

# A Christian Approach to Ethics for the Vulnerable - Part 2

The [WOA principle](#) - an ethical system rooted in care and concern for the biblical triad of widows, orphans and aliens - drives the mission of Jesus.

He constantly moves to meet people on the margins of the social world of Galilee and Judea.

The lack of direct references to widows, orphans and aliens as vulnerable social groups does not negate our premise that the ethics of the gospel requires us to consider moral issues from the perspective of people in the borderlands.

Jesus consistently follows the two features of WOA ethics:

1. Moving to the margins to meet people.
2. Acting in ways that offer transformation and restore dignity.

Mark 1:40-45 shares about a leper who takes advantage of a deserted space to approach Jesus.

Jesus has the moral right to send him away with a blistering censure for his lack of personal responsibility and for threatening to spread the dreaded disease.

Instead, Jesus touches the man and cleanses him from his impurity. He instructs him to show his healing to the priest and to re-enter into the life of his family and community. The transformation is physical, emotional and social.

Matthew 11:2-6 and Luke 7:18-23 both narrate the story of John the Baptist, who is the prisoner of Herod Antipas, sending his followers to ask Jesus if he is the expected deliverer.

Jesus sends them back to John with the report that he has restored sight to the

blind, healed the lame, cleansed lepers, given hearing to the deaf, raised the dead and proclaimed good news to the poor. These kingdom actions allow people to re-enter their communities as active participants.

Luke 7:36-50 is an emotionally charged narrative in which a woman from beyond the margins of respectability intrudes into a Pharisee's home to wash the feet of Jesus with her tears.

She experiences the hostility of the host and his other guests, but Jesus treats her tenderly and responds with firmness to the others in the room. Her faith has saved her and she may go in peace. Her dignity is restored.

These examples, among many other texts that could be cited, illustrate the feature that Latin American liberation theology called the preferential priority of the poor.

The point was not that God loved the poor to the exclusion of those that enjoyed wealth and security.

Rather, the God of the Bible expresses his redemptive love and concern for the most vulnerable members of the community. Their needs are to be given importance.

We see this most clearly in a narrative of an unnamed woman whose story of being healed by Jesus is interwoven with the healing of the daughter of Jairus, a synagogue ruler (Mark 5:21-43).

In spite of the urgency of Jairus, Jesus stops to meet the woman who with fear tells him her whole story. Instead of censuring the woman for breaking the laws of purity, Jesus pronounces a blessing on her.

Jesus does not neglect Jairus and his daughter. However, priority is given to this poor woman who has been marginalized in her community.

An ethical challenge of our time is to identify those people that are vulnerable,

marginalized and powerless while not neglecting to care for those that are more secure.

Each context will be different. Strident voices are not always a reliable indicator. Often those who live in the borderlands are without voice and representation.

The late Polish sociologist and philosopher, Zygmunt Bauman, used the expression “the underclass” to describe people that are viewed as a social problem and deprived of meaningful roles in their communities.

They live in a “horrifying wilderness,” Bauman asserted, in communities where they are silenced, excluded and humiliated.

The words portray the painful experiences of people that struggle on the “outside” with few prospects for moving into a life of dignity, stability and security.

The horrifying wilderness of the vulnerable exists in our local communities and the nations of the world. The WOA of our time include:

- People that flee their homelands for reasons of persecution, poverty or environmental degradation and live as aliens in another land.
- Minimum-wage workers trying to balance two or three jobs.
- The sick, and in particular those without medical insurance.
- Victims of racial or religious prejudice.
- Indigenous people that hold on within a dominant settler culture.
- Women that live in fear of violence.
- People that depend on food banks for their nutrition.
- Hungry people in South Sudan, Yemen, Northern Nigeria and the Middle East.
- Survivors of mass violence that can never find freedom from the trauma of abuse, torture and the loss of loved ones.

This list is, of course, partial and incomplete. Each context requires analysis and

discussion. The voices of those in the borderlands need to be heard so that their experiences enter into public discourse.

The WOA approach to ethics requires that we move deliberately into the borderlands to meet with those who are vulnerable and excluded. The new relationships that we establish will enable us to see the world from the perspective of those who live on the underside.

Through the challenge of sharing friendships, meals and prayers, we will engage in mustard seed projects that give hope and dignity to the poor.

This approach seeks to restore the dignity of people created in the image of God and to enable them to contribute to the shared life of their communities.

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*Editor's note: This article is the second of a two-part series. It is adapted, with permission, from a multi-part series first appearing on King's [website](#). Part one is available [here](#).*