

An Analysis of Gender Stereotyping in the Case of Karen Vertido

Rica delos Reyes-Ancheta, Ph.D.

San Beda College - Alabang

Abstract: *This article examines gender stereotyping as a form of structural evil or, in theological language, a form of structural sin. Using the celebrated case of Vertido vs. Custodio, the paper exposes the undercurrents of gender stereotyping. It also provides a cultural analysis of Vertido's case as it traces the root cause of gender stereotyping. A high-context reading of the events that led to CEDAW to intervene in Vertido's case enables the author to use feminist-theological principles to denounce and dismantle the structures of inequality and hegemony that still permeate the Filipino psyche.*

Keywords: *Structural Sin, Karen Vertido, Gender Studies, Feminism,*

This study seeks to examine gender stereotyping as a form of structural evil or, in theological language, a form of structural sin. The celebrated case of Vertido vs. Custodio will be used as a case for discussion. The help of cultural analysis will follow, which is hoped to pave the way towards greater understanding of stereotyping's shape and effect in the world. Once this is done, a theological reflection will follow.

Stereotypes are not always negative and unfair; there are positive stereotypes, like a foreigner's view that "Filipinos are hospitable," or "Italians are warm." But, of course, negative labeling seems to be the common people's usual reference to the concept of stereotyping. A pattern in one's mind about a race, gender, class, or religion is often a negative judgment, but this does not discount the fact such an application of negative stereotype is really the other side of the coin of positive stereotyping.

Labeling a person black or white; good or bad, right or wrong, is based on binary oppositions that impose positive/negative or superior/inferior hierarchical classifications on people's minds. It is because of the way our mental frame is habitually attuned to binaries (which are simple, ready-made, and easy formulas) that one becomes biased towards either the superior or inferior term,

that is, our perception is “coerced” by certain assumptions that render our prediction, classification, interpretation, and judgment about the world and relationships easier to accomplish. In other words, people are also “empowered” by the stereotypical labels found and available in their culture.

Gender stereotyping is one of those mental processes that hoists the male/female or man/woman binary categories to produce the biased classifications as shown in the following table:

Male	Female
Strong	Weak
Rational	Emotional
Culture	Nature
Superior	Inferior
Heroic; affirming	Abject
Honorable	Excised, deported, isolated,
In-charge of their death, meeting it with authority, dignity, and reason,	Uncontrollable wailing ‘white noise’
historically conscious	Lost
Transcend suffering/harrowing circumstance	Despondent
Male declaration—reason	Terrible noise—cry of distress
Subjects: grieving and pronouncing	Objects of terror: shocked, screaming
Frontline of resistance	Out of sight; nameless

Based on the characterization of Jewish men/women prisoners in Melissa Raphael, *Female Face of God in Auschwitz* (New York, Routledge, 2003).

More often than not, ordinary people in their everyday lives are determined by the above binaries that form mental patterns, which pre-dispose identity, role, character, behavior, and position in the world. Stereotyping or labeling, therefore, is a way of deploying mental categories or symbols in order to serve discernment, interpretation, and judgment. It is in this sense that stereotyping is also a form of deployment of power, that is, symbolic power over things and individuals.¹ It is no small matter when such binaries influence and direct public institutions whose policies and decisions have more far-reaching and severe effects on larger populations. World Wars initiated by males who are driven by convictions of racial supremacy/inferiority are examples of stereotyping that have devastating results; male decision-making in economics (because males are assumed to possess more rational culture) have also produced the molestation of nature; women are still regarded to be more effective at home, that is why they are forced to stay in that sphere and not attempt to contaminate the public with their emotional nature.² Negative stereotyping based on the superior/inferior binary opposition is, thus, very much alive in societies whether traditional or modern. Victims are overpowered by such deployment of negative stereotypes.

Stereotypes are also rooted on prevailing frame that has long influenced people's perspective—it is called “patriarchy”. Patriarchy is a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence.³ It has affected women's psyche and has praised the values of obedience, submissiveness, and service especially to males. Most Filipinas even has made serving the family, their second nature. When the eldest in the family is a female, it is natural for her to take care of her siblings. When the mother leaves the house, she takes the role of the mother and becomes a nanny to her younger siblings. Without a question or complaint, she assumes her role as

¹See Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991); *Masculine Domination* (Stanford, California: Stanford California Press, 2001).

²Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, Cambridge (MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

³Bell Hooks, *Understanding Patriarchy* Online Source.

if it is ‘just the way things are’ in a household. Females are confined to the home while males are free to leave the house any time. It is their lot to be in a public sphere—but not the women. Similarly, the stereotype that emerged from the domination of the father in a household has been experienced by religious women. In a book entitled, *Prophets in their own country: Women religious bearing witness to the Gospel in a Troubled Church*,⁴ a growing concern about the grand jury that convened and made it a hierarchical duty to visit religious in America for a Vatican investigation. Sandra Schneiders, OHM articulated the “new form of religious life” that resisted the Inquisition type of investigation and resisted the ‘in-house’ settling of matters affecting women-religious at the forefront of social issues and were put in question because of the “dwindling number of religious.” The Grand Jury represented male patriarchy that Schneiders and women religious, opposed. Similar power play concocted by males whether in the privacy of our homes, our community, or the Church needs our attention and critical assessment.

One such case of stereotype that has drawn international attention is the Vertido vs. Custodio case. This case illustrates how cultural stereotyping of women has skewered a decision prejudicial to Karen Vertido and to other women similarly situated. Vertido vs. Custodio is not an isolated case, suggesting the fact that a judge’s mindset is not necessarily above the cultural mindset that is predisposed to a similar cultural bias—one which citizens learn from childhood, share as habit with the rest of the population, handed down as “tradition” from their generation to the next, and enforced as if it is obligatory. Stereotyping, thus, is built into the structures of culture and society—determining worldviews and interactions, predisposing people to habitual schemes of thought, appreciation, and action. To raise a further issue, such a cultural stereotyping has produced harm and injury to people, causing multiplication and perpetuation of human evil.

⁴Sandra M. Schneiders, IHM *Prophets in their own country: Women religious bearing witness to the Gospel in a Troubled Church* (Manila: Claretian Publications, 2011).

A Re-look at the Case of Karen T. Vertido

Karen Tayag Vertido cried rape after an evening business meeting and a promised lift home by her boss and President of the Davao Chamber of Commerce and Industry in the Philippines, Jose B. Custodio. Vertido was the Executive Director of the Davao City Chamber when she filed a complaint in 1996 with the local police, alleging that Jose B. Custodio, had raped her. She alleged that the accused took her to a nearby motel instead of bringing her home as promised. Though she refused to leave the car, Custodio forced and dragged her to a motel room. Inside the room, she desperately looked for an exit but found none; so, she locked herself in the bathroom. When she thought the accused had left, she went out of the bathroom. When Custodio saw her, he pinned her to the bed. She claimed that by then she lost her consciousness and when she was awakened, the accused was already raping her. Her pleas for him to stop fell on deaf ears. She was unsuccessful in her attempts to push him away. She just managed to free herself only after she had been raped. She underwent a medical and legal examination the following day and reported the rape to police within 48 hours.

The case was initially dismissed for lack of probable cause. During preliminary investigation, Custodio's lawyers were able to convince the fiscal that the plaintiff and the defendant were consenting lovers. It was only through an appeal that the Secretary of the Department of Justice Teofisto Guingona, Jr. ordered the reopening of the case and that the accused be charged with rape. Thus, Custodio was arrested. The case languished in the trial court for eight years before Judge Virginia Hofileña-Europa finally handed a decision in April 2005.⁵ She acquitted the accused, citing insufficient evidence to prove beyond all reasonable doubt that the accused was guilty of rape. The judge based her decision on several 'guiding principles' derived from other rape cases (for example, that rape allegations are easy to make) and her unfavorable assessment of Vertido's testimony based, among other things, on the latter's failure to take advantage of perceived opportunities to escape from the accused.

Vertido, perceiving a generalized bias of the Philippine courts, subsequently submitted a communication to the Convention on

⁵Regional Trial Court Davao City, the Philippines, *The People of the Philippines v Jose B. Custodio*, Criminal Case No 37,921^96, 11 April 2005. Gender Stereotyping in Rape Cases 331.

the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW; <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm>),⁶ alleging that her acquittal constituted a violation, by the Philippines, of the freedoms from wrongful gender stereotyping and gender-based violence against women.⁷ Vertido also claimed that the judge's decision had no basis in law or fact and 'was grounded in gender-based myths and misconceptions about rape and rape victims... without which the accused would have been convicted'.⁸

Considering the claim of wrongful gender stereotyping, a majority of the CEDAW Committee reiterated that CEDAW requires States Parties to 'take appropriate measures to modify or abolish not only existing laws and regulations, but also customs and practices that constitute discrimination against women'.⁹ CEDAW also stressed that stereotyping affects women's right to a fair and just trial and that the judiciary must take caution not to create inflexible standards of what women or girls should be or . . . have done when confronted with a situation of rape based merely on preconceived notions of what defines a rape victim. . .¹⁰ Hence, the majority determined that Judge Hofileña-Europa expected a certain stereotypical behavior and formed a negative view of Vertido's credibility because she had not behaved accordingly.

The majority's recognition of several references to stereotypes about male and female sexuality in Judge Hofileña-Europa's decision lent credence to the fact that Judge Europa was more convinced of the credibility of the alleged perpetrator than that of the victim. Certain assumptions and prejudices about how women

⁶On 18 December 1979, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. It entered into force as an international treaty on 3 September 1981 after the twentieth country had ratified it. By the tenth anniversary of the Convention in 1989, almost one hundred nations have agreed to be bound by its provisions.

The Convention was the culmination of more than thirty years of work by the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, a body established in 1946 to monitor the situation of women and to promote women's rights. The Commission's work has been instrumental in bringing to light all the areas in which women are denied equality with men. These efforts for the advancement of women have resulted in several declarations and conventions, of which the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women is the central and most comprehensive document. (<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm>)

⁷Regional Trial Court Davao City, the Philippines, *The People of the Philippines v Jose B. Custodio*, Criminal Case No 37,921^96, 11 April 2005. Gender Stereotyping in Rape Cases 331 at para. 3.4^3.5.

⁸Ibid. at para 8.4.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid. at para 8.5.

should react to an assault is a form of stereotyping. To presume that rape victims should physically resist rape and other forms of sexual assault at every opportunity as the Committee reasoned perpetuates that stereotypical belief.¹¹ The majority therefore concluded that the Philippines had violated its obligations under Articles 2(f) and 5(a) of CEDAW to eliminate wrongful gender stereotyping, as well as its obligation under Article 2(c) to provide effective remedies. It recommended that the Philippines adopt a wide range of measures, including to ensure ‘that all legal procedures in cases involving crimes of rape and other sexual offenses are impartial and fair, and not affected by prejudices or stereotypical gender notions’.¹²

CEDAW’s decision has not only judged Judge Hofileña-Europa; it also judged that gender stereotyping is wrong. Its decision, however, needs more parsing and interpretation from the perspective of culture study. This latter step is necessary in order to expose more the character, shape, interconnections, and ‘career’ of gender stereotyping in society.

Stereotypes and prejudices

Stereotypes as mental residents move and operate through various channels of learning: through primary and secondary interaction, moral formation, and obligatory practices and rituals perpetuated by institutions like the family, school, and religion.

Stereotypes are products of cognitive development.¹³ People have the aptitude to learn social categories and stereotypes as they are naturally embedded in social groups. The aptitude and the learning process enable them to understand human relations and adopt certain categories. Thus, resulting to internalization and assimilation of stereotypical notions, making them highly resistant to change. Yet, learning process does not happen in a vacuum. Knowledge is handed-down especially through significant others—from parents, from neighbors, from peers, and from the wider public. Added to this is the influence of ‘surrogate parents’ in the home—media and all forms of access to it. Film, television,

¹¹Ibid. at para 8.9(b).

¹²Karen TayagVertido v The Philippines, supra n 2 at paras 3.1^3.17.

¹³R. Bigler, R., & L. Liben, “Cognitive mechanisms in children’s gender stereotyping: Theoretical and educational implications of a cognitive-based intervention,” *Child Development* 63 (1992): 1351–1363.

and the Web not only advertise and reinforce stereotypes, but more important, they provide us with the relevant social norms (formative and transformative)—which we can and cannot like. For example, acceptance or non-acceptance of gays and lesbians has gone into a normative progression due in part to mainstream media.

Furthermore, stereotypes also stem from the existing distributions of the roles played by social category members, for instance men and women. This idea is also consistent with the fact that stereotypes change as a result of changes in social context and the consequent shifting of relationships, roles, and identities. In many cases, however, the roles are determined by the stereotypes, too—so our expectations come from our perceptions of existing social conditions, but the expectations may also create these conditions.

Gender stereotyping also functions as a mental facility for description and evaluation of identities, roles, and behavior. When an idea becomes a common mental pattern among citizens in a society, it puts pressure on the whole society and its succeeding generations to consistently use and, thus, reproduce that idea. People's attitudes and behavior will subsequently be marked by what has become a shared and obligatory mindset. Thus, the customary judgment of woman as weak could direct every form of description and judgment of women via the lens of female inferiority or male superiority. Because cultural units do not operate in isolation, gender stereotyping will also configure other areas of life and could even penetrate and interlock with the foundational ideas and discourses of public institutions. It is in the pervasive and broadened sense that cultural stereotyping penetrates every personal process or project of integration; especially as more and more people and places are shaped by the requirements of culture that has become every person's second-nature.

The use and exertion of stereotypical knowledge serve to reinforce social integration, which thus becomes a value for citizens. Repeating stereotypical knowledge is an exercise that contributes to social acceptance and reinforcement of one's place in society. Thus, one of the most effective ways of social control is the practice of stereotyping. In other words, gender

stereotyping serves the social order with its repetitive judgments that legitimize male and female social positions. It is no wonder that even the courts would resort to stereotyping, albeit wittingly or unwittingly, because it is not just convenient, but it also actually serves to protect the social order that is founded precisely on gender bias.

Stereotyping: Its structures in a Cultural System

A cultural unit (like a stereotype) has to be clearly understood as connected to other elements within the whole culture; yet such connections determine the character of the whole. This connection is understood as structural—a concept that puts emphasis on interconnections within the whole cultural system, which affect or influence human behavior. Thus, the whole interconnected network of various cultural elements is a pattern that forms a structure. A cultural unit fulfills a purpose and is intertwined with other cultural units that form (structural) relations. Being in the loop, structures could create distinctive effects on the cultural system's operations. System, thus, depends on the stable patterning of relations to maintain its normal operations, Destabilized patterns (like heterosexuality challenged by homosexuality) will definitely appear to produce destabilizing and restructuring qualities in the whole cultural system.

Gender stereotyping is a cultural/structural unit that is maintained and reproduced in everyday life and a product of our patriarchal system at work in our society. Certain categories attached to the notion of 'women' could create a pattern of good or harm. For example, traditionally, women are relegated to home, bed, and kitchen. The categories may be well-meaning for it puts the classic role of women as the basis of ideal female behavior and action. Wives particularly, are supposed to be the light of the home, and thus, is pegged as home-maker which is construed as fulfilling duties pertinent to motherhood: best at nurturing, caring and cooking. This is gender stereotyping that has both positive and negative effects on women and the community as a whole. Affirming and more so, imposing these traditional roles to women is perpetuating (symbolic) power and gender stereotyping. This "invisible" power inevitably has invisible and visible effects (or

negative consequences), which may take a toll on male/female ideals and standards because they shape both the male and female psyche.

What can be more conflicting is how this gender stereotypes affect children's notion of duty. This is gleaned from certain demands kids do not often articulate but normally expect from their parents. Children's perception of 'good parents' may be influenced by the roles they expect parents play: father as provider and mother as a homemaker. Admittedly or not, it can have a ricocheting effect, which begins from personal notion of home to human relations and further, to socio-cultural expectations. But, what if such qualities are not present in a woman? Would a woman be labeled 'unfit' as a mother and wife? Would a man who is second-best at providing or earns less than a working mother ought not to be called a 'husband' much less, a 'father'? Labels have implicit and far-reaching effects. Even a child who begins to categorize a parent 'good' or 'bad' weave similar patterns of gender stereotypes. Fact is, no matter the inadequacy in one or some of the prescribed qualities of mother/father it does not render a parent unfit to be in every sense, a mother/father. Having on the other hand these qualities, could be qualities that people, (regardless if these are women or men) can capitalize on in their pursuit of their dreams and ideals. Labeling and gender stereotypes create invisible effects on people and society, which are difficult to uproot. Such interconnected ways of thinking and patterns of behavior could be categorized as structures of evil. Though stereotypical notions are sometimes neutral they weave patterns of thoughts and behavior which have unintended negative effects.

The Harm that Stereotyping Brings About

Gender stereotyping does not just facilitate mental operations; it also brings about judgments that cause harm to people. In other words, some people are victimized, like Vertido, because of the application and use of gender stereotypes. In moral-theological language, gender stereotyping produces sin and evil effects. The problem with this interpretation about gender stereotyping as sin is that we do not have perpetrators who clearly carry in their

consciences the element of malice, which the language of personal sin requires. We could only discern the cultural reproduction and the evil effects, but not the malicious intentions of, say, court justices, to bring harm to women. We have here what theologians have labeled as ‘structural sin’. In the analysis of Dagmang,¹⁴ he limits the meaning of structural sin to refer to “the deep/ideational and surface/operational structures which bring about unintended negative effects to society, that is, minus structural sin viewed either as malicious use of structures or evil structures producing evil effects.” Sr. Mary John Mananzan, OSB, also echoes the problematic reality of patriarchy in the Church by tracing the historical roots of male bias against women in religion, beginning with the writing of the Bible by men writers, its interpretation by men and its being taught for the last 2,000 years by men. The result of this monopoly, which is over writing and interpreting and teaching, has led to the use of the Bible “to justify the subordination and discrimination of women,” and yet, women, she quipped, not men are the most constant believers in the Bible or God’s word.”¹⁵

By naming the structure that long bound patriarchy to the Church, brought to the fore the stereotypes that have to be broken down. Mananzan replied in an interview: “... the church should, in fact, work on getting rid of its patriarchal values and structures. It will then become a more compassionate, more Christ-like church. And maybe by reclaiming what we have lost, we will contribute to this endeavor of de-patriarchalizing our church.”¹⁶

As deep/ideational structures, patriarchy and gender stereotyping, thus, stem from a culture that instills in thought, appreciation, and action—a kind of subservience or subordination to male thought. In the case of Vertido, it is thus evident, that even if a judge does not bear in her mind any intent to do harm, the mere application of a mental habit of stereotyping already produces harm and injury to individuals. Judge Europa’s acquittal of Custodio is a practice of her reliance on jurisprudence that has determined her decision that the evidences are insufficient

¹⁴Ferdinand D. Dagmang, “Structures and Structural Sin,” *Hapag* 2/11 (2005): 77-112.

¹⁵Sr. Mary John Mananzan, OSB *Challenges to the inner room: Selected essays and speeches on women* (Manila: Institute of Women’s Studies, St. Scholastica’s College, 1998).

¹⁶Ma. Ceres P. Doyo, Q & A with Sr. Mary John Mananzan, documenting Philippine church history from the viewpoint of the ‘vanquished’ retrieved from <http://globalsistersreport.org/blog/q/trends/q-sr-mary-john-mananzan-documenting-philippine-church-history-viewpoint-vanquished/> October 9, 2017.

to declare that the accused is guilty beyond reasonable doubt. The credibility of the victim is marred by traditional gender stereotypical notions that rape victims should do everything in their power to escape and that old males can be easily overcome. Such notions are biases that do not take into consideration other factors that can influence women's reaction to different forms of assault. Vertido's case exhibits trauma which has myriad expressions like traumatizing shock and temporary inability to move or speak; it can be so strong that victims are unable to tell if the whole incident is surreal or real or refuse to believe it's actually happening. Thus, the stereotypical notion of a learned judge could victimize again the rape victim through her expectations/standards imposed on the victim. Judge Europa is oblivious of the effects of her prejudice/gender stereotyping yet the harm is doubled by her inability to make a better judgment of the case at hand. The prejudice about rape victims and the assumption of non-guilt of the accused create patterns of thought and behavior that constitute a structural sin. There are invisible effects of her judgment, like its symbolic effects on women, her fellow judges, men and cultural values—imposition and reinforcement of power pre-established in cultural structures. Invisible effects could be more severe and damaging, notwithstanding the fact that victims could still cope with the harrowing visible effects of the courts' decisions.

The biased judgment of Judge Hofileña-Europa becomes sinful because her act constituted a violation and distortion of woman's intrinsic value. This may be problematic in this way of understanding sin. The fact that there is no malice leaves the perpetrating agent without guilt. Yet, the evil effect is no longer regarded as 'evil' since it is part of the structural sin continuum that serves as a scaffolding for every mental and affective judgment that a culture-bearer does—making this judgment just 'natural' and, thus, acceptable (because it is obligatory).

Gender stereotyping thus, becomes a vicious cycle: another judge, out of the pool of jurisprudence may decide a similar case and uphold Hofileña-Europa's decision while women who have been victimized may cease to report incidents of rape because the mental pattern has become a judgment paradigm for rape cases—the accused can just walk free if a woman does not resist much

less, overcome rape assaults. The more invisible effects create far more negative effects on the person, community and socio cultural values/norms. Structures of sin have been affirmed and are buried deeply in the personal and communitarian unconscious, where norms and standards of a culture are formidably stabilized.

Dismantling Gender Stereotyping

Vertido's case is an attempt to dismantle the structures that long upheld a culture where hegemonic masculinity constructed the thought patterns of Filipinos. It's an act of defiance to sexism that long silenced women. In a Filipino culture that promotes a sharp contrast of obedience and independence, as well as paradoxes of being a covertly matriarchal and overtly patriarchal culture, a fight against oppressive forces in place even in jurisprudence can break the habits of apathy and indifference. In the case of Vertido we find the courage to break the vicious cycle of abuse. While it is true that many women are now educated and the number of literacy of women is even greater than men's, the equality of both sexes needs to be strongly infused among the younger generations and the feminized tasks need to be equally distributed to both sexes. Just as structures of sin are built over time, so too, the structures of equality and justice. Structures of gender stereotyping have to be dismantled by building structures of equality in the home, school, community and society. Filipino women have carved their rightful place in society but structures of male hegemonic thought patterns (women, are no exemption) may be blocking its growth. Vertido's case is not an isolated case. It may be a daily situation of poor women who are forced to obey and to suffer in silence by a culture that undermines the intelligence and capacity of a woman. Vertido's courage can empower women to go against the tide—to go against oppressive structures.

Nikolaus Wandinger,¹⁷ treats structural sin as a concrete instance of original sin, referring to it as “as the ensuing consequences from that first act of sinning for the rest of humankind, that is our nature's being marred by original sin, the *peccatum originale originatum*” (referring to the second aspect of original

¹⁷Nikolaus Wandinger, “Where should one search for “Original Sin”? Dialogue between Theology, Philosophy, and Science, retrieved from <http://theol.uibk.ac.at/leseraum/artikel/342.html>.

sin; the first aspect of original sin being the first sin committed by the first humans has the technical term *peccatum originale originans*). “This state of primordial sinfulness is more consistent with the meaning of structures viewed from a structuralist form of analysis.”¹⁸ This way of interpreting structural sin (gender stereotyping in this case) does not immediately deal with malice but with primordial or deep-seated sinfulness—a predicament of corrupt, stained, frayed, fragmented, disintegrated, un-whole, or broken humanity. Being marred by this soul-defining sinfulness, people suffer from limited freedom which does carry with it ample amount of brokenness and alienating dispositions. Wandinger writes:

*We are aware today that oftentimes we are not our own masters, that we might want to be better but are unable to, we might have meant well but caused damage instead, we might act in an evil way, yet claim that we are not to blame but someone else who made us the way we are. And these are not just excuses or pretexts. There are objective causal relations between us and our ancestry that limit - and sometimes remove - our ability to choose, or to act according to our choices. This is basically, what the consequences of original sin are in our lives.*¹⁹

Furthermore, Pope John Paul II, condemned the structures of sin in his encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*,²⁰ stating that “If the present situation can be attributed to difficulties of various kinds, it is not out of place to speak of “structures of sin,” which. . . are rooted in personal sin and thus, always linked to the concrete acts of individuals who introduce these structures, consolidate them, and make them difficult to remove. He explained that if these structures grow stronger, they become widespread and can become sources of other sins, bringing forth unexpected influence and impact on the lives of the poor. Thus, to destroy these obstacles to a meaningful life is a mandate given to every person.

There is a prophetic role that women play in dismantling powerful sinful structures. They can be voices of struggles and echoes for equality and liberation. These have been recurrent themes in the writings of Mary John Mananzan and Teresa Dagdag²¹

¹⁸Dagmang, “Structures and Structural Sin.”

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Pope John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 36.

²¹Theresa Dagdag “Emerging Theology in the Philippines Today” in *Currents in Philippine*

who clamor for re-rooting the Gospel message in the genuine and enduring Filipino values as women work for incarnating empathy (*malasakit*). Women who suffer and translate pain into caring, into opportunities to denounce sinful structures, can reimage a Jesus, who truly liberates everyone—who never became a tyrant or a ruler—but a servant, a savior, and liberator of the poorest. Structures of sin can be transformed into, with women on the lead, structures of caring and equality.

Conclusion

Structural sin is a perpetuation of the presence of original sin in our lives. Structural sin is not alien to original sin. It is in fact, profoundly linked with sinfulness, which has far-reaching effects. Thus, when sinful actions become accepted by a society, structures of sin can emerge, which tend to push others toward committing sinful acts.

Gender stereotyping is a structural sin that produces negative thought patterns and behaviors of people. It has far-reaching effects because it becomes deeply embedded in a person's psyche. Stereotypes change as a result of changes in social context and the consequent shifting of relationships, roles, and identities. Since in many cases, roles are determined by the stereotypes,—so human expectations come from perceptions of existing social conditions, which at the same time, create these conditions. This is why the structures of sin are dangerous---they are built by indifference and inaction, synonymous to sins that go unchecked.

Vertido's case has unraveled the evil effects of gender stereotypes. In a sense, she showed that a lone woman could 'hold the bull by the horn' and face it head-on. She knew the link that perceptions have to judgment and how it could generate further gender-biased action. Hence, she fought the hard battle by denouncing gender stereotypes. Her story of courage brought to the fore women subordination and unjust legal system that still pervades the court of law. Through her seeming unsuccessful battle with gender stereotyping, structures of evil are unmasked and overcome.

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