conferences of this continent, in vulnerability we can find the perspective to denounce all vulnerability that has already been transgressed in such an extreme and violently unequal world as ours. By this, I mean that ethics of vulnerability is not only a construction that privileges more personalistic spheres, but it has a prophetic aspect and denounces all the vulnerabilities suffered by humanity. From vulnerability, we can build bonds that humanize us, push us towards fulfilment, with characteristics such as those mentioned above. The image is that of Jesus Christ as the complete human being, and the call to each one of us to “attain his stature” (Eph 4:13).

The conviction and passion that has driven me throughout these years is the certainty that while some moral proposals seem to burden and undermine the community of believers, there are others that focus—from a greater connection with the Gospel—on what can be offered to them, guide them, accompany them, towards greater humanity, greater flourishing, to the stature of Jesus Christ. My aim is to contribute to this Christian ethics with the conviction that vulnerability is not only an anthropological and ethical category that collaborates and supports this purpose but that it is a universal human quality and a singular experience faced by everyone. We could say that human openness, the condition of the permeable being, of those who are affected and transformed in the interaction with their environment, with themselves, with others, and with that which transcends them, is a fact that must be considered.

It is my wish for our Church and for Humanity as a whole, through early and adult education, with patience, for vulnerability to evolve out of the negative meaning that it contains today. And that the more profoundly human aspects of vulnerability may come to light in a different way. To be vulnerable is to be open to one's own being on the way, always inapprehensible, always a momentary expression of the deepest part of one's existence. It also means being capable -because it is open- of generating personal and social bonds. To meet eye to eye, to acknowledge others, to be able to show

oneself when the occasion is appropriate, and to live in authenticity. To be vulnerable is to be able to recognize beauty in the world, in nature, and the opportunity to inhabit and care for it. And it is also to be able to recognize injustice, inequity, and exploitation that abuses the vulnerability of so many; finally, to be vulnerable, unfinished, and on the frontier, also implies the ability to receive a God who always goes out to meet us.

It becomes evident that the conceptualization of human vulnerability within Tradition has consistently been intertwined with the lived, concrete-historical engagement and response to it, adapting to the circumstances of each era. Indeed, the imperative to expand the kerygma with the urgency of one who anticipates the imminent end of time during their lifetime differs significantly from the necessity of maintaining a stringent control over the possibility of salvation in periods marked by profound precariousness and threat, such as in the early monastic world, or amidst the skepticism engendered by modernity's apparent de-Christianization. The experience of vulnerability varies when viewed through the lens of an optimism replete with confidence in humanity's ability to navigate uncharted seas and discover new worlds, compared to the context of grappling with plagues and pandemics that appear to imperil the very existence of humanity.

On the other hand, the Church's self-perception of itself -the ecclesiology that traverses each epoch and paradigm- is a determining factor in the capacity of the Christian community in general, and of the magisterium in particular, to find in the experience of vulnerability a generative possibility. Church persecuted, Church Christianity, Church perfect society, Church People of God, are all, also, a way of positioning herself before her own vulnerability and that of every human being.

Our Church is living today, amongst other things, the need to be one who acknowledges and repairs the incommensurable damage that she, in some of her members and her structures, has caused thousands of people who put their faith and hope in its sacramental mediating role, as a way of walking in fidelity to God's will for all of us. This is also an experience of profound vulnerability, of our own lability and of the possibility inherent in all -also the Church- to "*vulnerate*" others. But this acknowledgement and reparation can also be a generative possibility of renewal.

When we look at Christian Tradition as a living reality that seeks to transmit the presence of Jesus Christ in all times and cultures, the ethics that emerges from it and from each historic moment necessarily requires ongoing discernment. As Pope Francis will say in *Evangelii Gaudium*, there are elements of continuous inculturation that were necessary for the transmission of the Christian

message, which no longer provide this service. It requires then, the Pope continues, courage to renew, courage to discern (EG 43). Let us have ask God for this courage, let us continuously discern, let us accept ourselves vulnerable and dependent on his Spirit for this renewal which is so necessary.

I could not pass this opportunity of speaking without expressing how grateful I am. I thank the distinguished jury of the Foundation for taking notice of my book and deeming its content worthy of such recognition. I am most grateful for the education I have received, particularly at the Pontifical University of Comillas, Madrid, for fostering disciplinary rigor and openness to academic creativity, both with the imprint of the Ignatian *Magis*. I am also grateful for the opportunity provided by my affiliated institution, the Salesian University to which I belong, the Catholic University Silva Henríquez, for enabling my professional development with academic freedom and constant support in all my research and teaching initiatives. But above all, I thank God and life for the possibility of recreating and repairing vulnerabilities through my family. Thank you, Felipe, for your constant love and support, for being a partner in creating spaces and occasions of mutual openness and respect. Thank you for my daughter, Amira, bright, courageous sunbeam, whose radiant vulnerability transforms our world into a realm of challenges, beauty, and grace.

We could say, perhaps boldly, that God himself is “the Open, the Permeable, the Affected.” God is also vulnerable because he chooses this way of being for the sake of being connected with his creature and his history. The epiphany of this way of being of God is in the person of Jesus. He is the one who *shows humanity to itself* (GS 22). He is the way to plenitude and to humanity. He is the way of compassion, hospitality, tenderness, forgiveness, and so many other expressions of human vulnerability. This is the ethical path that I wish to propose, in the hope that it will permeate our way of approaching human beings, our vulnerability, and the fulfilment that, in Christ, is promised to us.

Thank you.