

Abortion Shame, Abortion Shaming, and the Reintegrative Mercy of God (*Evangelium Vitae* §99)

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Introduction

THE “1 IN 3” CAMPAIGN is a grassroots movement that is trying to “end the stigma and shame women are made to feel about abortion” by encouraging the one in three women who will have an abortion in her lifetime in the United States to tell their abortion stories, “on our own terms.”¹ The organizers of the movement wish “to harness the power of storytelling to engage and inspire action and strengthen support for abortion access” that will “help create a more enabling cultural environment for the policy and legal work of the abortion rights movement.” The campaign website highlights numerous abortion stories in both English and Spanish, including the story of sixty-year-old Mari, who aborted two of her seven pregnancies, and that of Sherry, who had her abortion so that she could go to college. Sherry ends her narrative by echoing the mantra of the “1 in 3” campaign: “The stigma that shrouds abortion and the shame and embarrassment that women are forced to endure needs to stop. Abortion must remain a safe and legal part of every woman’s medical resources.”²

How should pro-lifers, especially pro-lifers who have religious faith, respond to the “1 in 3” campaign and other contemporary movements

¹ For details, see their website: <http://www.1in3campaign.org/about>.

² “Written Stories,” The 1 in 3 campaign, <http://www.1in3campaign.org/written-stories/2970>.

that are trying to destigmatize abortion? To begin to answer this question, this essay will open with descriptions of the psychology of shame as a “self-conscious” emotion, and of the sociology of shaming as a form of social control and punishment. We will then turn to a discussion of the morality of shame and of shaming by comparing four philosophical accounts of these phenomena: the classical accounts of Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas and the more contemporary narratives of John Rawls and Martha Nussbaum. Next, we will move specifically to abortion shame and abortion shaming. What do the empirical studies reveal about how post-abortive women in the United States deal with both? Finally, we will conclude by comparing the responses to abortion shame proposed by the pro-abortion movement represented by the “1 in 3” campaign and the contrasting paradigm best found in Pope St. John Paul II’s great encyclical on the gospel of life, *Evangelium Vitae*, whose twentieth anniversary we are celebrating this year. In *Evangelium Vitae* §99, in my view, the most important paragraph of the papal letter, Pope St. John Paul II addresses women who have had an abortion and addresses their shame. He reveals that only the reintegrative mercy of God can heal the wounds of the post-abortive heart.

The Psychology of Shame

In contemporary psychology, shame is understood to be a “self-conscious emotion” that is often defined by distinguishing it from guilt; the former emotion engages one’s sense of self, while the latter does not.³ In an influential account that has been supported by much empirical work in psychology, Helen Block Lewis made the distinction between shame and guilt as follows:

The experience of shame is directly about the *self*, which is the focus of evaluation. In guilt, the self is not the central object of negative evaluation, but rather the *thing* done or undone is the focus. In guilt, the self is negatively evaluated in connection with something but is not itself the focus of the experience.⁴

³ For discussion and extensive citations of the relevant primary literature, see the following reviews: June Price Tangney, “How Does Guilt Differ from Shame?” in *Guilt and Children*, ed. Jane Bybee (San Diego: Academic Press, 1998), 1–17; Nancy Eisenberg, “Emotion, Regulation, and Moral Development,” *Annual Review of Psychology* 51 (2000): 665–697; and June Price Tangney, Jeff Stuewig, and Debra J. Mashek, “Moral Emotions and Moral Behavior,” *Annual Review of Psychology* 58 (2007): 345–372.

⁴ Helen Block Lewis, *Shame and Guilt in Neurosis* (New York: International

Shame involves a critical judgment of oneself (“I am a bad person”), while guilt involves a critical judgment of one’s actions (“I did *something bad*”). Not surprisingly, according to Lewis, these two emotions are experienced differently. Shame is an intensely painful emotion that is accompanied by a sense of worthlessness and powerlessness. The shamed individual feels small, exposed, vulnerable, and self-consciously concerned that others will discover that he is inferior, defective, and inadequate. He is disgusted with himself. Shame often motivates a defensive reaction where the individual wants to escape, hide, deny responsibility, or blame others.

In contrast, guilt is relatively less painful because, here, the primary concern is with one’s behavior rather than with one’s identity. It is accompanied by a sense of remorse, regret, and anxiety regarding what one has done. Here, the guilt-ridden individual becomes preoccupied with his specific transgression and is concerned about how he could possibly undo his deed and any untoward effects that it may have caused to himself or to others. Guilt often motivates reparative action as the individual tries to repair the damage he has done.

Several psychologists have noted that shame appears to be a human universal because it leads to postural signs of deference and self-concealment—head tilted downward with slumped shoulders—that appear to be cross-cultural and innate.⁵ Even athletes who have been blind since birth manifest nonverbal shame display, such as hiding of the face and narrowing of the chest, when they are defeated.⁶ Thus, psychologists have proposed that shame is an evolved adaptive response in our species for at least two reasons. First, they suggest that shame serves as a social signal of appeasement that benefits the group. When individuals violate social norms, they risk unpleasant and even potentially dangerous reactions from their peers, including anger and retaliation. However, these

Universities Press, 1971), 30. For a comprehensive overview of the empirical research that has supported Lewis’s thesis, see J.P. Tangney and R. Dearing, *Shame and Guilt* (New York: Guilford, 2002). More recently, Jessica L. Tracy and Richard W. Robins have proposed a reformulated account of the role of the self in the self-conscious emotions (“Putting the Self Into Self-Conscious Emotions: A Theoretical Model,” *Psychological Inquiry* 15 [2004]: 103–125).

⁵ Jason P. Martens, Jessica L. Tracy, and Azim F. Shariff, “Status Signals: Adaptive Benefits of Displaying and Observing the Nonverbal Expressions of Pride and Shame,” *Cognition and Emotion* 26 (2012): 390–406.

⁶ J.L. Tracy and D. Matsumoto, “The Spontaneous Expression of Pride and Shame: Evidence for Biologically Innate Nonverbal Displays,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences USA* 105 (2008): 11655–11660.

social transgressors can minimize the severity of these negative responses by signaling, via shame display, that they recognize and regret their behavior. In support of this adaptionist explanation, one study revealed that a defendant who showed embarrassment and shame in one mock trial received two-thirds of the prison sentence and was nominated for parole more than a year earlier than he was in other mock trials where he manifested neutral behavior or contempt.⁷ Next, psychologists propose that shame, or at least the fear of it, facilitates group dynamics. In another study, undergraduate participants who were threatened with being shamed were more willing to cooperate with others in anonymous six-player public goods experiments than those who did not face the same threat.⁸ *In toto*, these empirical results suggest that shame benefits the social collective by preserving the long-term survival not only of individuals but also of the interpersonal relationships that anchor human communities.⁹

Strikingly, however, there is also data that suggests that shame can be detrimental to the shamed individual. Shame-prone individuals are more likely to experience intense anger and to express that anger in destructive ways, including physical, verbal, and symbolic aggression, both directly and indirectly.¹⁰ Feelings of shame have also been linked to behaviors that disrupt the individual's ability to form empathic connections with others.¹¹ This is not surprising, since shame inherently moves the individual to focus on self rather than on neighbor. Significantly, people who experience shame frequently are also more vulnerable to other psycho-

⁷ For details, see Dacher Keltner, Randall C. Young, and Brenda N. Buswell, "Appeasement in Human Emotion, Social Practice, and Personality," *Aggressive Behavior* 23 (1997): 359–374.

⁸ Jennifer Jacquet, Christopher Hauert, Arne Traulsen, and Manfred Milinski, "Shame and Honor Drive Cooperation," *Biology Letters* 7 (2011): 899–901.

⁹ Klaus Jaffe, "Evolution of Shame as an Adaptation to Social Punishment and its Contribution to Social Cohesiveness," *Complexity* 14 (2008): 46–52.

¹⁰ Bernice Andrews, Chris R. Brewin, Suzanna Rose, and Marilyn Kirk, "Predicting PTSD Symptoms in Victims of Violent Crime: The Role of Shame, Anger, and Childhood Abuse," *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 109 (2000): 69–73; Felicity W.K. Harper and Ileana Arias, "The Role of Shame in Predicting Adult Anger and Depressive Symptoms Among Victims of Child Psychological Maltreatment," *Journal of Family Violence* 19 (2004): 359–367; David S. Bennett, Margaret W. Sullivan, and Michael Lewis, "Young Children's Adjustment as a Function of Maltreatment, Shame, and Anger," *Child Maltreatment* 10 (2005): 311–323.

¹¹ Karen P. Leith and Roy F. Baumeister, "Empathy, Shame, Guilt, and Narratives of Interpersonal Conflicts: Guilt-Prone People are Better at Perspective Taking," *Journal of Personality* 66 (1998): 1–37.

logical stresses, and proneness to shame is linked to a wide variety of psychological pathologies, including low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and suicidal ideation.¹² Finally, it is important to acknowledge that the empirical findings that link shame to poor mental health outcomes may only represent the experience of subjects raised in an individualistic (i.e., Western) culture, rather than in a collectivistic (i.e., Eastern) one, and as such, may be culturally biased.¹³

The Sociology of Shaming

Where shame is often defined by contrasting it with guilt, shaming can be understood best by distinguishing it from blaming. Blaming involves telling someone that he has done something bad, while shaming involves telling someone, directly or indirectly, that *he* is bad, often in a public and humiliating manner, because he has violated some social norm. Shaming is constituted by intentional acts that aim at disgracing or dishonoring another person.

Shaming has been used since time immemorial as a means of social control and punishment. Crucifixion, for example, was arguably the most shameful way to die in the Roman Empire. Similarly, recusant Catholic priests were publicly hanged in Elizabethan England in front of large crowds of onlookers to shame them and to discourage others from following in their footsteps. However, as Michel Foucault narrates in his *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, public-shaming punishments, including public floggings, brandings, and executions, gradually disappeared in the West during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹⁴ Nonetheless, judges in the United States continue to hand out

¹² For details and citations of the literature, see Tangney and Dearing, *Shame and Guilt*, 134–137; Tangney, Stuewig, and Mashek, “Moral Emotions and Moral Behavior,” 352–354; and Sally S. Dickerson, Tara L. Gruenewald, and Margaret E. Kemeny, “When the Social Self is Threatened: Shame, Physiology, and Health,” *Journal of Physiology* 72 (2004): 1191–1216.

¹³ Ying Wong and Jeanne Tsai, “Cultural Models of Shame and Guilt,” in *The Self-Conscious Emotions: Theory and Research*, ed. Jessica L. Tracy, Richard W. Robins, and June Price Tangney (New York: Guilford Press, 2007), 209–223. My own anecdotal experience as a Filipino-American would suggest that shame is not as detrimental to the mental health of individuals within collectivistic cultures, not only because these societies have a more buffered sense of self that does not involve a “naked” individual, but also because they have numerous practices involving family and friends that allow the shamed person to regain “face” after he has transgressed social norms.

¹⁴ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977).

public-shaming sentences for low-level offenders, including one judge in Ohio who ordered a woman who drove on a sidewalk to avoid a school bus to wear a sign saying, "Only an idiot drives on the sidewalk to avoid a school bus."¹⁵

Contemporary sociologists distinguish two types of shaming first described by John Braithwaite.¹⁶ Disintegrative shaming occurs when the wrongdoer is punished in such a way that he, as a person, is stigmatized, rejected, or ostracized from his community. Hester Prynne, the protagonist in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, experienced this kind of shaming in her Puritan town. However, these shame punishments create the risk of a rebellious reaction and the perpetuation of illicit behavior. As Braithwaite explains it, "stigmatization by the family, the school, and other sources of social control increases the attraction of outcasts to subcultural groups which provide social support for crime, and weakens control by the former against criminal activities."¹⁷ Consider the behavior of juvenile offenders who join gangs of other disenfranchised youths when they perceive that they have been ostracized from society.

In contrast, reintegrative shaming involves expressions of community disapproval of the social transgression that are accompanied by social indications of forgiveness and reacceptance. In this second type of shaming, the emphasis is placed upon the condemnation of the act, rather than the condemnation of the perpetrator. Note that reintegrative shaming is not and cannot be a simple whitewashing that covers up the misdemeanor, fault, or error. The transgression is still acknowledged for the transgression that it is, but the transgressor is not labeled by his transgression, so as to mitigate the impact of shaming on the individual. As the cliché goes, one is called to hate the sin but to love the sinner. As I will discuss below, only reintegrative shaming can be reconciled with the gospel of life.

Lastly, we need to acknowledge the reappearance in recent years of public shaming in a new incarnation, this time as the anonymous public shaming on the Internet that has destroyed the reputations of many a naïve individual.¹⁸ Shaming of this sort, especially shaming via social

¹⁵ For examples, see Matt Berman, "The 7 Craziest Public-Shaming Sentences Given by U.S. Judges," *National Journal*, September 9, 2013, <http://www.nationaljournal.com/pictures-video/the-7-craziest-public-shaming-sentences-given-by-u-s-judges-20130909>.

¹⁶ John Braithwaite, *Crime, Shame and Reintegration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹⁸ For details, see the blog post by Kristi Iannelli, "Public Shaming on the Inter-

media, has been condemned by some as one form of cyber-bullying. Nonetheless, it is striking that there have been recent calls to use public shaming as a nonviolent form of resistance to challenge institutions, corporations, and governments to change their policies and behaviors.¹⁹

The Morality of Shame and Shaming

The moral status of shame as a psychological trait has been debated for centuries. To illuminate the contours of the discussion, we consider here the philosophical analysis of two classical and two contemporary thinkers before concluding with a summary account that seeks to bring together the truest insights of each.

In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle defines a sense of shame as “a certain fear of disrepute.”²⁰ Elsewhere in the text, he acknowledges that this sense has a proper role in the life of the virtuous individual because it restrains him from doing things that are disgraceful: “For some things, one even ought to fear, and it is noble to do so and shameful not to—for example, disrepute, since he who fears this is decent and bashful, whereas he who does not is shameless.”²¹ However, though shame is praiseworthy, it is a passion that does not presuppose reasoned choice, and as such, falls short of being a virtue: “For a sense of shame is not a virtue, but he who is bashful is praised.”²²

Significantly, however, there are also texts in Aristotle where he suggests that shame is not a quality associated with the virtuous, because it is a response to a dishonorable action that is not befitting of a person of character. For example, at one point, he explains:

Shame does not belong to a decent person either, since it occurs in connection with base things (for one must not do such things). And whether these are shameful truly or shameful according to

net,” Huffington Post, March 11, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/lindsay-hoffman/public-shaming-on-the-internet_b_6849036.html. Also see the *New York Times* bestseller by Jon Ronson, *So You’ve Been Publicly Shamed* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2015).

¹⁹ As an instance of this, see the thought-provoking book by Jennifer Jacquet: *Is Shame Necessary?* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2015).

²⁰ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (hereafter, *NE*) iv 9.1128b11, trans. Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collins (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 88.

²¹ *NE* iii 6.1115a12–15 (Bartlett and Collins, 55).

²² *NE* ii 7.1108a32 (Bartlett and Collins, 38: As the translators acknowledge in note 24, the word they translated as “bashful” shares the same root as the word translated as “sense of shame”).

opinion makes no difference, for neither is to be done; as a result, one should not feel shame. And to be the sort of person to do anything shameful is the mark of someone base.²³

To reconcile these texts, we can propose that Aristotle is considering two different conceptions of shame in his writings.²⁴ There is a positive account of shame that sees it as a disposition that moves one to flee from a disgraceful act, what I will call “shame-before-the-act,” and then there is a negative account in which shame is the feeling that one experiences after one has performed a dishonorable act, what I will call “shame-after-the-act.” The former is laudable while the latter, which is the psychological reality that better corresponds to our contemporary psychological understanding of shame described above, is not.

St. Thomas Aquinas agrees with Aristotle when he defines shame (*verecundia*) as a praiseworthy passion whose object is fear of something dishonorable or disgraceful.²⁵ This conforms to Aristotle’s positive account of shame-before-the-act, which focuses upon the virtuous person’s interior experience *before* he ever performs a dishonorable act. Again, however, like Aristotle, Aquinas does acknowledge a second notion of shame-after-the-act that is a character trait that cannot be praised as a virtue is praised, because it presupposes a dishonorable act that does not befit a virtuous man.²⁶ Nonetheless, he does affirm that shame-after-the-act remains praiseworthy as a passion.

Also in the *Summa theologiae*, St. Thomas will expand upon Aristotle’s positive account of shame when he lists it as one of the integral parts of temperance, which is the cardinal virtue that regulates the human agent’s sensual appetites so that they are ordered according to right reason. (The

²³ *NE* iv 9.1128b22–27 (Bartlett and Collins, 88).

²⁴ For a similar reading of these Aristotelian texts, see Kristen Inglis, “Philosophical Virtue: In Defense of the Grand End,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. Roland Polansky (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 263–287, at 278–281.

²⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* (hereafter, *ST*) I-II.24.4.

²⁶ *ST* II-II.144.1: “Anything that is repugnant to perfection, even if it is good, falls short of the notion of virtue. Now shame is repugnant to perfection because it is the fear of something dishonorable, namely that which is disgraceful. . . . But one who is perfect according to virtue does not apprehend that which is disgraceful or dishonorable to do as being possible or arduous, i.e., as something difficult for him to avoid, nor does he actually do anything dishonorable, so as to fear disgrace. Thus, shame, properly speaking, is not a virtue for it falls short of the perfection of virtue.”

integral parts of a virtue are those things that need to come together well to realize a perfect act of that virtue in the same way that the integral parts of a house—a wall, a roof, and foundations—need to come together well to build a perfect house.)²⁷ According to Aquinas, the temperate man needs to have a healthy sensitivity to shame, what psychologists today would call a healthy shame-proneness, because this would repel him from base or dishonorable acts. Why is shame an integral part of temperance and not of the other virtues? Because in St. Thomas's view, intemperate acts are the most base and disgraceful—and thus the most likely to shame us—since they make us most like the irrational brutes that we are not, and least like the thinking persons that we should be.²⁸

With regards to a phenomenology of shame, in his response to the question of whether shame is about disgraceful action, Aquinas comments that there are two kinds of shame experience.²⁹ He distinguishes the shame that one feels when one refrains from disordered acts from the shame that comes while one is actually performing such acts. Citing St. Gregory of Nyssa, he then attributes “blushing” (*erubescitiam*) to the former, and “being shamed” (*verecundia*) to the latter. Since the evolutionarily conserved shame response described by psychologists follows rather than precedes the shameful act, it appears that it would correspond better to the latter shame experience than to the former.

Lastly, St. Thomas considers the role of other observers in the shame experience. He notes that observers who are perceived to be reputable are more effective at shaming for two reasons.³⁰ First, there are observers who are reputable because of their rectitude of judgment of the shamed as it is perceived by others, as in the case of wise and virtuous individuals. Second, there are observers who are reputable on account of their perceived expert knowledge of the relevant circumstances of the shamed person and his actions. Not surprisingly, therefore, Aquinas observes that we are more likely to be shamed by persons connected with us, since they are better acquainted with our deeds. Shaming is most effective when it is done by those whom we most respect as moral and social exemplars and those who know us best. Importantly, though St. Thomas never explicitly says this, it is clear from his writings that he believes that one of the responsibilities of the wise and virtuous man is to make those moral judgments that may shame others, so that they too will strive for

²⁷ Cf. *ST* II-II.48.1

²⁸ *ST* II-II.144.1 ad 2; cf. *ST* II-II.142.4.

²⁹ *ST* II-II.144.2.

³⁰ *ST* II-II.144.3.

virtue. Shame may not be virtuous for Aquinas, but shaming certainly is.

Moving forward eight hundred years, the twentieth century moral and political philosopher, John Rawls, characterizes shame “as the feeling that someone has when he experiences an injury to his self-respect or suffers a blow to his self-esteem.”³¹ According to Rawls, it is painful since it involves the loss of a prized good, self-respect, which he considers perhaps a person’s most important primary good for two reasons. First, it “includes his sense of his own value, his secure conviction that his conception of his good, his plan of life, is worth carrying out.”³² Second, it “implies a confidence in one’s ability, so far as it is within one’s power, to fulfill one’s intentions.”³³

Rawls proposes that there are two varieties of shame.³⁴ Natural shame involves an injury to our sense of self-esteem arising from a failure to exercise a certain excellence. A person’s plan of life determines those excellences that will cause him natural shame. Thus, for Rawls, a person who decided to develop his musical talent would feel natural shame if he failed to do so, while his neighbor with no musical ability who does not strive to be a musician would feel no shame if he were never able to sing or to play a musical instrument. In contrast, moral shame is experienced when we fail to attain those moral virtues that his plan of life requires and is framed to encourage. Significantly, for Rawls, these are often virtues that the individual regards as characteristics that both he and his associates want and expect in him. Actions and traits that reveal the absence of these characteristics and the awareness of this absence would likely occasion moral shame. Notice that, for Rawls, shame is good because both natural and moral shame are linked to the pursuit and achievement of human excellence. It motivates the citizen to do the good by preventing him from acting rashly or behaving stupidly.

Finally, in contrast to Rawls’ somewhat optimistic view, Martha Nussbaum is much more critical of shame, and particularly of its use as a form of social control. She defines shame as “a painful emotion responding to a sense of failure to attain some ideal state.”³⁵ For Nussbaum, shame is always about defect: “In shame, one feels inadequate, lacking some desired

³¹ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1999), 388.

³² *Ibid.*, 386.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 389–391.

³⁵ Martha C. Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 184.

type of completeness or perfection.”³⁶ It is an emotion that is derivative of a society’s account of what is normal for its citizens. She writes: “Each person in a society looks out at the world from the perspective of its norm of normalcy. And if what he or she sees when looking in the mirror does not conform to that norm, shame is the likely result.”³⁷ It is social abnormality, rather than dishonor, that is the object of shame, according to Nussbaum, though of course, there is a close association between honor and acceptable social norms of behavior. However, it is also important to note that she believes that shame has its roots in the earliest experiences of infants who discover their inadequacies. This primitive shame is experienced even before the child discovers that society has “norms of normalcy.” It is “connected primarily to the more primitive longing for wholeness and the sense that one ought rightly to be whole.”³⁸

So, is shame good or evil according to Nussbaum? She is clearly against the shaming of children: “My analysis suggests that any appeal to shame in connection with the child’s human weaknesses, whether bodily or mental, would be a very dangerous and potentially debilitating strategy.”³⁹ Or again, she states: “Where children are concerned, aspirational shame seems very dangerous, especially when the invitation to shame is issued by the parent.”⁴⁰ However, Nussbaum still thinks that shame may be good in children in a limited context: “If a child has a habit of being inattentive to the needs of others and persistently behaves in a grandiose, insensitive, or manipulative manner, guilt may not be enough. Shame, focused on a trait or pattern of behavior, seems morally appropriate.”⁴¹ In the same way, she affirms the value of shame in some adults: “Shame over laziness, lack of dedication, and other failure to pursue valuable personal ideals? For adults, such aspirational shame may be constructive, although it seems most appropriate that the invitation to feel shame come from oneself.”⁴² Once again, however, she is adamantly against the shaming of others: “Strangers have no business telling a person that he or she is not living up to some personal ideal, where that ideal is not part of the political culture.”⁴³ In the end, Nussbaum is critical of shaming because of the grave damage it risks for the vulnerable individual: “The

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 217.

³⁸ Ibid., 186.

³⁹ Ibid., 214.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 215.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

vulnerability to shame is part of the exposure of self that is involved in intimacy. . . . [T]his shows why it is so problematic to invite another to feel shame: there is great exposure and vulnerability in intimacy, and the potential for damage is very great.”⁴⁴

To conclude, let us consider the similarities and differences of these four somewhat disparate philosophical accounts. What do they reveal about shame and shaming? First, regarding their nature, there is a consensus that shame is the painful emotion that is experienced when we perceive that we have been disgraced or dishonored, and that shaming involves the actions of others that cause this painful emotion. However, there is some disagreement on the proper causal explanation for shame. The classical accounts discussed earlier focus on one’s actions as the primary cause of one’s shame as bringing about honor or dishonor to oneself, and shaming as the response of others to those shameful actions. This is certainly true because there are many times when we do things that bring shame to ourselves.⁴⁵ However, these classical accounts can also imply that we are always the primary cause of our shame, since it is our actions that trigger the shame response in ourselves and the shaming response in others. This is certainly not true. As the contemporary narratives rightly acknowledge, there are also times when individuals experience shame not about their actions, past, present, or future, but about their identities, as fat, short, black, gay, or even American or Christian. In fact, as Nussbaum emphasizes, the individual can be shamed without his doing anything truly dishonorable. Instead, this shame is triggered by the actions of others who want to make the person feel that he has failed to live up to some social expectation or ideal. Shame is caused not only by our own actions, but also by the independent actions of others.

Second, regarding their moral status the classical accounts contend that shame and shaming are good when they promote and protect virtue. This is a reasonable claim. However, in a way that the ancients do not, I stress that shame and shaming are good only when they are ordered towards an authentic good. Consider both the shaming that happens in a gang so that members commit murder, and the shaming that occurs when

⁴⁴ Ibid., 216.

⁴⁵ Notice that the classical view presupposes that the same action can cause *both* guilt and shame in the individual, a scenario that is not often considered today because contemporary psychologists make the strong distinction, discussed above, between guilt as sorrow for acts and shame as sorrow for one’s self. As I suggest below, in my pastoral experience, post-abortive women often experience both abortion guilt and abortion shame simultaneously.

defenders of marriage are labeled as bigoted homophobes so that they will change their views. These are occasions when shame and shaming are evil because they are being used to manipulate persons so that they either acquire vice or shun virtue. Neither kind of scenario is considered by the ancients, probably because they presuppose that honor is always ordered towards the good. In contrast, as the gang and defenders of marriage examples reveal, “honor” is sometimes associated with socially imposed norms that may actually be evil. In a manner not really imagined by the ancients, there are occasions when shame and shaming are used to promote vice and to discourage virtue. Therefore, like Nussbaum, I conclude that shame and shaming are not always praiseworthy. At times, they can in fact be shameful, and should therefore be condemned.

The Experience of Abortion Shame and Abortion Shaming in the United States

Several empirical studies have shown that many women in the United States experience shame after an abortion.⁴⁶ In a study of 442 women who were followed for two years after their abortions, Brenda Major and Richard Gramzow discovered that 47 percent of their patients believed that they would be looked down upon by others if people knew about their abortion, and that 45 percent thought that they needed to keep the abortion a secret from family and friends.⁴⁷ In a study exploring the views of single women who had had an unintended pregnancy, Marcia Ellison reported that all the women in the study who had had an abortion reported enduring social stigma.⁴⁸ They feared that they would be

⁴⁶ Though this essay will focus on the experience of post-abortive women in the United States, the following empirical studies, among others, show that abortion shame is transcultural and transnational: Meimanat Hosseini-Chavoshi, Mohammad Jalal Abbasi-Shavazi, Diana Glazebrook, and Peter McDonald, “Social and Psychological Consequences of Abortion in Iran,” *International Journal of Gynecology & Obstetrics* 118 (2012): S172–S177; Kristen M. Shellenberg, Lella Hessini, and Brooke A. Levandowski, “Developing a Scale to Measure Stigmatizing Attitudes and Beliefs About Women Who Have Abortions: Results from Ghana and Zambia,” *Women & Health* 54 (2014): 599–616; and Carrie Purcell, Shona Hilton, and Lisa McDaid, “The Stigmatisation of Abortion: a Qualitative Analysis of Print Media in Great Britain in 2010,” *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 16 (2014): 1141–1155.

⁴⁷ Brenda Major and Richard H. Gramzow, “Abortion as Stigma: Cognitive and Emotional Implications of Concealment,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 77 (1999): 735–754.

⁴⁸ Marcia A. Ellison, “Authoritative Knowledge and Single Women’s Unintentional Pregnancies, Abortions, Adoption, and Single Motherhood: Social Stigma and

judged as having made a selfish decision, especially by their parents and by their daughters. More recently, Littman et al. reported that all twenty-two participants in their pilot abortion stigma intervention program believed that the judgmental and negative attitudes of others were hurtful to women who have had abortions.⁴⁹ Finally, in a large study with 9,493 respondents who had had an abortion in the United States, Shellenberg and Tsui report that two-thirds of the women believed that people would look down on them if they knew about the abortion, and more than half thought that they needed to keep their abortion a secret from family and friends.⁵⁰ Interestingly, 17 percent of the respondents believed that their regular healthcare provider would treat them differently if he or she knew about the abortion. The four characteristics found to consistently predict stigma across ethnic groups in this national sample were the following: region of residence (women living in the Southern, Western, or Midwestern regions of the United States experienced more abortion shame than those living in the Northeast), number of previous abortions (the fewer the abortions, the more intense the shame), not having one's mind made up about the abortion at the time of making the appointment, and not informing the man involved with the pregnancy about the abortion.

As indicated above, a significant number of women who have had an abortion in the United States rarely talk about their abortions. This secrecy has often led to a vicious cycle where thought intrusion and suppression led to further psychological distress.⁵¹ Not surprisingly, therefore, there is data that suggests that some post-abortive women experience psychological distress after their abortions.⁵² However, social

Structural Violence," *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 17 (2003): 322–347.

⁴⁹ Lisa L. Littman, Christina Zarcadoolas, and Adam R. Jacobs, "Introducing Abortion Patients to a Culture of Support: A Pilot Study," *Archives of Women's Mental Health* 12 (2009): 419–431.

⁵⁰ Kristen M. Shellenberg and Amy O. Tsui, "Correlates of perceived and internalized Stigma among Abortion Patients in the USA: An Exploration by Race and Hispanic Ethnicity," *International Journal of Gynecology and Obstetrics* 118 (2012): S152–S159.

⁵¹ Major and Gramzow, "Abortion as stigma," 736. Also see Brenda Major, Josephine M. Zubek, M. Lynne Cooper, Catherine Cozzarelli, and Caroline Richards, "Mixed Messages: Implications of Social Conflict and Social Support within Close Relationships for Adjustment to a Stressful Life Event," *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology* 72 (1997): 1349–1363.

⁵² For discussion and citations of the literature, see Allyson Lipp, "Termination of Pregnancy: A Review of Psychological Effects on Women," *Nursing Times* 105 (2009): 26–29.

support that women receive from the immediate social networks, particularly from their partners, can mitigate the effects of abortion shame, and women who perceive that their community has supported their right to an abortion are less likely to feel shame about their choice.⁵³ Lastly, it is important to point out that the experience of abortion shame varies depending upon the individual woman's religious beliefs, cultural values, and economic status, and can be transitory or episodic, re-emerging throughout the life of a woman whenever she confronts anti-abortion rhetoric or whenever she is asked for her reproductive history by a health care provider.⁵⁴

In contrast to the growing number of studies that have identified and characterized abortion shame in patients in the United States, there have only been a few reports that have explored the etiology of this shame experience. Most substantially, in a conceptual paper, Alison Norris and others discuss five primary reasons for why they think abortion is stigmatized, including the violation of female ideals of sexuality and motherhood, technological developments like the 3D ultrasound that have facilitated the attribution of personhood to the fetus, legal restrictions that reinforce the perception that abortion is morally wrong, the belief that abortion is dirty or unhealthy,⁵⁵ and the successful use of stigma as a tool for anti-abortion advocacy.⁵⁶ Drawing on interviews with thirty-four American women who had had an abortion, Kate Cockrill and

⁵³ Anuradha Kumar, Leila Hessini, and Ellen M.H. Mitchell, "Conceptualizing Abortion Stigma," *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 11 (2009): 625–639.

⁵⁴ Alison Norris, Danielle Bessett, Julia R. Steinberg, Megan L. Kavanaugh, Silvia De Zordo, and Davida Becker, "Abortion Stigma: A Reconceptualization of Constituents, Causes, and Consequences," *Women's Health Issues* 21-3S (2011): S49–S54, at S50.

⁵⁵ It is incredible to me that this study, which highlights the prevalence of abortion stigma and shame in contemporary society, is dismissive of proposals that some post-abortive women undergo psychological distress akin to post-traumatic stress syndrome. The authors write: "Seven states have integrated groundless claims about the psychological effects of abortion (such as so-called post-abortion syndrome) into regulations. These institutional practices deny the normalcy of abortion as technique and as medical care and reinforce stigmatizing ideas that abortion is unhealthy" (S52). Is it not reasonable to think that the psychological distress experienced by some post-abortive women is actually linked to, caused by, and exacerbated by the abortion stigma they describe? My experience as a Project Rachel priest certainly confirms this proposal.

⁵⁶ Norris, et al., "Abortion Stigma," S49–S54. It should be noted that Norris et al. echo earlier proposals by Kumar, Hessini, and Mitchell ("Conceptualizing Abortion Stigma," 629–633).

Adina Nack have confirmed this conceptual analysis by describing a social-psychological framework for understanding abortion stigma and identifying the individual stigma management strategies women use to mitigate negative intrapersonal and interpersonal consequences of abortion shame.⁵⁷

Norris and her fellow researchers also identify secondary causes of abortion stigma. One surprising source is the abortion clinic itself. Often set apart from other health care facilities and surrounded by protesters, the clinic's institutional framework appears to validate the stigma that abortion is unlike other "normal" and "noncontroversial" medical procedures. It should not be surprising therefore that a recent abortion clinic with natural wood floors and plush upholstery has opened up in Washington, D.C. that describes itself as an abortion "spa," in attempt to de-stigmatize the procedure.⁵⁸ Its slogan: "Abortion.Yeah, we do that."

Finally, I would like to make three anecdotal comments about abortion shame and abortion shaming gleaned from my pastoral experience as a Project Rachel priest. Project Rachel is the Catholic Church's outreach to women and men who struggle with grief and the other aftereffects of abortion.⁵⁹

First, several of the Project Rachel women I have counseled have indicated to me that they are struggling not only with abortion shame but also with abortion guilt. Yes, they feel shame that they could be the kind of woman who would take the life of her child, but they also feel guilty that they actually *did* take the life of their child. These are women who are seeking not only relief from shame but also forgiveness for their act. It is striking, but not surprising to me, that the published medical literature that describes abortion shame never considers the possibility that women could also be dealing with abortion guilt. For the health care providers who conduct and publish these studies, abortion is a necessary good that should never warrant feelings of guilt. In response, it will be important to initiate empirical studies to investigate the extent of abortion guilt and abortion regret in women who have had abortions to challenge

⁵⁷ Kate Cockrill and Adina Nack, "'I'm Not That Type of Person': Managing the Stigma of Having an Abortion," *Deviant Behavior* 34 (2013): 973–990.

⁵⁸ Sandhya Somashekhar, "New Spa-Like Abortion Clinic is Part of a Trend to De-Stigmatize the Procedure," *Washington Post*, March 30, 2015, http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/a-fluffy-robe-a-cup-of-tea-and-an-abortion/2015/03/29/0c55f17c-cbe7-11e4-8c54-ffb5ba6f2f69_story.html.

⁵⁹ For information on Project Rachel, see their website: <http://hopeafterabortion.com>.

the medical profession to address this dimension of the post-abortive experience.

Second, several of the Project Rachel women have observed that one of the sources of abortion shame and guilt not identified by the published studies is the mothering experience that comes with any “intended” or “wanted” pregnancy that follows the abortion. The authors of the studies described above fault developments in technology for facilitating the attribution of personhood to the fetus. As the Project Rachel women have acknowledged to me, however, the experience of a wanted pregnancy does the same. One woman described it this way: When your husband begins to speak to your fetal child and addresses her by name, and when both of you play Beethoven symphonies to her using pregnancy headphones that can attach to your baby bump, and then conclude that she obviously loved the music because she started to kick, it is natural to attribute personhood to this “other” *in utero*. But doing so immediately challenges one’s self-imposed belief that one’s previous pregnancy that ended in abortion did not involve a fetal person. This leads to cognitive dissonance that is uncomfortable, distressing, and painful. Abortion shame is triggered by motherhood regardless of whether or not one thinks it is just an idealized social construct.

Third, at least one of the published studies that looked at abortion stigma is asking for more comparative work to understand how abortion shame is similar to or different from cancer shame or gay shame.⁶⁰ As Norris correctly points out, American society has substantially de-stigmatized cancer and homosexuality in recent decades, and they would like to adopt and to apply the best practices that worked with these social movements to the destigmatization of abortion. As several Project Rachel women explained to me, however, abortion is a very different reality from either cancer or homosexuality, because it involves the termination of a human life. Their experience is that for many, if not most, Americans, abortion is understood to be a necessary evil that has to be tolerated in a pluralistic society, especially because of the existence of perceived ambiguous cases like abortion after rape or incest.⁶¹ In contrast, the vast majority of supporters of compassionate cancer care and same-sex marriage do

⁶⁰ Norris et al., “Abortion Stigma,” 552.

⁶¹ A Pew Research survey has revealed that nearly 50 percent of Americans believe that abortion is morally wrong, while only 15 percent think that it is morally acceptable. See “Abortion Viewed in Moral Terms: Fewer See Stem Cell Research and IVF as Moral Issues,” <http://www.pewforum.org/2013/08/15/abortion-viewed-in-moral-terms>.

not see their advocacy as promoting tolerance for a necessary evil. In fact, advocates see compassionate cancer care and marriage equality as necessary goods that must be embraced by an authentically liberal society. This distinction will make it much more difficult to de-stigmatize abortion. To accomplish their goal, pro-abortion advocates will have to convince society that abortion is a necessary good that does not involve the killing of a fetal person.⁶² As I explained above, however, this is a claim that is counter to the lived experience of the women and men who speak to, sing to, and play with their fetal child *in utero* during a wanted pregnancy that is brought to term.

Responding to Abortion Shame: The Pro-Abortion Paradigm

As I described in the opening paragraphs of this essay, there is a growing movement in the United States to de-stigmatize abortion.⁶³ In addition to the “1 in 3” campaign, other pro-abortion organizations like Faith Aloud⁶⁴ and Abortion Care Network⁶⁵ are working to eliminate abortion stigma and abortion shame. From their websites and the published medical literature, their paradigm includes three elements that are targeted to post-abortive women. First, these organizations are asking women to talk about their abortion experiences. There is empirical data that suggests that private conversations about abortion in a group setting can mitigate abortion stigma.⁶⁶ These groups also hope that the public telling of abortion stories will address the public misconception that abortion is uncommon.⁶⁷ Second, these organizations are creating support groups

⁶² As a recent example of an argument that proposes that abortion is a necessary good for society because it promotes the welfare of women, see Katha Pollitt, *Pro: Reclaiming Abortion Rights* (New York: Picador, 2014).

⁶³ For a description of the agenda for a program to de-stigmatize abortion, see Leila Hessini, “A Learning Agenda for Abortion Stigma: Recommendations from the Bellagio Expert Group Meeting,” *Women & Health* 54 (2014): 617–621.

⁶⁴ Faith Aloud is an organization of people of diverse religious beliefs and from different religious traditions that is trying to eliminate the religious stigma of abortion. For details, see their website: <http://www.faithaloud.org>.

⁶⁵ Abortion Care Network is a network of independent abortion providers, allies, and individuals who provide quality care for women. Its activities include “We are Good Women” videos, support for those considering abortion, efforts to de-stigmatize abortion, and ongoing training for quality abortion care. For details, see their website: <http://abortioncarenetwork.org>.

⁶⁶ Stephanie Herold, Katrina Kimport, and Kate Cockrill, “Women’s Private Conversations about Abortion: A Qualitative Study,” *Women & Health* 18 (2015): 1–17.

⁶⁷ Cornelia Dean, “Telling the Stories Behind the Abortions,” *New York Times*, November 6, 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/06/health/06abor.html>.

of abortion patients and abortion allies. Pilot studies suggest that these can help women deal with abortion shame.⁶⁸ Finally, they are providing supportive counseling to women who struggle with abortion stigma. For example, the EXHALE program has a free national talkline that provides emotional support, resources, and information to women who have had abortions.⁶⁹ EXHALE is committed to creating an environment where “each person’s unique experience with abortion is supported, respected, and free from stigma.”⁷⁰

To understand the *telos* of the pro-abortion movement’s program to de-stigmatize abortion, consider one vision of a society without abortion stigma.⁷¹ First, it imagines a world where the absence of abortion stigma and shame allows persons to speak freely about their abortion experiences:

We can imagine a world in which abortion stigma and shame do not taint the relationships of people with abortion experiences or abortion providers. People might talk regularly about their abortion experiences with co-workers, friends, and family members in the way they share their birth stories, adoption stories, and experiences with infertility and/or pregnancy loss. Abortion providers would freely discuss their work without fear of reproach or discomfort from family, friends, and/or society at large.⁷²

Next, it imagines a world where abortion is visible without negative repercussions:

Diverse stories featuring experiences with abortion would appear on regularly scripted and reality television, representing the complexity of abortion in reproduction and family life. . . . Finally, in-person interactions in book clubs, sororities, and religious communities would include conversations about abortion, allowing people without experience in abortion to hear the stories of their friends and neighbors.⁷³

⁶⁸ Littman, Zarcadoolas, and Jacobs, “Introducing Abortion Patients.”

⁶⁹ “After Abortion Talkline,” Exhale, <https://exhaleprovoice.org/after-abortion-talkline>.

⁷⁰ “Mission & Culture,” Exhale, <https://exhaleprovoice.org/mission-culture>.

⁷¹ Kate Cockrill, “Commentary: Imagine a World Without Abortion Stigma,” *Women & Health* 54 (2014): 662–665.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 663.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

Third, it imagines a society where abortion is integrated into the health care systems as just another normal medical intervention:

We will know that abortion is destigmatized when abortion care is fully integrated into the health care systems globally. This integration would include the presence of strong referral networks that enable women to make health decisions, the inclusion of abortion services into broader reproductive health care, and implementation of laws that reduce emotional harm and facilitate positive health outcomes for women. In a world without abortion stigma, the distinction between health care providers and “abortion providers” would have clinical but not social relevance.⁷⁴

Lastly, it imagines a world where disagreement over abortion is accepted as just part of the human condition:

A world without abortion stigma is one in which we neither ignore nor give authority to conflicting beliefs about abortion. Instead, we must build our capacity to accept conflict over abortion as normal and engage in conflict constructively and productively. When we treat our differences—and one another—with a degree of wonder, respect, and humility, we reduce stigma.⁷⁵

In the end, it is a vision of a culture where abortion is valued, not as a necessary evil, but as a necessary good that is embedded into the fabric of liberal society.

Though there is evidence that some of these strategies can mitigate shame among some post-abortive women,⁷⁶ my experience as a Project Rachel priest suggests that they will not be able to realize the complete vision of the pro-abortion movement summarized above for at least two reasons. First, as I explained earlier, the witness of Project Rachel women reveals that the experience of subsequent motherhood challenges the abortion-is-a-necessary-good narrative because it undermines the post-abortive woman’s conviction that abortion does not involve the taking of the life of at least a “potential” son or daughter. This trigger for cognitive dissonance will always be present regardless of all the pro-abortion messaging that is targeted to a post-abortive woman.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 664.

⁷⁶ For example, see Littman et al., “Introducing Abortion Patients,” 426–427.

Next, any strategy that includes the telling of abortion stories will also promote the rendering of the stories of women with abortion regret. These include the stories of women who were coerced into having their abortions by others, the stories of women who did not give themselves the chance to *really* think through their choice because they were overwhelmed at the time with the circumstances of their unwanted pregnancy, and the stories of women who have had a conversion of heart regarding what they had done. These are women who are prone to abortion regret, and as such are also most prone to the realization that abortion involves the taking of an innocent human life. The existence and experience of this group of post-abortive women will always be a strong rebuttal to this claim that abortion is good. Their personal narratives will always undermine the work of any social movement that seeks to replace abortion shame with abortion pride rather than with abortion healing.

Responding to Abortion Shame: The Pro-Life Paradigm of *Evangelium Vitae* §99

How, then, should pro-life advocates, especially pro-life advocates of faith, respond to these recent efforts to de-stigmatize abortion like the “1 in 3” campaign? First, given the known negative effects of shame on the health and wellbeing of people described above, I propose that we should acknowledge that it is a great good to help post-abortive women move beyond and through their chronic shame. However, as I have begun to do in this essay, I also think that it is important that we point out the limitations of the strategies put forward by the pro-abortion movement. These approaches will not bring about the profound healing that many post-abortive women are seeking. Instead, we have to advance the paradigm for the merciful approach of reintegrative shaming that can be found in *Evangelium Vitae* §99, which I consider to be the most important paragraph of Pope St. John Paul II’s great encyclical on the gospel of life, whose twentieth anniversary we are celebrating this year.

Recall that disintegrative shaming occurs when the wrongdoer is devalued, criticized, and punished in such a way that she is left feeling stigmatized, rejected, or ostracized from her community. This was the way associated with the Pharisees, who were quick to ostracize the woman caught in adultery (cf. Jn 8:1–11). In contrast, reintegrative shaming involves expressions of community disapproval of the social transgression, accompanied by social indications of forgiveness and reacceptance of the wrongdoer. This is the way of Jesus Christ, who acknowledged the sin that is adultery while reaffirming the dignity of the woman

herself, whom He would not condemn: “Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again” (Jn 8:11, RSV). It is the way of the Lord who acknowledged that his persecutors were doing evil things that called out for forgiveness, but who immediately sought to mitigate their culpability: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Lk 23:34).

In *Evangelium Vitae* §99, Pope St. John Paul II concludes this seminal paragraph with “a special word to women who have had an abortion.”⁷⁷ First, in this special word, he is clear that abortion remains a grave moral evil. The Pope writes: “Certainly what happened was and remains terribly wrong.” However, the Holy Father also acknowledges the great struggle and angst that often accompanies this tragic choice: “The Church is aware of the many factors which may have influenced your decision, and she does not doubt that in many cases it was a painful and even shattering decision.” It is acknowledgement that a post-abortive woman’s culpability may have been diminished by the circumstances of her choice. Like the Lord’s persecutors, she may not have known what she was doing! The Pope then reminds post-abortive women of their great dignity by reminding them that they are still loved by a God, who is the Father of Mercies and who invites them to experience the forgiveness that only He can give: “The wound in your heart may not yet have healed. . . . But do not give in to discouragement and do not lose hope. Try rather to understand what happened and face it honestly. If you have not already done so, give yourselves over with humility and trust to repentance. The Father of mercies is ready to give you his forgiveness and his peace in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.” Finally, John Paul II offers post-abortive women an opportunity to redeem themselves by giving them a specific apostolic task to promote the gospel of life:

As a result of your own painful experience, you can be among the most eloquent defenders of everyone’s right to life. Through your commitment to life, whether by accepting the birth of other children or by welcoming and caring for those most in need of someone to be close to them, you will become promoters of a new way of looking at human life.

In the end, the approach of appealing to God’s reintegrative mercy to heal abortion shame is superior to the strategies of the “1 in 3” campaign

⁷⁷ For the official English translation of this great papal encyclical, see the Vatican website: http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html.

and other pro-abortion movements like it because it acknowledges that abortion shame is linked—not always but often enough in some women—with abortion guilt. Abortion guilt can only be truly healed by forgiveness, while abortion shame can only be redeemed by conversion and mission.

Lastly, in a recent letter anticipating the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, Pope Francis acknowledged the tragic burden carried by women who have had abortions.⁷⁸ Strikingly, the Pope ends his letter with an invitation to priests to welcome post-abortive women during the Jubilee year using the approach of *Evangelium Vitae* §99: “May priests fulfill this great task by expressing words of genuine welcome combined with a reflection that explains the gravity of the sin committed, besides indicating a path of authentic conversion by which to obtain the true and generous forgiveness of the Father who renews all with his presence.”

Conclusion

Finally, I close with a word to my brother Catholic priests: Empirical studies have shown that abortion shame and abortion guilt are more common among women who hold religious beliefs than among the general population.⁷⁹ As such, I strongly recommend that every homily on abortion be always accompanied with an explicit acknowledgment of the dignity that all post-abortive women have because they remain daughters of the Father of Mercies. Every abortion homily should also include an explicit recognition, as Pope St. John Paul II himself included in *Evangelium Vitae*, that the tragic choice that is an abortion is often made under circumstances that can mitigate culpability. Every abortion homily should always end with a gentle invitation to approach the Sacrament of Mercy. In this way, homilies will be instruments not of disintegrative but of reintegrative shame. Post-abortive women are wounded persons whose shame and guilt are calling out for redemption and healing. They should not be condemned further because they have suffered enough. N&V

⁷⁸ Pope Francis, “Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis According to which an Indulgence Is Granted to the Faithful on The Occasion of The Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy,” September 1, 2015. Available at http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20150901_lettera-indulgenza-giubileo-misericordia.html.

⁷⁹ Kate Cockrill, Ushma D. Upadhyay, Janet Turan, and Diana Greene Foster, “The Stigma of Having an Abortion: Development of a Scale and Characteristics of Women Experiencing Abortion Stigma,” *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* 45 (2013): 79–88.