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To cite this article: Kristin Graff-Kallevåg & Sturla J. Stålsett (2021): Vulnerability in the arena of strength, Studia Theologica - Nordic Journal of Theology, DOI: [10.1080/0039338X.2021.1937313](https://doi.org/10.1080/0039338X.2021.1937313)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0039338X.2021.1937313>



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Published online: 25 Jun 2021.



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Vulnerability in the arena of strength

An analysis of Christian sermons in the context of international sporting events

Kristin Graff-Kallevåg and Sturla J. Stålsett*

There is an ambiguity inherent in vulnerability as a part of human life. Beyond mere limitation, recent interdisciplinary research shows that the condition of vulnerability also contains essential life-sustaining resources. This ambiguity is particularly interesting in the context of embodied competition, such as sports. The present study of Christian sermons held on the occasion of international sporting events explores to what degree and in what way the homilies mobilize religious resources to shed light on this ambivalence of vulnerability. The study shows that the sermons in general tend to confirm rather than challenge a conventional conceptualization of vulnerability as limitation. However, it also shows a critical potential, explicitly present in some of the sermons, of mobilizing theological and religious resources for providing a more multi-faceted and even affirmative interpretation of vulnerability in the context of competitive sports.

Introduction

Athletic competition is all about perfection and excellence; it is an arena of strength. What might experiences of human vulnerability mean in a sports setting, and how are religious practices and resources used to shed light on such experiences? In this article, we explore how interpretations of vulnerability in the context of competitive sports are negotiated in “sports sermons”, sermons occurring at the boundary between two different social worlds, church and athletic competition. This study

* The names are listed alphabetically. The authors contributed equally to this work

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places itself within a turn towards exploring theology and religion at “new places”, including a particular academic interest in how religion is *used*.¹ The study also contributes to the exploration of the relationship between sports and religion, a growing research area in the study of religion and theology.²

We proceed in three steps. First, we place the topic of vulnerability in the context of competitive sports, focusing primarily on some recent studies in sports psychology that describe vulnerability as a challenging topic in the world of competitive sports and as a concept open to different interpretations in this particular context. Second, drawing on recent developments in vulnerability studies in philosophy, theology and ethics, we present a continuum of differing conceptualisations of vulnerability, which subsequently, in a third and final step, will serve as a background for our analysis of three selected sports sermons. Our particular interest is to examine implicit and explicit interpretations of the ambiguous experience of bodily vulnerability the sermons offer in the context of competitive sports.

Vulnerability in sports

To compete in sports means to expose oneself to vulnerability.³ Vulnerability involves the inherent risk of every human being to be harmed, physically or psychologically.⁴ Athletes daily expose themselves to the risk of failure, harm and injury. They live in a high-pressure situation; “high-level competitive athletes participate in sports under conditions that present considerable physical and psychosocial stressors”.⁵

A study conducted in sports psychiatry by Hägglund et al. observes that when vulnerability is addressed in the context of competitive sports, it is most often seen as a problem: “Typically, vulnerability is regarded as a weakness, not least in sport cultures”.⁶ This makes vulnerability conflict with the athlete’s ideal: “If there is any character trait that is anathema to an athlete, it is that of weakness”.⁷ The ideal is to be strong.⁸ For competing athletes, sports performance is naturally a decisive dimension of their identity. As a consequence, this ideal of strength is also likely to influence their personal lives.⁹

In a study of how student athletes respond psychologically to injury, Margot Putukian, a specialist in athletic medicine, argues that the athletic ideal of strength may be an obstacle to seeking mental health care. Through her study, she shows that athletes often see psychological and physical obstacles as something they need to “push through” and

overcome – in personal as well as professional life. Hence, vulnerability is responded to as something they need to combat.¹⁰

Interestingly, Håggglund et al. hold that a one-sided understanding of vulnerability as weakness may not only hinder necessary help-seeking, it may also impair performance.¹¹ They claim that if athletes take a more encompassing view of vulnerability, seeing it as both weakness and strength, and seeing this as a part of both their own life and a shared humanity, this could open up for a non-judgmental awareness of the human condition. In turn, such awareness could enhance a higher degree of self-acceptance and, through this, increase personal and athletic strength: “The willingness to fully open up to the experience of vulnerability may also eventually be a critical step towards sustainability in high-performance settings”.¹² Against this backdrop, they conclude that there is an important “upside” to vulnerability in sports. Håggglund et al. seem to base this argument mainly on their reading of Brené Brown’s widely popular vulnerability lectures from the perspective of psychology.¹³ However, as we will show, this view may find broader and more substantial support in other interdisciplinary research on vulnerability.

Differing theoretical conceptualisations of vulnerability

Vulnerability has gained renewed interest in various academic disciplines. Differing conceptualisations of human vulnerability within philosophy,¹⁴ ethics¹⁵ and theology¹⁶ can be seen in a continuum from a conventional view of vulnerability as a weakness to be overcome to a more multi-dimensional view of the vulnerable condition as a basis for ethical agency, as well as for human flourishing. For the sake of brevity, three main positions may be sketched: (1) the mere neglect of vulnerability, or a mobilization to get rid of it; (2) an acceptance of the inevitability of the vulnerable condition and even an appreciation of potential positive ways to deal with it, at the same time acknowledging a diversity in degrees and situations of particular vulnerabilities; (3) a valorization of a common human vulnerability as not merely inescapable, but even as a precondition for personal well-being and human community.

The *first* position is a view mostly taken for granted. Vulnerability spells out the inherent risk of every human being to be wounded, disregarded, and ultimately killed. Many definitions prioritize this aspect. According to Robert Goodin, it is “essentially a matter of being under the threat of harm”.¹⁷ Paul Formosa further develops this position,

suggesting that “(v)ulnerability implies that *x* is susceptible to *y* being inflicted by *z*, where *y* is some harm, injury, failure, or misuse, and *x* and *z* are some person, animal, object, event or group”.¹⁸ In this interpretation, vulnerability equals violability, injurability, perishability, and mortality. Vulnerability is self-evidently understood as regrettable, something to be reduced to the highest degree possible, in favour of security, safety, self-mastery and strength. Moreover, being vulnerable as it is thus understood is often linked to stigma and shame.¹⁹ Since focusing exclusively on these negative dimensions is the most common and everyday understanding of the word, we may call it “a conventional view” (also in the context of sports, as showed above).

Although Goodin may be seen as a proponent of emphasizing the negative dimensions of vulnerability, he avoids a static or fatalist view. In his consequentialist ethical approach in *Protecting the Vulnerable: A Reanalysis of Our Social Responsibilities*,²⁰ he also highlights that vulnerability is essentially a “relational notion”.²¹ Vulnerability is, to Goodin, “more than susceptibility to certain sorts of harm, ... it also implies that the harm is not predetermined”.²² This relationality and indeterminacy may lead to responsibility and agency. The vulnerability of others thus has the potentially valuable function of making us aware of “our social responsibilities”.

According to the *second* position, vulnerability is recognized as a permanent feature of human life. This basic fact may be met with passive resignation or an active response. Although it is something permanent and universal, one may also from this position affirm that the experience of vulnerability *varies* in forms and degrees. There are, in other words, two sides to it. Catriona Mackenzie, Wendy Rogers and Susan Dodds speak from an ethical and feminist philosophical perspective of “inherent” or “ontological” vs. “situational” vulnerability,²³ while Günther Thomas, in his theology, differentiates between “static” and “dynamic” dimensions of vulnerability.²⁴ These various conceptualisations of a fundamental duality in the vulnerable condition open up a space for agency, coping strategies and resilience in the midst of a life experience in which vulnerability nevertheless is recognized as a constant feature.

Although this second position represents a more nuanced view, seeing an inevitable human vulnerability as diverse and occurring in different degrees, it does not necessarily allow for a positive evaluation of the vulnerable human condition itself. By contrast, the *third* position in the continuum underscores that vulnerability also implies sensibility, affectability and openness.²⁵ These features are *sine qua non* for

ethical agency, and hence for human flourishing. Therefore, according to this view, vulnerability should also be affirmed and protected,²⁶ ventured²⁷ or even embraced.²⁸ Philosopher Joel Anderson argues that vulnerability contributes constitutively to the personal development of autonomy.²⁹ Along similar lines, but from a different theoretical perspective, the leading American philosopher, feminist, and queer and literary theorist Judith Butler holds vulnerability to be “part of the performative account of agency”.³⁰ It can actively resist in an act of exposing itself; there is in it a performative “dis-possession” which may actually affirm and protect life.³¹ Thus, in this view, vulnerability and strength are not opposites, but connected in ambiguous and complex ways.

Analyzing the sermons

It is against this backdrop that we now turn to Christian sermons held in the arena of sports. We are especially interested in if and how the ambiguity and multi-dimensionality of vulnerability appear in these sermons. The material forming the basis of our analysis is seven written Christian sermons held in the context of international sporting events.³² These “sports sermons” are held within the framework of a service organized by a church. The services are either part of the official programme of an international sporting event, or intentionally related to it by the organizers of the service or the sporting event. Thus, these sermons take place in a shared and overlapping space between the social world of the church and sports. The audience of the sermons we have studied is mixed in the sense that not all listeners are necessarily active professional athletes themselves. Hence, one can expect that in these sermons, the meaning of vulnerability in competitive sports is negotiated not solely with regard to the experiences of athletes, but also with regard to the aim of saying something to a wider audience. Our analytical focus will, however, be on interpretations of vulnerability with regard to the particular context of competitive sports.

Although our study is based on an analysis of seven written sermons, we will in the following present an in-depth analysis of only three of these sermons. They broadly represent what we in our material have identified as three different options for negotiating the meaning of vulnerability in the context of competitive sports.

Our methodological strategy is to do a hermeneutical text analysis, more specifically a content analysis.³³ We will identify and describe conceptualisations of vulnerability with the continuum presented above.

Further, we aim to identify pragmatic dimensions of the sermons' use of conceptualisations of vulnerability. From a pragmatic perspective, theologian Jan-Olav Henriksen has suggested that religion may serve as a resource for orientation, transformation, legitimization and reflection.³⁴ Religions do not only "explain" human existence, but they also actually "do something: they orient, transform and legitimize specific types of human practices that are symbolically mediated".³⁵ The practice of preaching aims at orienting its listeners and possibly sustaining or changing their behaviour. So we ask: What implicit or explicit understandings of vulnerability come through in these Christian sermons held in the context of competitive sports? What resources do these sermons offer for an athlete's practical engagement with the human condition of vulnerability?

"I beat my body": vulnerability as weakness

In the seven sermons we have studied, vulnerability is most often implicitly or explicitly presented as weakness. It represents the possibility of failing or being wounded. Thus, the conventional view of vulnerability as weakness appears to be dominant in our material; the focus is on vulnerability as primarily a problem – as something the athlete needs to overcome. A sermon held in Berlin Cathedral by a male bishop at the opening service of the World Championship of the Athletics in 2009 attests to this.³⁶ The sermon is based on the following passage from 1 Corinthians 9:

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore, I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize (1 Cor 9:24–27).

This choice of text is hardly surprising, given its direct reference to an arena of sports. And like a race itself, the sermon sets off with the words: "On your marks – get set – go!" It pictures the professional athlete in the starting blocks, having years of preparation and hard

discipline behind him (sic). This discipline, the preacher continues, includes fighting against yourself:

No matter at what time someone has committed himself to competitive sport, before everything else he has had to fight himself. Before you meet the opponent, you meet with your own [fatigue] and have to overcome your own weakness. The struggle with your self is the crucial precondition for winning the struggle against others.

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians is a key text in presenting a paradoxical view of weakness as something through which God reveals Godself (e.g. 1:17–31; 2:3–5). 1 Corinthians 9 is in this sermon nonetheless exclusively used to say something about the value of self-discipline and of struggling against your own weakness:

[Paul] leaves no doubt about what he means with asceticism. He who wants to win “goes into strict training”. It is obvious that [with asceticism] the apostle does not only mean eating and drinking ... Abstinence is regarded by him as the means to success in sports.

The vulnerability of the body, then, is interpreted as a weakness that must be resisted and eliminated through “strict training”, as it represents the opposite of the athlete's goal – “success in sports”. The approach seems to fit well into an environment characterized in the ways described by Hägglund et al. and Putukian: faced with the limitations of one's body, it is necessary to “push through”. Thus, the interpretation of 1 Corinthians here legitimizes a strictly problematizing view of vulnerability, already dominant in the sports context. The preacher orients the listeners towards resisting vulnerability through a specific present-day version of asceticism: discipline in systematic and hard training, thus reducing fragility and the risk of failure in a permanent process of transformation.

By framing it soteriologically, the preacher legitimizes this conceptualization of vulnerability even further. Following Paul's imagery in this biblical passage, the sermon recalls that while the victory and wreath of the athlete are temporary, there is also an eternal wreath. This eternal wreath is received as a gift in baptism. Thereby, the dichotomy between losing and winning in sports, or in life in general, is placed within a larger soteriological frame; it relates to the logic of eternal salvation. Salvation thus becomes an eternal overcoming of weakness. The

conventional view of vulnerability as something to be struggled against, eliminated and ultimately overcome is thereby given a strong religious legitimation.

“Bad things happen”: vulnerability as inescapable

A sermon given on the occasion of the Boston Marathon Sunday in 2018, by the female senior minister of the Old South Church in Boston, has Job 23:10 (“When God hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold”) as its biblical reference and main point of reflection.³⁷ There is a double backdrop for this main theme of trial. Clearly, the hardship of running a marathon is in itself a demanding test. The sermon does not explicitly address this, however. In the foreground is another tragic trial: the terror attack that hit the Boston Marathon on 15 April 2013, killing three people and leaving at least 264 persons wounded. The preacher recalls the devastation of the bombs:

The Boston Marathon – this world’s oldest, peaceful international competition – was visited with violence, was violated, was twisted into a scene of horror. Lives were taken. Families devastated. Limbs lost. Some lost hearing; many still suffer from PTSD. Bad things happened that day to good and innocent people.

Remembering this act of terror, then, the preacher, basing herself on an implicit understanding of the theology of suffering in the Book of Job, draws a general conclusion about the human experience: “bad things happen to good people”. This is presented as inescapable. We cannot defend ourselves from this unfairness of life:

As much as we ache for a balancing scale that would afford to good people only good things and to bad people only bad things, life isn’t fair in that sort of way. It just isn’t. Sometimes, terrible things, even unbearable things, just happen.

This inescapability of the risk of being wounded in human life is seen as ambiguous. It is negative, thus confirming a conventional view of vulnerability: “*Bad* things happen” (emphasis added). Nonetheless, through the biblical resources of the narrative of Job, a different frame of interpretation of this inescapable fact is presented. By enduring

vulnerability and its negative consequences, a higher value, something “stronger, better, finer” can emerge, namely “gold”.

Gold is the aim of the athlete’s strenuous efforts. Gold was also the outcome of the trials of Job. Thus, by using gold as a symbol common to the world of sports and the church, the negative experience is presented as an opportunity for transformation. Thus, it is given a positive value. The tragic event caused by the inescapable vulnerability of human life becomes meaningful through a biblical interpretation and application of the concept of trial. The audience is oriented towards seeing their own vulnerability and exposure to harm as a regrettable fact about reality, and yet as something that, through their coping with it, can bring about a positive transformation.

What, then, about the particular context of competitive sports? According to Hägglund et al., the acceptance of vulnerability as something one shares with a common humanity can contribute to facilitating sustainability in high-performance sports. Thereby, the sermon, exactly by placing the athlete’s vulnerability in the frame of the vulnerable condition of all humanity, may contribute orienting and transforming resources for the context of competitive sports.

In this sermon, then, the ambiguous character of vulnerable life experiences, also in the context of sporting events, emerges. One may recognize the distinction between the ontological and situational, and between the inherent and contingent sides of vulnerability, as highlighted in the second position in the continuum presented above. Vulnerability is presented as an inescapable limitation, yet it presents itself in unique ways in particular situations and can be handled. This experience of living with and handling vulnerability can also form the basis of something valuable. It can, against all odds, lead to gold.

“You and I also have to let go”: vulnerability as a value

While the default position in the sermons seems to be a conventional understanding of vulnerability as a weakness to be overcome, some sermons show that this negative reality can be turned into something valuable. Still, this does not display a positive recognition of the value of vulnerability in itself. There are, however, also glimpses of vulnerability seen as a resource and potential strength in our material. A sermon delivered in the context of a major ski-jump competition in Norway by a male minister in a local Lutheran church in the area where the competition took place, takes the famous passage about

faith, hope and love in 1 Corinthians 13 as its scriptural basis.³⁸ Playing on the similarity between the Swedish word for hope (“hopp”) and the Norwegian and Swedish word for jump (“hopp”), the preacher enters the fluid and flexible space between religion and sports in an almost naive, humorous manner. The main theme of the sermon is serious enough, though: the existential leap – the preacher refers to Kierkegaard’s notion of the “leap of faith” out on “70,000 fathoms of water”³⁹ – that is seen as a precondition for salvation as well as human flourishing. The opening passage of the sermon illustrates this well:

Seated on the bar at the top of the ski jump hill, he is nervous. The hill is steep. The carefully prepared tracks in the in-run in front of him look like tram tracks leading straight down the ramp and off into the air, disappearing into nothing ... He is ready; but will he dare to let himself go? He lets go of the bar. In high speed he approaches the end of the hill and takes off into the air.

Any ski jump requires “letting oneself go;” a voluntary renunciation of the safety of sitting on the bar on the top of the hill and entrusting oneself to conditions and elements that others have prepared. In the same manner, the minister claims, in life we have to dare to be exposed. We must do without the security of that to which we hold on. Only thus may we experience the joy of soaring through the air and possibly landing elegantly and safely at impressive lengths: “You and I also have to let go of the bar”.

This opening of the sermon points to the inner connection between vulnerability and athletic performance. All athletes expose themselves to failure, injury and harm. The ski jumper who lets go of the bar exemplifies the vulnerable condition. Thereby, implicitly, a positive dimension of vulnerability in the context of competitive sports comes forth: To expose oneself to vulnerability is necessary for athletic performance, and experiences of vulnerability may open one up for experiences of athletic joy, strength and success.

Further, the minister points to an inner connection between vulnerability and trust.⁴⁰ The ski jumper, letting go of the bar, has to trust the preparation done by others. Both vulnerability and trust are dependent on the ability and willingness to be exposed. The concluding Gospel message drawn from this observation is traditional in its formulation. The preacher encourages his listeners to trust Jesus as “our Lord and Saviour”, who has promised to “carry us”. Just like how the ski

jumper needs to trust others in her letting go of the bar, the Christian can and should trust Jesus when “letting go” in a leap of faith.

Thus, this sermon offers resources of orientation and transformation that may serve to critically challenge a conventional view and adopt an affirmative understanding of the vulnerable human condition. It is in and through the living out of this vulnerable condition (“letting go”) that athletic performance, as well as more generally the good life (joy, love, salvation), is attained and preserved.

The sermon further affirms that the positive outcomes of such an affirmation of vulnerability are not merely individual. Its mutual benefits, it is claimed, were already present among the first Christians. Based on the “safety in life that faith provides”, the first followers of Jesus “helped the needy, and prayed for the sick”. This view of Christian life is in continuity with the sermon’s emphasis on how the ski jumper needs to trust her support team, underscoring the communal dimension of the human response to vulnerability in both of these contexts.

The third position in our continuum above conceived of vulnerability also as something positive: understood as sensibility, affectability and openness, it is constitutive for ethics and a necessary ingredient of a liveable life. The sermon’s encouragement to self-exposure is in tune with such a conceptualization. Its main message is that accepting the vulnerability implied in letting go of the bar is a necessary condition for success, both in sports and personal life.

However, the picture is not unambiguous. It could be said that it is an act of courage that is promoted here, not vulnerability *per se*. The leap of faith may also be presented as the optimal sign of strength and an exceptional performance. This being so, the sermon does indeed underscore the limits of self-reliance. Whether to the sustaining elements in the environment prepared by others or to God, the sermon seems to underline that fullness of life, as well as success in sports, depends on a moment of letting go of oneself. This recalls Butler’s thinking of resistance and agency in vulnerability as present within the fact and act of dispossession.⁴¹

Opportunity lost or promising potential? Concluding discussion

The church and sports are different social worlds that occasionally overlap and intertwine. Sports sermons are places for such intertwining. In the intersection between these areas, we find a process of negotiating meaning. Against the backdrop of a continuum of differing and partly

conflicting interpretations of human vulnerability in philosophy, theology, ethics and sports science, we have asked how these sermons mobilize religious resources to negotiate the meaning of vulnerability in a sports context. Do these sermons provide resources for re-orientation that can help athletes meet the challenges that Putukian and Hägglund et al. identify in their research?⁴²

Our first conclusion is that the conventional view of vulnerability is dominant in our material. Vulnerability is often interpreted in the sermons as weakness or the possibility of failing or being wounded. Vulnerability is presented as a problem – something the athlete needs to overcome and “push through”. In these cases, the sermons confirm rather than challenge the predominantly negative view of vulnerability in sports. In this adaptation to the arena of strength, this preaching does not seize the opportunity for re-negotiating a concept of vulnerability that has also been criticized within sports studies.

However, in our material, there are also instances of a more complex notion of vulnerability. Sometimes, vulnerability is seen as inescapable, but still possible to confront. Surprisingly, in confronting it, something good may emerge, like “gold”. Furthermore, sermons can facilitate the view that vulnerability is life-sustaining and a condition for well-being, as well as success in sports. This was, in our sample, demonstrated with the sermon that uses ski jumping to say something about trust, hope and faith. The sermon communicates that to expose oneself to vulnerability can lead not only to success in sports, but also pave the way for new transformative life experiences.

Resources for new orientation and transformation are in this way offered through the sermon’s theological reflections on human vulnerability. Even though it does not generally seem to be the case, this shows that sports sermons do have the possibility of identifying the productive potential of an ambiguous and even positive notion of vulnerability in line with recent interdisciplinary research. Thus, these sermons may also contribute to highlight what Hägglund et al. see as a promising “upside” to vulnerability in sports.

Kristin Graff-Kallevåg and Sturla J. Stålsett
Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society
P.O. Box 5144 Majorstuen
0302 Oslo
Norway
kristin.graff@mf.no
sturla.stalsett@mf.no

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes

1. E.g., Ammerman, *Everyday Religion*; Henriksen, *Religion as Orientation and Transformation*; McGuire, *Lived Religion*.
2. E.g., Alpert, *Religion and Sports*; Higgs, *God in the Stadium*; Lindfelt, "Body, Religion and Sports"; Nykvist and Maurits, *A Sportful History*; Price, *From Season to Season*.
3. E.g., Hägglund et al. "Is there an Upside," 222.
4. See, e.g., the definition of vulnerability in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as the "state of being exposed to the possibility of being attacked or harmed, either physically or emotionally" (<https://www.lexico.com/definition/vulnerability>).
5. Lundqvist, "Well-Being in Competitive Sports," 109.
6. Hägglund et al., "Is there an Upside," 222.
7. Beigel, "Introduction," xv.
8. Bauman, "Stigma of Mental Health"; Putukian, "Psychological Response to Injury."
9. Putukian, "Psychological Response to Injury," 145.
10. "Vulnerability" is not a key term in Putukian's study. Her study of how athletes respond to injuries and to the risk of being harmed concerns, however, athletes' responses to a central feature of vulnerability in the context of competitive sports (see the definition of vulnerability above).
11. Hägglund et al., "Is there an Upside."
12. *Ibid.*, 224f.
13. Brown, *Daring Greatly*.
14. See, e.g., Lévinas, *Humanisme de l'autre homme*; Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*; Butler et al., *Vulnerability in Resistance*; Butler, *The Force of Nonviolence*.
15. See, e.g., Goodin, *Protecting the Vulnerable*; Mackenzie et al., *Vulnerability: New Essays*; Butler, *Prekarious*; Butler, *Frames of War*; Stålsett, "Vulnerabilidad, dignidad y justicia"; Stålsett, "Theological Reflections on Vulnerability"; Stålsett, "The Ethics of Vulnerability."
16. See, e.g., Soelle, *The Window of Vulnerability*; Pool, *God's Wounds*; Placher, *Narratives*; Culp, *Vulnerability and Glory*; Gandolfo, *The Power and Vulnerability*; Springhart and Thomas, *Exploring Vulnerability*; Stålsett, "Towards a Political Theology."
17. Goodin, *Protecting the Vulnerable*, 110.
18. Formosa, "The Role of Vulnerability," 89.
19. Brown, *Daring Greatly*.
20. Goodin, *Protecting the Vulnerable*.
21. *Ibid.*, 112.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Mackenzie, "Importance of Relational Autonomy," 7.
24. Thomas, "Divine Vulnerability," 41. Similarly, Heike Springhart argues for an "anthropological realism" in which she distinguishes between ontological or fundamental vulnerability as the shared human condition, and a situated or contextual vulnerability that has different levels of realisation, as there are "social, cultural and environmental conditions that increase or lower vulnerability." Springhart, "Exploring Life's Vulnerability," 17–18.

25. Cf. the definition of human vulnerability suggested in Stålsett, "Towards a Political Theology," 467: "the ability to be corporeally, mentally, emotionally or existentially affected by the presence, being or acting of another or something other."
26. Butler, *Precarious*, 42.
27. Springhart, "Exploring Life's Vulnerability," 21.
28. Brown, *Daring Greatly*.
29. Anderson, "Autonomy and Vulnerability Entwined."
30. Butler, "Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance," 19.
31. Butler and Athanasiou, *Dispossession*.
32. All the studied sermons are conducted by a Protestant minister. However, several of the sermons are held in services that are advertised as ecumenical. The sporting events they relate to are international events in individual sports and in Europe and North America. A study of sermons held in the context of events in *team* sports could, of course, have given different results than our analysis. To compare approaches to vulnerability in the context of individual and team sports is, however, beyond the task of this article.
33. See, e.g., Nelson and Woods, "Content Analysis". Our approach to textual analysis in this study may also be labelled "idea-analysis," as we seek to clarify the interpretations of vulnerability in the sermons. See Bratberg, *Tekstanalyse for samfunnsvitere*, 57; and Grenholm, *Att förstå religion*, 213.
34. Henriksen, "Everyday Religion"; Henriksen, *Orientation and Transformation*; Henriksen, *Representation and Ultimacy*.
35. Henriksen, *Orientation and Transformation*, 21.
36. The written sermon is available online, in both English and German. See https://archiv.ekd.de/4279-090813_huber.html and https://www.ekd.de/090813_huber_berlin.htm. This article uses the English text. In some instances, we have made minor linguistic changes in the quotations based on our translation of the German version for the sake of linguistic clarity. Changes are marked. In our analysis, we use Bible references as they are quoted in the online manuscript of the sermon.
37. For an online manuscript of this sermon, see <https://www.oldsouth.org/sermons-worship-recordings/2018/04/15>. Bible references as they are quoted in the online manuscript of the sermon.
38. This sermon is not available online. We have received the sermon from the preacher, who has given written permission to use it for the purpose of this article. All quotations from this sermon are translated by the authors.
39. Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*.
40. This, of course, is the main theme in K. E. Løgstrup's theological ethics; see Løgstrup, *The Ethical Demand*.
41. See Butler and Athanasiou, *Dispossession*.
42. Hägglund et al., "Is there an Upside?"; Putukian, "Psychological Response to Injury."

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