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EDITOR'S NOTE

The five articles included in this volume (by Gerard Whelan, Susan Rakoczy, Marilise Smurthwaite, Buti Tlhagale and Lawrence Mduduzi Ndlovu), alongside the three book reviews, cover the two issues for the year 2016. The publication of Volume 17 of *St Augustine Papers* coincides with a number of initiatives and events around the globe that are related to the natural environment and ecological justice. The publication of Pope Francis' second encyclical *Laudato Si': On Care for our Common Home*, in June 2015, was an inspiration for many of them. The role of this document in raising awareness of universal interconnectedness, whereby the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor are being heard in unison, as well as the spiritual and political impact of its uncompromising call for the 'ecological conversion', cannot be underestimated.

While Smurthwaite's article reflects on the ethical and moral aspects of *Laudato Si'*, Whelan encourages his readers to take it as a point of departure for articulating a 'moderately anthropocentric perspective' which may prove essential in sustaining the 'cultural revolution' called for by the encyclical. The three other articles remind us that, from a Christian perspective, 'bioship' should not be considered in isolation from two other 'ships', namely 'discipleship' and 'citizenship'. All three dimensions came into play in the life of Dorothy Stang, in her commitment to the poor and her ecological spirituality. Rakoczy depicts her as an 'ecological prophet and martyr'. Tlhagale's article brings into focus the most vulnerable members of our human environments, as he seeks to identify elements within African cultures that contribute to violence and discrimination against women. Lastly, through his fresh and prophetic reading of the Book of Ruth, Ndlovu invites us to explore the dynamics of marginalisation and liberation inherent in the story of the Moabite woman. Here ecological issues revolve around an *oikos*, the 'household' – those who belong and those who don't, insiders and outsiders (refugees). All of these present topical questions relative to liberation theology, are the given new impetus in light of an emerging American regime which, contrary to Pope Francis' recommendation, insists on building walls instead of bridges.

The article by Smurthwaite is based on a presentation that formed a part of the workshop titled *Laudato Si': A Down-to-Earth Dialogue with the Eco-Pope*; it was offered by members of the academic staff of St Augustine College in various settings in 2015 and 2016. Ndlovu's article is an elaborated version of an assignment at Heythrop College, University of London, as well as the public lecture on 'Book of Ruth: Dynamics of Marginalisation and Liberation', which he delivered at St Augustine College on 6th July 2016.

In addition, the 'Book Reviews' section offers three recommendations of recent titles: (1) A secular-scientific perspective on *Land Degradation, Desertification and Climate Change*; (2) an intersectional study of race, class and gender in the context of *Systemic Crises of Global Climate Change*, and (3) a contextually relevant exploration of the plight of the earth and of the poor from the viewpoint of African Christianity (*The Creator's Symphony*).

CALLS FOR PAPERS:

In mid-2017, we plan to publish a volume dedicated to current global issues. Papers which focus on any of the following themes are welcome: Brexit; the 2016 U.S. elections and America under Trump; the refugee/ migrant crisis around the globe; religious fundamentalisms and terrorism; poverty; structural racism and the worldwide calls for decolonisation; Black Life Matters, and other issues surrounding social (in)justice. The call for papers is open until the end of May 2017.

Towards the end of 2017, a special volume will be published to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. Articles discussing this topic – be it from the perspective of world or church history, theology, ecumenical movement, ethics, politics, law, peace studies, or any other relevant area of study – can be submitted for peer-review by the end of August 2017.

Guidelines for the authors can be found at the end of this volume as well as on our Journal's website: www.staugustine.ac.za/sap.

The Human Person: Cause or Solution of the Ecological Crisis?

GERARD WHELAN

ABSTRACT

This paper concludes by agreeing with the often-stated proposal that Pope Francis has helped the Catholic Church move beyond an attitude of “culture wars” in the manner in which it engages with the modern world one of *a culture of encounter*. However, it suggests that the Catholic voice needs to maintain a *prophetic edge* in the manner in which it engages in this encounter, and that this will involve challenging not only those who deny or minimise the ecological crisis, but also those who propose solutions, such as biocentric ones, that, according to the Pope are in danger of “adding yet another imbalance, failing to solve present problems and adding new ones” (Pope Francis *Laudato Si'* 2015: paragraph 118).

INTRODUCTION

Laudato Si' is remarkable for the positive reception it received at a world-wide level. In another article in this volume, Paolo Conversi offers a reflection on the positive influence this seems to have exercised on *COP 21*, the world meeting on climate change in Paris in 2015 that agreed on an international strategy for the reduction of carbon emissions. Indeed, one explicitly stated purpose of the encyclical was to influence this meeting. However, beyond this immediate purpose, the encyclical calls for a *cultural revolution* that will favour both care of the natural environment and care of the human poor, something that will involve a long-term process. One aspect of this process will be the need for academics who agree with Pope Francis to continue working in the field of ecological ethics. This article focuses on this challenge. It suggests that an awareness

of the issues involved in such a debate will be important for all those who wish to associate themselves with the cultural revolution for which Pope Francis calls.

Academics already working in the field of ecological ethics and ecological theology have almost universally welcomed *Laudato Si*. Above all, they express admiration for the way it has helped to mobilise international opinion. However, not every academic agrees with the encyclical in all its details. I suggest that underlying such disagreements there is often a difference with the Pope on issues of *philosophical anthropology*, i.e., of presuppositions on just what is the human person and how he or she should relate to the natural environment. This article seeks to identify how *Laudato Si* can be located within debates in this field and proceeds in three steps: first, it discusses the emergence of a critique of the *excessive anthropocentrism* in culture that has produced the ecological crisis; second, it outlines a *biocentric* approach to proposing solutions to this crisis; third, it outlines a *moderately anthropocentric* approach.¹ It suggests that arguments of the second kind were predominant during the 1970s and 1980s, while arguments of the third kind have begun to emerge since the 1990s. It suggests that *Laudato Si* can be located clearly as a form of moderately anthropocentric argument.

A CRITIQUE OF EXCESSIVE ANTHROPOCENTRISM

During the years after World War 2, Europe and North America experienced an unprecedented economic boom. During this time an awareness began to grow that high rates of industrialisation and urbanisation can harm the environment. On this matter, one short article published in a scientific journal in the USA in 1967 exercised a major influence. This was entitled “The Historical Roots of the Ecologic Crisis” and was written by Professor Lynn White, a historian from Princeton University who was an expert on how culture interacts with scientific and technological development (White 1967:6). In his article, he accepts the views of those contemporary scientists who speak of an upcoming

ecological crisis and he seeks to identify the cultural causes of the problem. He locates the problem in what he describes as an “anthropocentrism” of Western Culture, which he describes as holding the view: “We are superior to nature, contemptuous of it, willing to use it for our slightest whim.” He then describes Christianity as “the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen,” and concludes that as a cultural cause of the ecological crisis: “Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt.” (White 1967: 7)

White does not pretend that culture is the only cause of scientific and technological development. He studies the history of Europe and acknowledges that during the middle ages environmental factors played a role in stimulating human ingenuity in discovering new technology. However, he notes that during this same time cultural developments were also assisting this attitude towards new discovery. He notes that from the late middle-ages onwards scholastic theology began to adopt the philosophy of Aristotle as an instrument for its theology. He points out that this led to a distinction between the natural world and the supernatural world, leaving considerable liberty for the pursuit of a scientific study of what is natural. He suggests that this promoted ideas which exalted the notion of human dominance over nature and its right to interfere with it. He adds that such natural philosophy was assisted by a natural theology that explained how God is transcendent of creation and how man, being made in the image of God, was destined to exercise a dominion over nature so that “no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man's purposes” (White 1967: 5).

White adds that this notion of being made in the image of God applies especially to the so-called “spiritual” qualities of man, i.e. his powers of intellect and will. He adds that the philosophical and theological tradition of Western Europe tended to take a *voluntarist* route, stressing the role of the will more than that of intellect. This approach emphasises the tendency of the human will toward evil and how this can only be reversed by God’s grace which transforms human willingness towards a desire to do good. He suggests that this favoured an approach of looking on human nature

negatively and on emphasising a principle that Martin Luther would articulate in a theology of “grace alone” as the source of all ability for the human being to do what is good. He adds that this tended to support the notion that those who are on the way to salvation have a right to conduct a “conquest of nature,” in which the nature being subdued was not only the evil tendencies of human behaviour but also the natural environment.

White next suggests that this fundamentally Christian attitude pervaded the history of early Modern Europe, regardless of whether individuals considered themselves Catholic, Protestant, atheist or deist. He points out that throughout the scientific revolution of Seventeenth Century, “every major scientist, in effect, explained his motivations in religious terms.” He next studies the industrial revolutions of the Nineteenth Century. Here he identifies a remarkable synergy occurring between popular democracy, scientific discovery, and technological application. He suggests that while it is from this time onwards that most damage would be done to the natural environment, the anthropocentric cultural justifications for such action had long since been put in place.

In concluding his article, White calls for a major cultural shift in the modern attitude to man’s relationship to nature. He points to the hippie, or “beatnik,” movement, which was in the news at the time of his writing his article, as playing a prophetic role in this regard. He states: “The beatniks, who are the basic revolutionaries of our time, show a sound instinct in their affinity for Zen Buddhism, which conceives of the man-nature relationship as very nearly the mirror image [i.e., the opposite] of the Christian view” (White 1967:7). This statement would be taken seriously by philosophers and theologians in the succeeding decades.

BIOCENTRISM

The ideas of Lynn White contributed to explicitly non-Christian developments in philosophy and theology in North America and beyond during the 1970s and 1980s. Many thinkers adopted what can be broadly understood as *biocentric* arguments that held in common a series of views:

the need to abandon the notion of a God who creates *ex nihilo*; the need to abandon the consequent notion of humankind being superior to other creatures and exercising any kind of “stewardship” or “dominion” over them; and finally, the need to reconsider notions of original sin, redemption, good and evil.²

At a philosophical level it suffices to give two examples of prominent tendencies that emerged. A first tendency relied on a body of philosophy called *process philosophy* which speaks of the existence of God but locates God within time as well as within natural and human processes of emergence. Consequently, it suggests that the very existence of God is dependent on the responsible exercise of freedom by human beings.³ A second philosophical approach is called the “Gaia hypothesis.” Here Nature is regarded as a single organism in which the human race is just one element among others. This analysis attributes to Nature, or “Gaia” a semi-sacred status as well as an intelligent self-awareness. It then raises the question about whether Gaia might not choose to eliminate the human race because of the refusal of humans to live in harmony with the rest of the natural order (Lovelock 1979).

More theological versions of this biocentric approach address the Christian doctrines of original sin and redemption. Authors such as Matthew Fox represent a *New Age Spirituality* that suggests that Christian notions of the fallenness of human nature have contributed to the ecological problem. The logic here is that a notion of original sin tends to be associated with a negative attitude to human sexuality which, in turn, tends to extend to a negative attitude to nature itself. Fox proposes a spirituality based on a notion of “Original Blessing” to replace that of original sin and encourages individuals to adopt a positive attitude toward sexual self-expression which in turn can produce a respectful attitude toward nature as a whole. He proposes an attitude toward evil in the world which draws on Zen Buddhism and Jungian psychology. These approaches suggest that good and evil are to be looked on as necessary and unavoidable aspects of both natural and human reality. Fox suggests that instead of seeking to reverse

evil and to promote good, one should rather seek to harmonize these two tendencies in a reconciliation of opposites (Fox 1983).

Intellectuals of a biocentric approach are aware that political decisions need to be taken urgently to arrest phenomena such as pollution and global-warming. Many opt for a vocabulary of rights-talk, or what is also called a *deontological* approach to ethics. A focus of effort then becomes one of incorporating certain notions of the “rights of the environment” into the law of states so as to oblige citizens to respect ecological concerns.⁴ The call to acknowledge these kinds of rights can sometimes take on an echo of the Gaia hypothesis as an appeal is made to respect “the rights of Mother Earth” and to attribute to Mother Earth an agency in forming the moral consciences of humans. Such perspectives are often behind a movement of *environmental constitutionalism* about which more will be said below.

MODERATE ANTHROPOCENTRISM

From the 1990s onwards criticisms have been emerging in mainstream debates on ecological ethics of the kind of biocentric arguments outlined above. At a scientific level, some suggest that tendencies to project onto the natural environment human attributes such as consciousness and intelligence, is disrespectful of the autonomy of nature and can lead to many misunderstandings. Similarly, they point out that every species of plant and animal exercises an impact on its environment that alters the functioning of both the natural environment and other species. Consequently, they suggest that it is unreasonable to expect that humans would be different.⁵ The argument moves to philosophical ground when commentators point to similarities between some biocentric arguments and the rationalist notion of “*the noble savage*” of Jean Jacques Rousseau, the Enlightenment philosopher of the eighteenth century. They then suggest that biocentric arguments are vulnerable to the same kind of criticisms as was the thought of Rousseau.⁶ A new generation of “moderately anthropocentric” voices has emerged that accepts that humans have a

unique role to play in the natural universe and have a right to manipulate aspects of it to suit their needs. As a result, they tend to argue for economic policies that leave a more significant “footprint” on the natural environment than would be acceptable to those who hold biocentric views. This having been said, they agree that technological interaction with the natural environment promotes sustainable development as well as the common good in human society.

At a philosophical level, the move to moderate anthropocentric arguments is related to a re-thinking of aspects of Enlightenment philosophy. One example is the feminist movement which notes that the appeal to abstract reason by philosophers such as Descartes and Kant was associated with a dismissal of women as too emotional and concerned with the concrete and particular.⁷ Another critic of Enlightenment thinking is Alisdair MacIntyre. In his book, *After Virtue*, MacIntyre offers an account of the history of philosophy, especially in the modern era (MacIntyre 2007). He discusses the role of Immanuel Kant in founding a deontological approach to ethics. He notes that Kant proposes a series of duties—articulated in terms of “rights”—that can be recognised by all reasonable people. However, he suggests that Kant’s manner of deducing which rights are universal is based on an abstract notion of reasoning and fails to actually provide an adequate account of how the human mind recognises such obligations. He points to considerable confusion in the deontological tradition regarding just what rights are fundamental and universal.

Turning to an analysis of modern culture, MacIntyre suggests that the weak ability to propose ethical arguments has resulted in key political and economic decisions being made by what he calls the *bureaucratic manager*. He suggests that such managers claim that their competence on matters of economic and sociological fact (the “is”) give them the ability to recognise what public policy decisions should be taken by political leaders (the “ought”). He suggests that, in fact, these individuals often represent the interests of powerful economic and class interests. This suggestion is eloquently captured in the title of another of his books: *Whose Justice, Which Rationality?* (MacIntyre 1989). He next suggests

that the voice of protest against the excesses of the bureaucratic manager is often limited to the protests of the “emotivist” who makes an appeal to the rights that are being infringed upon by policy makers. He suggests that the problem here is that the emotivist abandons attempts to appeal to reason in identifying rights and appeals instead to emotion. He adds that such ethical arguments rarely succeed in threatening the core interests of powerful economic groups.

Michael Northcott is a philosopher and theologian who holds ideas similar to MacIntyre and who carries these into the debate about ecological ethics. In his book, *The Environment and Christian Ethics* (1996) he links the bureaucratic manager of MacIntyre to the excessive anthropocentrism that does harm to the natural environment. Indeed, in a more recent book, *A Moral Climate* (2007), he includes a chapter, “When Prophecy Fails,” that traces how powerful economic forces have been active in counteracting the influence of ecological thinkers. At the same time he is critical of ecological thinkers who offer biocentric and deontological arguments, suggesting that MacIntyre’s notion of emotivist ethics applies to some of these. Again, like MacIntyre, he makes an appeal for the retrieval of wisdom traditions in cultures, as a means of helping philosophers avoid excessively abstract approaches to ethical reasoning. On this matter he explores the value of the late-medieval Western tradition of *natural law* and its notion of virtue. He also speaks of the importance for technologically sophisticated cultures to rediscover the wisdom held in primal cultures where a sense of the necessary harmony of human living and the cycles of nature remains strong (Northcott 1996: 102, 165-174, 265-282).

LAUDATO SI’ AS MODERATELY ANTHROPOCENTRIC

Laudato Si’ stands firmly within the range of moderately anthropocentric arguments. This is evident in three major characteristics of the encyclical: first, a “sacramental” vision of the relationship of how humans need to relate both to the natural environment and to each other; second, a stress on the need for a cultural revolution, characterised by an “option for the poor”

that will require dialogue at many levels and a stress on the education of the young; third, the method employed in constructing its argument.

The first major characteristic of this encyclical is the “sacramental” approach the Pope adopts to the relationship of humans both to the natural environment and to each other. His clearest statement of this occurs when he contrasts his position with a biocentric one. He speaks of the dilemma that people can face when they recognise that there exists an ecological crisis but are offered only unbalanced ethical proposals that seem to resolve this crisis:

This situation has led to a constant schizophrenia, wherein a technocracy which sees no intrinsic value in lesser beings coexists with the other extreme, which sees no special value in human beings. But one cannot prescind from humanity. There can be no renewal of our relationship with nature without a renewal of humanity itself. There can be no ecology without an adequate anthropology. When the human person is considered as simply one being among others, the product of chance or physical determinism, then “our overall sense of responsibility wanes.” *A misguided anthropocentrism need not necessarily yield to “biocentrism,”* for that would entail adding yet another imbalance, failing to solve present problems and adding new ones. Human beings cannot be expected to feel responsibility for the world unless, at the same time, their unique capacities of knowledge, will, freedom and responsibility are recognised and valued (Pope Francis 2015: paragraph 118, *italics added*).

When the Pope outlines the main dimensions of the “adequate anthropology” he offers a sacramental explanation that includes a stress on the importance of a concern for the poor. Regarding the former aspect, one recognises links to the kind of suggestions made by Lynn White. The encyclical speaks of St Francis as the patron saint of ecologists and opens with the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi: “Praise be to you, my Lord [*Laudato si’, signor*] through our sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with coloured flowers and herbs.” This notion of praising God by means of our attitude to the natural

environment is developed when he adds: “Developing the created world in a prudent way is the best way of caring for it, as this means that we ourselves become the instrument used by God to bring out the potential which he inscribed in things.” The Pope also concludes the encyclical with a similar insight: “We take charge of this home which has been entrusted to us, knowing that all the good which exists here will be taken up into the heavenly feast. In union with all creatures, we journey through this land seeking God” (Pope Francis 2015: paragraph 118)

When the Pope proceeds to address the question of relating a concern for the poor to a concern for the environment, he again turns to St. Francis of Assisi who: “shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace. Echoing the saint, he stresses that a tension exists in human life, between a sinful self-centredness and a liberating other-centredness. He stresses that the former attitude is fundamentally violent both to one’s neighbour and to the natural environment. Conversely, the latter attitude will seek both to include marginalised groups in the material well-being that the community is capable of providing. On this matter, he echoes MacIntyre and Northcott in stressing that without a retrieval of wisdom traditions, members of society are unlikely to gain the kind of schooling in virtue that is needed to become other-centred. He adds: “Together with the patrimony of nature, there is also an historic, artistic and cultural patrimony which is likewise under threat” (Pope Francis 2015:11, 2, 143).

The second major characteristic of *Laudato Si'* is the call for a “cultural revolution” that would promote a specific set of ideas and values: a special care for the poor; a willingness to promote dialogue at many levels; and to stress the importance of education for the young. An interest in culture has been central to Pope Francis for most of his life. In this he follows the lead of a generation of Post-Vatican II Argentinian theologians, some of whom were his teachers, who promote what is called “a theology of the people” (Scannone 2014; Whelan 2015:1-10). This emphasises the importance of engaging with popular culture—not least popular religiosity—and seeking to steer it towards recognising unjust social structures and the need for

change. This theology expressed a “preferential option for the poor” by taking seriously the culture of the poor, believing that it retains a reservoir of wisdom from which Christian preaching must draw. At the same time, it recognised in popular culture tendencies toward superstition and an absence of critical awareness about oppressive social structures. On these issues, they spoke of Christian preaching helping to promote a change in this culture. At times these theologians were criticised by liberation theologians from other countries of Latin America who adopted more Marxist approaches of seeking to advocate change in social structures by more interventionist means, and having less confidence in cultural change promoting social change. One can recognise parallels between this debate within Latin American theology and that between moderate anthropocentric and biocentric approaches to the ecological question.

A third major characteristic of *Laudato Si'* appertains to the kind of proposals it makes for action. One might say that Pope Francis is a “process person” more than one who proposes direct solutions to problems. In Chapter 5, “Lines of Approach and Action” he organises his argument around given subsections each of which call for a specific kind of dialogue: within the international community; at the level of national and local politics; for “transparency in decision-making”; between economics and politics; and between religions and science. Next, in Chapter 6, “Ecological Education and Spirituality,” he suggests that in order to be capable of authentic dialogue one needs to be a virtuous person: “Many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change.” He adds, “A great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal” (Pope Francis 2015: 202).

This emphasis on process can be contrasted with a deductive approach that would begin with enunciating clear and distinct ideas and would then seek to apply these to current situations. In principle, one could hold a moderately anthropocentric set of such deductively-produced ideas. However, Pope Francis has a horror of abstract generalisations about the essence of the human condition. A biographer of Francis suggests this

comes from his dislike of three intellectual tendencies that did much harm in Argentina: neo-scholastic theology; liberalism (not least neo-liberal economics); and Marxism.⁸ Arguably, his criticism of biocentrism in ecological ethics is related to his critique of the abstract reasoning of liberal rationalism that he had developed many years earlier.

VIEWS THAT DIVERGE FROM *LAUDATO SI'*

It is illuminating to note that while *Laudato Si'* was widely appreciated, it is nevertheless evident that some of those engaged in issues of ecological ethics hold different philosophical presuppositions and propose policies that are different in subtle but important ways. I explore this point primarily by studying the thought of a noted author in the field of ecological ethics, Willis Jenkins, an Episcopalian theologian from the USA.⁹ Jenkins is a respectful and intelligent reader of *Laudato Si'* and accurately summarises the position of Pope Francis:

By organising response to climate change around such dialogue, *Laudato Si'* recognises that the future of earth (in the near-term anyway) is subject to human ideas of justice and dignity, of nature and ourselves. That is the basic thought of the anthropocene: culture has global ecological influence. Not only our environmental ideas, but our ideas about how to respond to child malnourishment, about what sort of work to do with our lives, about how to make a household, how to cooperate with others – all that will shape what will be the temperature of earth and what species survive with us (Jenkins 2015:12).

However, Jenkins proceeds to express “perplexity” with aspects of the encyclical. He states, “Political resistance is not as strong as it could be because *Laudato Si'* stops short of developing two crucial points: the role of creation in forming human dignity and the political standing of earth.” In explaining the first of these two points, he criticises the sacramental-liturgical notion of human stewardship in creation suggested by the Pope. He suggests, “that seems to weaken the encyclical’s resistance to human

domination by assigning such a strong role to human agency in interpreting earth's interests. Linking care of creation with development of the planet seems perilous."

In explaining his second reason for perplexity, Jenkins employs a deontological argument. He suggests: "Rights seem like the most effective way to interrupt technocratic domination with democratic environmental governance" (Jenkins 2015: 11, 9). He next expresses a wish that *Laudato Si'* had explicitly expressed support for countries that he considers have shown leadership within the international community on ecological issues. He states: "It is impossible that the writing process of the encyclical could have failed to notice the movement for rights for Mother Earth." He then mentions how the governments of Bolivia and Ecuador have included a reference to the rights of Mother Earth in their national constitutions and asks: "Why does Francis refrain from that direction?... The absence is perplexing" (Jenkins 2015: 9, 10).

The reference Jenkins makes to recent developments in Bolivia and Ecuador is significant. In this way he associates himself with a movement of environmental constitutionalism within which recent decisions by these countries are regarded as exemplary (May 2015). This approach seeks to gain support for introducing changes to the constitutions of states that speak of the "rights of the Earth." As a result, judges are empowered to represent the long-term interests of the environment against the decision-making of the legislatures in their countries. This perspective found robust expression in *Cop 21* and, in fact, in previous international meetings on the environment. It tends to employ biocentric and deontological arguments (Jenkins 2015: 9, 10).

FUTURE ECOLOGICAL DEBATE

How to interpret the "perplexity" of Jenkins? I suggest that it results from an approach to ecological ethics that has primarily biocentric and deontological presuppositions. It is notable that the governments who propose the ecological policies that Jenkins supports come from a left-

wing tradition of Latin American politics that have origins in Marxist thought. This tradition has found expression in Argentinian politics over the years and Bergoglio had a long history of distancing himself from it. By contrast, he promoted a political process anchored in dialogue with representatives of civil society and that involved a search for solutions to national problems around which diverse economic classes would unite.¹⁰ He believed he recognised a paradoxical similarity between Marxist and liberal options. Both draw on abstract categories of thinking and fail to attend to the necessarily inductive and consultative process of producing policy solutions.

I suggest that it will be important for those who agree with Pope Francis to maintain a consistently moderately anthropocentric perspective in ecological debates in the future that will involve identifying points of disagreement not only with those who adopt positions of excessive anthropocentrism but also with those who espouse biocentrism. Four examples come to mind of where it will be valuable to adopt a moderately anthropocentric position in future ecological debates.

First, the notion of environmental constitutionalism will need to be explored. Needless to say, Pope Francis is explicit in his hope to witness legislative change in favour of environmental protection. However, he suggests that this has to be related to a cultural shift where populations come to accept the values implied by such legislative change, and where the specifics of such changes have been worked out in wide-based processes of dialogue. Otherwise environmental constitutionalism would imply a kind of compulsion of citizens, where those who do not at first grasp the significance of a legislative or constitutional change that has been made, may subsequently find themselves bound by it.

Second, the difference between anthropocentric and biocentric approaches can become evident on questions of what kind of “footprint” economic activity should be permitted to leave on the natural environment. Broadly speaking, I suspect that the approach of Pope Francis would tend to support options that biocentric thinkers would consider to be excessively

heavy. An example of such a debate is found in policies surrounding the protection of forests. It is becoming increasingly accepted that human husbandry of forests—for economic purposes—can sometimes be the best way of preserving them. However, this issue has been a source of controversy, especially where expanding human population puts pressure on land use (Kimmins 1992). Third, the question of the human population explosion is a sensitive one in any debate on global economic development between Catholics and non-Catholics. Nevertheless, it cannot be avoided. One would hope that the credibility that *Laudato Si'* has won for a Catholic voice in the secular realm of ecological ethics would extend to a readiness on both sides to explore these issues further from a basis in moderate anthropocentrism.

My fourth point concerns party politics in modern democracies. I suggest that a moderate anthropocentric approach may appeal to centre and centre-right parties more than a biocentric one. I fear that the predominance of biocentric arguments in public debate leads to a regrettable tendency to consider ecology to be an issue that is only important for the left. Careful dialogue should occur between those who agree with Pope Francis and the so-called *green conservative movement* (Grey 1993). These could point out that moderate anthropocentrism is perfectly compatible with what is best in socially conservative political movements. In a qualified way, they could share in a criticism of the “politically correct” culture in developed countries, inasmuch as this represents ideas and values that are emotivist. On the other hand, it would be necessary to point out how often conservative political movements are held captive by xenophobic and excessively anthropocentric views, as well as by neo-liberal theories of economic development. An instructive line of enquiry here would be the question of how vested financial interests can find ways to deny the truth about ecological problems and to persuade conservative political parties to accept such falsities (Oreskes & Conway 2010; Mayer 2016.).

CONCLUSION

In concluding this reflection on *Laudato Si'* I suggest that it is above all important to recognise that the encyclical seeks to initiate processes converting minds, hearts, and culture, that will inevitably take a long time to achieve. At a political level, the need for continuing effort is obvious. We can rejoice that the *COP 21* meeting of 2015 constitutes a step forward in international consensus, but we can also note that it produced no legally binding regulations for nation-states. Consequently there remains a challenge for advocacy at national level. However, this paper has focused on the need for academics who agree with *Laudato Si'* to maintain a sustained contribution to ecological debates in the medium and long term future. *Laudato Si'* makes a robust and at times innovative contribution to a set of moderately anthropocentric arguments that have recently been gaining respect in academic circles. Academics who are impressed with the encyclical should treat it as a point of departure for articulating a moderately anthropocentric perspective on a wide variety of issues.

NOTES

¹ This categorisation of approaches to ecological ethics is reasonably widely accepted, although many add further distinctions; see Callicott 2004.

² Strictly speaking the term “biocentrism” is associated with the thought of Robert Lanza (Lanza 2007). However, the term can also be used to describe a wider set of arguments sometimes called “ecocentric.” An example is the “deep ecology movement” (Naess 1973).

³ For a perspective rooted in process philosophy, see Cobb 1972.

⁴ For an example of a deontological approach to environmental ethics, see Rolston 1988.

⁵ A prominent current critic of biocentrism is the physicist D.L. Krauss (2016).

⁶ An early statement of an anthropocentric argument in ecological ethics was offered by J. Passmore (1974); more recent articulations include W. Grey (1993); M.J. Adler (1993); C. Crysdale & N. Omerod (2013).

⁷ For the examples of a feminist critique of biocentric and deontological arguments, see Gilligan 1981 and Kheel 1990.

⁸ Austen Ivereigh explains the inductive approach of the Pope to both theology and political philosophy by describing it as a form of “moderate Peronism” (Ivereigh 2014:71-72, 104-106, 113-114, 196, 202, 217-218, 237-238, 246-247, 267-271).

⁹ Jenkins is widely published (see, for example, 2008; 2013).

¹⁰ Here again, the analysis offered by Austen Ivereigh of the Peronism of Bergoglio is revealing. He suggests that Bergoglio distanced himself equally from right-wing neoliberalism and the “friend-enemy logic” of Marx-influenced left-wing policies. See, for example, the opposition of Cardinal Bergoglio to the government of Néstor Kirchner from 2003 onwards (Ivereigh 2014:271-273). See also a discussion of how Pope Francis inherits an ethical-philosophical tradition from Europe that is more “romantic-idealist” than rationalist and Marxist (Kasper 2015:15-21).

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Dorothy Stang: Ecological Prophet and Martyr

SUSAN RAKOCZY

ABSTRACT

Dorothy Stang, SND, was assassinated in February 2005 in the Amazon forest of Brazil. This article analyses her life and the foundations of her spirituality which sustained her as she ministered to very poor, landless people in the Amazon region. Her letters and other reflections, together with the witness of those who knew her, describe a woman of great faith and commitment who was willing to give her life for the poor. Her praxis of discernment was based on the SND [Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur] commitment to the poor and her growing and developing ecological spirituality.

INTRODUCTION

Dorothy Stang, SND, assassinated on 12 February 2005 in Brazil, gave her life for ecological justice; her violent death was the result of her unwavering commitment to the poor and to justice for them. Her letters and reflections, together with the accounts we have of her committed life, demonstrate the discernment decisions of her faith.

There was nothing extraordinary in her early life that presaged her martyrdom. Her strong Catholic family life and the example of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur nourished her religious vocation. From their foundation by St Julie Billiart in 1804, the SNDs have focused their mission on serving the poor. Dorothy's ministry evolved over the years from primary school teaching in Illinois and Arizona to the many ways she lived and worked amongst the poor of Brazil from 1966 to her death in

2005. These included development of basic Christian communities, schools and literacy projects and direct advocacy with the poor.

Dorothy arrived in Brazil one year after the close of the Second Vatican Council. The immediate post-conciliar years were a time of enormous change in the Catholic Church and in women's religious life. The SNDs embraced this renewal, especially the call in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*), to read the signs of the times and be in solidarity with the poor and all those in need.

Dorothy began her years of ministry in a Brazil under military dictatorship which had taken over the country in 1964. Four years later the Brazilian bishops participated in the momentous meeting of Latin American bishops in Medellín, Colombia in which they proclaimed that the Church must exercise a preferential option for the poor. This set the Church on a collision course with the rich and powerful in Brazil and throughout Latin America. It became a church of martyrs such as Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador who was assassinated in 1980.

The Brazilian government wanted to open up the Amazon River region for development, supposedly for agriculture and the settlement of landless persons from other parts of the country. This was a key aspect of the development of the Pan Amazon Highway (PA) which began in 1972. Dorothy lived amongst the people in the PA 70 region and stood by their side when agriculture was frustrated by loggers and the people lost their new farms. Her commitment led to her death.

DOROTHY'S EARLY YEARS

Born in rural Shiloh, Ohio in the United States on 7 June 1931, she was the fourth child of a family of nine. Her father, Henry Stang, was a military officer who had worked in the US Air Force as a chemical engineer. He was also an organic farmer and the work she and her siblings did on the farm was an invaluable preparation for her future in Brazil. Her mother Edna (nee McClosky) was a strong wife and mother who had her hands

full raising her large family. They were a devout Catholic family and the children attended local Catholic schools.

Dot (as she was always called) was a student in Julianne High School in Dayton, which was directed by the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur who were founded in 1804 in Belgium by St Julie Billiart. The Sisters stimulated mission awareness in the students through mission talks, films and contributions to the Propagation of the Faith, an international mission organisation. All of this provided the motivation for her vocation to religious life.

Her life-long best friend Joan Krimm was a year ahead of her in school and had decided to enter the congregation. Dorothy was only 16 but she was determined not to be left behind. At the top of her application form she wrote “I want to be a missionary in China.” (Murphy 2007:7). She did not know that at the time this was impossible because the SNDs had been forced to leave China during World War II. Eventually it was to be in Brazil, not China, that Dorothy lived her missionary call.

Reflecting on her call, she said, “I came to Notre Dame because I liked the good example set before me by the Sisters. Also because they are primarily for the poor.”¹ She recalled that when she was 13

there was a sister at our little rural parish called Sr. Mary Michael. For some mystic (*sic*) reason she filled my heart with a desire to be a missionary. My Dad & Mom also were 2 great missionaries at our little parish – always willing to do what they could do to help.²

Her sister Maggie reflected on Dorothy’s vocation:

Dorothy seemed to know her own mind. Despite her full social life and her love of excitement, I think she always had a deep feeling that this might be the right way for her to live her life. She always wanted to help people who were poor and she could serve the Lord at the same time (Murdock 2009:12).

Dorothy and Joan entered the congregation on 26 July 1948; fired with youthful enthusiasm, they expected to be asked to do harsh penances such as sleeping on the floor. What a disappointment it was to find that there were beds, though with straw mattresses (Murphy 2007:8). She finished high school during her postulancy. Entering the novitiate in 1949, she was given the name Sister Mary Joachim. She made her first vows on January 26, 1951 and final vows followed five years later on August 13, 1956.

Her first mission experiences were in Illinois where she taught Grade 3 in St Victor School in Calumet City and Grades 4 and 5 in St Alexander School in Villa Park. Her sense of call to mission beyond middle class America began to be realised when at age 22 she was sent with 4 other SND sisters to the new Most Holy Trinity School in Phoenix, Arizona. She taught many of the grades and was later named principal and superior. Her youthful energy amazed the children who had never seen a sister play games with them. On Friday afternoons Dorothy and the other sisters would travel to the migrant camps to teach catechism to the children. Observing the children, she noticed that some had deformed fingers and dark birthmarks on their faces and arms. The daughter of a farmer, she realised their mothers had been exposed to dangerous pesticides from the crop dusting planes when they were pregnant. When the planes passed over the fields where Dorothy worked with the children and their parents in the lettuce fields, she urged them to come into the Sisters' car until the plane had vanished. She told the family,

We are all God's children. You and me. And while we are waiting for our government to outlaw pesticides that can harm us, we have to stand up for ourselves (Murdock 2009: 17).

Nancy Clingan was one of Dorothy's pupils in the school. Sometimes she went along with the Sisters to the migrant workers' fields and homes. These became very formative experiences for her and she recalled that

The most important contribution Sister made to me in my personal development, however, came in the form of raising my social, cultural, personal and political awareness.³

She was with Dorothy the day that the crop duster plane sprayed them, making everyone choke and gag. On the way home she recalled that

Sister talked about the power of the worker, and how standing together for what you believe in and deserve is a very powerful weapon. She explained how racism and capitalism were connected, and how unions could impact change.⁴

THE CALL TO BRAZIL

During the years she worked in Arizona, Dorothy was able to spend the summers in Mexico, teaching catechism to the children and generally helping in many ways. One summer her brother Tom, now a priest, came to assist and when the parish priest disappeared only to return when there was a funeral and a stipend to collect, Dorothy was not impressed.

In 1963 Pope John XXIII requested that North American religious congregations commit 10% of their members to the church in Latin America. The Notre Dame Sisters asked for volunteers and Dorothy immediately said yes. In 1966 she received word that she had been chosen to join the second group of SNDs in Brazil and that her very good friend Joan Krimm was also going.

Dorothy and Sisters Barbara English, Marie Heinze, Patricia McQuade and Joan Krimm arrived in Brazil in August 1966. They went to the Centre for Intercultural Formation (CENFI) near Rio de Janeiro for language and cultural studies. On weekends they stayed in Rio to practice their Portuguese which Dorothy found difficult. In a letter to SND friends in the States she wrote,

One of my trials is the language problem. Portuguese is by no means easy to master and to really teach religion here, one should be able to speak fluently.⁵

But in another letter to her parents she is full of enthusiasm:

Our Portuguese classes are wonderful. We are in groups of 4 or 5. The teachers are young Brazilians and most delightful. We rotate so as to get acquainted with all. It creates a great bond of friendship. I must add too that the Brazilians are great.⁶

Her first impressions of the Church in Brazil were mixed:

As far as the Church is concerned most saying it is dead I think it is because the Church has not been a real part of their lives.⁷

On December 18th Dorothy went with 4 other Notre Dame Sisters to Coroatá where she began to work with the families of farm workers and to help develop Basic Christian Communities. At a liturgy to welcome the Sisters, Bishop Motta asked the sisters to say a few words and Dorothy spoke for the group, saying “Thank you. We’re happy to be here. Thank you very much” in her beginner’s Portuguese (Murphy 2007:30). The Bishop was particularly happy to see that they were not wearing veils (they were in their luggage) since he wished to show the women of the parish that they did not have to cover their heads when receiving Communion – they had been using tablecloths which covered a group (:29).

Although Dorothy and the other Sisters thought that they would teach in a school, they quickly became immersed in pastoral work, visiting the homes and doing street preaching. She soon learned that the people knew little of the faith other than baptism was essential, go to Mass when you could, and living together before marriage was a sin (Murphy 2007:30). The social teachings of the Church were unknown to the people and they were at the mercy of the landowners, who demanded at least 10% and sometimes 50% of what they grew.

The SNDs arrived in Brazil at a crucial time, both politically and in the Church. A military coup in 1964 began many years of violent repression of the people which Dorothy was to witness time and again and to be in danger herself. In 1968, three years after the close of Vatican II, the Latin American bishops met in Medellín, Colombia and reversed their traditional approach of focusing on the spiritual needs of the people and made a “preferential option for the poor,” describing the injustice of the continent in prophetic language. It was a stance which she embraced fully.

The SND commitment to justice for the people made enemies and on August 5 1970

gunmen shot up the parish centre in an effort to scare the village women who were with the sisters for a retreat (Murphy 2007:39).

Brazil’s military government viewed anyone who worked for justice and on the side of the poor, as Communists. The social encyclicals such as *Populorum Progressio* (1964) named the dangerous signs of the times—violence, poverty, oppression—while Dorothy and the other sisters intensified their work with the people.

After only two years in Brazil, Dorothy’s negative views of the landowners, were apparent. She stated that “what we made sure of was that we went to no landowner’s house.”⁸

Writing to her provincial in February, 1967, Dorothy spoke of her ministry with women who are prostitutes:

We are home visiting these days. Sr. Patricia and I go as a team. We have been to 118 homes so far. The last two roads have been filled with prostitutes. What pitiful sights and conditions. So many women here are just slaves. The men use them and leave them. The women tell us they are prostitutes because they don’t know what to do as they receive money and this helps them to live as there is practically no employment for women. People all over town are raising these illegitimate children. Will tell you more later. Just hope we can bring

a little hope into their lives. I received a hug from one prostitute that I thought would squeeze out my life.⁹

By 1974 Dorothy sensed that she had done what she could do in Coroatá and at an SND Assembly in July she proposed that the region also begin to work in Marabá in the Amazon region. She argued that they should go because it was

an area that had very few ministering there, a diocese dedicated to the oppressed, and an area of expansion where many from the Northeast were migrating and so they “could accompany our people.”¹⁰

However, there were counter arguments relating to their few numbers, that the new area was distant and that it was politically dangerous, thus adding risk to their ministry. In the end, it was decided that Dorothy and Sister Rebecca Spires would visit the area and assess the situation. Their visit convinced them that Marabá was the place for SND ministry. The decision was ratified in September and Dorothy was to go immediately to “PA 70” which was a new road connecting various cities including Belem—Brasilia with Marabá and Marabá Conceição de Araguaia.

Before she left for PA 70 the base communities in Coroatá missioned Dorothy to her new place of ministry. She reflected on this experience:

The people felt they were missioning me to carry to other Maranhenses what we had done in Coroatá. When I first came to Coroatá, I didn’t know anything about the work. The people didn’t either. We all learned together how to walk me. The idea was that we would walk together in this new land with this new people, and I would carry with me the spirit of Coroatá (Murphy 2007: 48-49).

BEGINNINGS IN PA 70

In November 1974 Sister Becky Spires joined Dorothy in this area of ministry. The PA 70 road was still new as it made its way into the Amazon forest. People were moving in and establishing new villages and Dorothy found herself amidst a great mixture of people since they were moving there from all over Brazil. Everyone wanted land. And land was the chief challenge which confronted Dorothy and which ultimately led to her violent death.

They wanted land because

their land already being old, weak and poor or because the landowners they worked for humiliated and exploited them. Or because they had nothing. They came with hope and excitement—a people strong, resistant, full of hope and a pioneer people, ready for anything.¹¹

But the rich also came

to speculate and explore, the business people, gunmen—every kind in the end. There were also some firms. The firm Javaé, lumbermen and breeder of cattle from São Paulo, drove out 400 families from land they had cultivated by hand which was already producing fruit, beautiful farms. Javaé came, took, drove out the people. It was the law of the strongest.¹²

The goals of the PA team for 1975 were clear: to learn the area, to create bonds with the people, and to begin to organise communities. Soon the land problems impacted Dorothy's ministry. A rich landowner threatened to expel the group and destroyed their crops.

There were threats, gun shots, burnings of homes, everything. There was no time for pedagogical processes. We simply mobilized the whole PA 70 in a fury of reports, uprisings and petition signings.”¹³

These first clashes with the rich showed Dorothy that the people were ignorant of their rights. She entered into the MEB (Mobilization for Basic Education) team which promoted adult literacy. The text was the Bible—in an inexpensive edition—and as the people began to read and reflect on their lives they began to make the connections between the biblical text and their context of oppression and injustice.

During a retreat which Becky and Dorothy were holding for women, they were told to report to the military, along with all foreign religious. Dorothy quickly took their “subversive documents” and asked a neighbour to bury the bag containing them. When they were called to the inquest the military lieutenant “pulled out song sheets and handouts from a pile of papers that the sisters had used for Eucharistic celebrations and classes. One was a copy of the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights...which he called subversive.” (Murphy 2007: 55).

Writing in 1977 to family members Bob and Barbara Richardson, Dorothy commented that “Brazil has 12,000,000 landless; 44% of our farm land is in the hands of 1% of the population.”¹⁴

In 1977 another highway was constructed and Dorothy and the SND team helped to organise thirty basic Christian communities. In 1978 the SNDS divided into two teams and Dorothy went to live where “as the land battles escalated, Dorothy continued her activism for the poor peasants, once again creating friction between her and the landholders.”¹⁵ Now she was in real jeopardy because “in 1979, a warrant was issued for her arrest. Fortunately, she was tipped off and went to the regional capital of Belém to get legal protection. The matter was dropped, but Dorothy was warned that if she ever had meetings about land, she would be arrested.”¹⁶ These warnings did not deter her; Dorothy was clear that her vocation was to serve the poor and to be with them.

Reflecting on her early days in Pará, she emphasised community building:

What I would like to say is that our whole emphasis at that time was to help those small groups, isolated out there in the woods, to create

strong communal ties, and once they were created, to build strong CEBs [base communities]...Every time we got together, every month on the first Saturday of the month, the subject was land, how much land we could occupy (Murphy 2007: 70, 71).

Dorothy's sense of mission was consistently to be with the poor and so she moved from Abel Figueredo in 1977 to Nazare, then to Anapu in 1982, each time going more deeply into the forest. In Nazare she helped farmers begin the Pioneer Association, the forerunner of the Farmer's Union of that area. In 1981 her name again appeared on a hit list because of her stand with and for the poor. During those years she began the Women's Association, various coop projects (including pig raising) and various types of community education projects.

Bishop Dom Erwin of Xingu described his first encounter with Dorothy and her sense of mission. She had come to the Xingu area to work amongst the poorest of the poor and he told her, "All right, Dorothy, if you're looking for the poorest of the poor, you'll need to go to the Transamazon East. It's the end of the world there. It's terrible. The people haven't so much as a place to lay their heads" (Le Breton 2008: 106).

During a 1989 visit to the SNDS in Brazil, Claire Callaghan SND who was Mission Coordinator for Africa and Latin America, described Dorothy's ministry:

Dorothy battles her way through the busy struggling to help the poor to obtain a piece of land from which they can eke out a very modest living. Wealthy landowners are seen by the poor; but the landowners fail to see the poor all around them. Because of the enormous wealth of the landlords, anyone who tries to thwart their ways (lawful or not) of getting or keeping large parcels of land, is in constant threat of reprisal.¹⁷

Her letters to family and friends visibly describe the challenges and dangers of her ministry. 1997 was a time of severe drought and in a letter to Maggie and Elmer Holm she said,

Can you imagine we live in the Amazon praying for rain. Our rains stopped the middle of May...water is low—how to water!¹⁸

In a 1998 letter to Archie Bruun of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati's Mission Office who helped with fund-raising, she asked him to

pray that our Church is faithful to the cry of the poor.¹⁹

To her family in 1999 she spoke of the land problems:

These pictures are some 60 families that just occupied a piece of forest. We had trouble with a land speculator. They took our people to court but it looks like our people will hold the land. We are trying on another piece for some 30 families. This keeps the people from working for big land owners for slave pay.

Her efforts on behalf of the poor landless farmers led to numerous threats against her life. In 2003 she was served with a notice to appear in court, charged with aiding farmers in an armed rebellion. At the court hearing in Brasilia in October 2004 she described the

murder, theft and the burning of houses taking place around Anapu, of the crops being destroyed, of cattle grass being sown among the farmers' rice (*sic*) or beans to choke their growth (Murphy 2007:129).

The judge told her that she would be recalled for the second session of the case. But by that time she was dead.

As the threats against her increased, friends advised her to ask for police protection. But she refused since the farmers were the ones who needed protection from the ranchers and landowners. She said,

I am not afraid for myself. I fear for the lives of these poor people, and if I can help them save their own lives, I will continue my work.

The rural peasants have a right to a place in society as much as the wealthy do (Quoted in Murdock 2009: 101).

To the landowners she was a “terrorist” but to the farmers she was “the angel of the Trans-amazon.”²⁰

DOROTHY’S SPIRITUALITY

Two streams formed the basis of Dorothy’s spirituality: her commitment to the Gospel as a Sister of Notre Dame and ecological spirituality. The first was the foundation of her life and the second blossomed later in her life.

Amongst her notes is Brother Charles De Foucauld’s “Prayer of Abandonment.” She translated the Portuguese into English:

Father/Mother,
I abandon myself into your hands,
Do with me what you will;
Whatever you may do, I thank you.
I am ready for all; I accept all
But only your Will be done in and in
All your creatures.
I wish no more than this, O Lord.
Into your hands I commend my soul.
I offer it to you with all the love of my heart.
For I love you, Lord and so need to give myself
Without reserve and with boundless confidence
For you are my Father/Mother.²¹

Writing in 1981 from a “hide-away” house, Dorothy reflects on the SND commitment to the poor:

We can't talk about the poor. We must be poor with the poor and then there is no doubt how to act. If we strip ourselves of all our extras that consume so much of our time and thoughts on how to care for them, our left-over time is (no longer) coloured and it is (no longer) hard to give a gospel response.²²

Dorothy lived on prayer and her daily prayer time was an absolute essential for her. Murphy describes prayer as central in her life: “She always carried her Bible and her breviary wherever she went. Every time she met with a group in the forest, she invited them to pray together. Her energy and her courage sprang from her deep faith and her obvious love of God and the people” (Murphy 2007: 104).

In 1993 she expressed her anguish and suffering as a woman in a patriarchal church:

All that I can say my God what does this macho church want of us women? We have given our all. [I have] even sacrificed my home, country, family, trust, to work among your people. God, my lover and Creator, I love You but I don't understand why they seek to destroy our simple life-joy-caring among the people. I never came to create hate or division but to build love, confidence, and caring among a beautiful, abandoned people. Does this have to be part of life's struggle (Murphy 2007:105).

But in the midst of her enthusiastic commitment to God in and with the poor, Dorothy struggled with the demands of her life. In 1998 she celebrated her golden jubilee as a Sister of Notre Dame with her community in Ohio. In England the congregation was holding a General Chapter, a time of discernment and decision-making. The sisters at the Chapter recommended that each SND write a letter that the two foundresses, Julie Billiart and Françoise Blin de Bourbon would have

written to them. But instead, Dorothy wrote to them, sharing her struggles. While in Ohio she had shared with her best friend Joan Krimm that the “romance was over” (Murphy 2007: 112) and it would be difficult for her to return to Brazil.

In her letter Dorothy spoke of her psychological struggles:

I thought that I would be ready to face whatever was ahead. You know something, I was wrong... I feel shaken, my tranquillity is being transformed and my head is spinning. The reality is larger than I!²³

Describing the conditions in Brazil – leadership fights, government bureaucracy which blocks development for the people, increasing poverty – she asserts that as Notre Dame Sisters

we need, more than ever, solidarity, companionship – community among us so as not to lose the vision that we have had for our people since the beginning

in order to

live the challenges of the Gospel and together enter into the 3rd millennium with plans for an alternative society that gives LIFE.²⁴

She concludes her letter to her foundresses with this prayer,

I ask that God deepen my faith so that I do not lose my enthusiasm for the struggle of the people.²⁵

In 1999 she responded to the SND document “Beyond the limits” with a clear statement of her commitment to the poor:

We, as Notre Dame, have inherited from St Julie and our history a mission to dedicate ourselves to the poor in the most abandoned places. Living, eating, drinking, sharing daily with these, bring about **change**... Our consciences accuse – demand – that we act, risk, and

assume with the communities a role that we can fulfil as committed Gospel Sisters of Notre Dame.²⁶

Her friend Jo Anne Depweg SND who also has worked in Brazil for many years, recalled the importance of the Scriptures in Dorothy's life, especially the prophets Jeremiah and Isaiah. She said, "Whatever she did, the Word of God was part of it."²⁷ The Eucharist was also central in her spirituality and Sister Jo Anne described a retreat which they made together in Concordia, Kansas in which Dorothy insisted "Let's take Jesus with us"²⁸ (the reserved Sacrament) so that they could receive the Eucharist.

GROWING IN AN ECOLOGICAL SPIRITUALITY

As the daughter of an organic farmer father and as a woman committed to helping the poor in Brazil secure land rights for farming, Dorothy's spirituality reflected a close bond with the earth. Reflecting on her father's influence she recalled

The great love for the land which I have comes from my parents. My father worked the land for many years, from my infancy on. And my father always taught me that you had to work the land in such a way that when you finished the land was richer than when you started.²⁹

She often wore a T-shirt which said, "The death of the forest is the end of our Life."³⁰ Her ecological commitment was deepened and strengthened when she participated in the Institute for Culture and Creation Spirituality at Holy Names College in California during 1991. Matthew Fox, the director of the Institute, had written about "Original Blessing"³¹ (in contrast to "original sin") which focused on the goodness of creation and of the human person.

Dorothy was delighted to discover that this spirituality was

naturally allied with liberation theology and the struggles for justice in Latin America. In patriarchal societies there was a natural

connection between the abuse of women, the exploitation of the poor and the abuse of nature (Murphy 2008:96).

Dorothy entered fully into the programme which offered her not only an expansion of her ecological spirituality but also opportunities to engage her creativity through painting and ceramics. She told her friend Sister Barbara English that

It was a tremendous moment for me, a highlight. It really helped me to deepen in relation to ecology, which I had embraced very much in my heart for years, even when I was in Arizona in the desert (Murphy 2007: 97).

The influence of the Institute can be seen in some of Dorothy's letters where she now refers to Mother Earth and speaks of "Father and Mother God."

She attended the Rio Earth Summit in June 1992 which brought together over 100,000 people from all over the world. Among the documents adopted by the Summit was the Statement of Forest Principles, to guide the sustainable development of forests worldwide. This heartened Dorothy but "the principles and proposals were rarely, if ever, carried out in the region of the Amazon" (Murphy 2007:98).

Writing to members of her family after the Rio Summit she said,

Really, the world scene is not too good. Tell all the family we must make great efforts to save our planet. Mother Earth is not able to provide anymore. Her water and air are poisoned and her soil is dying of exaggerated use of chemicals, all in the name of profit...Pray for all of us and for a world where all can live—plants, animals, and humans in peace and harmony (Quoted in Murphy 2007: 98-99).

Death approaches

It was her profound faith which sustained Dorothy throughout her life as the nets of those opposed to her work for justice closed around her. She wrote,

I have learned that faith sustains me. I have also learned that three things are difficult. As a woman, to be taken seriously in the struggle for land reform. To stay faithful to believing that these small groups of poor farmers will prevail in organising and carrying their own agenda forward, and three, to have the courage to give your life in the struggle for change.³²

Joan Krimm remembers that she said

I have to be with these people. If it means my life, I want to give my life.³³

Even as early as 1981 “Dorothy received warning and threats from the ranchers and land thieves (*grileiros*) in the area. I remember on one occasion Dorothy and some 27 farm workers escaped an attempt on their lives by hiding in a dump truck with high walls.”³⁴ By the late 1990s she was on a death list; she knew this, but she would say, “Who would want to kill an old woman?” In 2003 she was accused of aiding the farmers in an armed rebellion.

In 2004 the death threats escalated from landowners and lumber men because of the plans for a sustainable development plan for 140,000 hectares which belonged to the Federal government. Dorothy spoke courageously:

I will not hide the struggle of these farmers who are unprotected in the middle of the forest. They have a sacred right to a better life on a land where it is possible to live and produce crops without destroying the forest.³⁵

Her martyrdom occurred on 12 February 2005. She had set a date for meetings with farmers on the 11th and 12th to encourage them to stay on their land. Dorothy appeared worried about the meeting and she called her brother David early on the 11th and asked for prayers, saying, “This is going to be a tough one” (quoted in Murphy 2007: 136). David sensed that things were very wrong.

The original plan was to kill Dorothy that night as she slept at the home of friend. But when the assassins arrived they couldn’t see her sleeping in a hammock because she slept on the floor. The next morning as Dorothy walked to the meeting place, the two assassins, Rayfran and Clodoaldo who had been hired by the landowner, Tato (Amair Fijoli da Cunha), confronted her. As usual she carried her cloth bag with her bible, breviary and papers relating to her ministry. She was ordered to take her hand out of her bag since they suspected she had a gun in it. She replied “I have no gun” and began to read the Beatitudes: “Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness...” (Le Breton 2008:222).

Rayfran said to her, “If you haven’t solved this problem till now, you’re not going to be around to solve it anymore” (Murphy 2007:142).³⁶ Then he fired, first hitting her in the abdomen and shoulder, then four shots to her head. It was raining and her blood seeped into the mud where she lay for the rest of the day.

The news of her murder spread rapidly and three hundred people soon gathered. Her body was first taken to Anapu and then to Belem for the autopsy. Jo Anne Depweg, SND remembers that as her body was brought to the morgue “people clapped slowly and chanted ‘Dorothy lives forever’.”³⁷ A first funeral Mass was held after the autopsy which was attended by hundreds, to be followed by a vigil and a 4am Mass. Then Dorothy’s body was flown to Altamira for another liturgy and finally to Anapu where the funeral was held at the Centre of Formation at Sao

Rafael. She was buried on 14 February at Sao Rafael, a pastoral centre which she had built, in the middle of the forest.³⁸

RESPONSE TO DOROTHY'S DEATH

There was massive international response to her murder because of her commitment to be with the poor in their struggles for land and a decent life. President Lula acted swiftly and sent a special police unit “to secure and transport Sister Dorothy’s body, protect witnesses, and guard the crime site.”³⁹ He also sent 2,000 troops to the region to try to halt the illegal logging operations. The US FBI aided Brazilian law enforcement officers as they investigated Dorothy’s murder. On 14 February a warrant was issued for the arrest of Tato who planned the murder and he turned himself in on the 16th. Rayfran and Eduardo who murdered her were arrested on 20 February. Bida the land grabber turned himself in on 27 March. They were all given long prison sentences.

In December 2005 Rayfran was sentenced to 27 years and Eduardo to 17 years. In April 2006 Tato was found guilty of being an intermediary to Dorothy’s murder and was sentenced to 18 years in prison. Bida was sentenced to 30 years in prison in May 2007. There were many appeals and the case became very complicated.

As of 2015, however, one of the men who was convicted for ordering the killing, Regivaldo Pereira Galvao, was out of prison awaiting appeal, while his associate, Vitalmiro Bastos de Moura, was completing his penalty in a semi-open prison regime, allowing him to leave prison by day. Nevertheless, Stang’s case was, in many ways, exceptional, for the simple fact that the killers were identified and brought to trial. Of the 1 270 cases of homicide of rural workers documented by the Pastoral Land Commission between 1985 and 2013, less than 10% were ever prosecuted.⁴⁰

DOROTHY STANG'S DISCERNMENT EXPERIENCE: COMMITMENT TO THE POOR NO MATTER THE COST

It is many thousands of kilometres from the secure Catholic family in which Dorothy grew up in Ohio to a muddy forest path in Brazil where she was murdered because of her stance for justice with and for the poor.

Dorothy did not write about discernment; she lived it through the choices which she made. First was her missionary call to religious life which she expressed first in her desire to go to China as a SND Sister. This expanded in her years in Arizona where she learned of the harsh conditions of the farm workers through her visits to them for catechetical ministry. In 1966 she arrived in Brazil to begin nearly 39 years of ministry among and with the poor.

The charism of her congregation – to be with the poor – and reading the signs of the times in Brazil, specifically the situation of landless people in the midst of the Amazon River region – shaped her response to the Spirit. Each choice of ministry, each new direction, was made according to this perspective. Her SND spirituality was later deepened through the new perspective of creation spirituality which built on the foundation of learning and doing organic farming under the guidance of her father. Her faithfulness led to her murder in the Amazon forest on that rainy February morning as she read the Beatitudes to her assassins.

Women's experience is the foundation of their discernment. Theory and theology can guide but experience is the norm. Dorothy's committed life led her step by step along the jungle paths of the Amazon region to ever deeper levels of commitment to the poor. She died as she lived, for and with the poor.

NOTES

- ¹ Quotation, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur Provincial Archives, Dorothy Stang Room, Reading, Ohio. I am very grateful to Kimberly Dalgarn SND, archivist, for her assistance during my visit in November 2014.
- ² Dorothy Stang SND, Questionnaire. Office of Communications, Cincinnati, Ohio. n.d. Dorothy Stang Folder 5, SND Provincial Archives, Reading, Ohio.
- ³ Nancy Clingan, "Testimony"—Most Holy Trinity School, Class of 1960," page 1. This was written for a Women's Studies Class in 1986. Dorothy Stang Folder 6, SND Provincial Archives, Reading, Ohio.
- ⁴ Clingan, page 2.
- ⁵ Quotation, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur Archives, Dorothy Stang Room, Reading, Ohio.
- ⁶ DS, Letter to Dad and Mother, September 3, 1966. Dorothy Stang Folder 7, SND Provincial Archives, Reading, Ohio.
- ⁷ DS, Letter to Dad and Mother, September 3, 1966. Dorothy Stang Folder 7, SND Provincial Archives, Reading, Ohio.
- ⁸ Joan Krimm SND, interview with Jaime Holland and David Stonehill, "Sister Dorothy Stang: Struggling for Sustainable Development in the Brazilian Amazon," American University (n.d.), 4. Dorothy Stang Folder 6, SND Provincial Archives, Reading, Ohio.
- ⁹ Dorothy Stang, Letter to Provincial, February 14, 1967. Dorothy Stang Folder 2, SND Provincial Archives, Reading, Ohio.
- ¹⁰ Barbara English SND, interview with Jaime Holland and David Stonehill, "Sister Dorothy Stang: Struggling for Sustainable Development in the Brazilian Amazon," American University (n.d.), 4. Dorothy Stang Folder 6, SND Archives, Reading, Ohio.
- ¹¹ The Sisters of Notre Dame and the "PA 70." Dorothy Stang Folder 6, SND Provincial Archives, Reading, Ohio.
- ¹² The Sisters of Notre Dame and the "PA 70." Dorothy Stang Folder 6, SND Provincial Archives, Reading, Ohio.
- ¹³ The Sisters of Notre Dame and the "PA 70." Dorothy Stang Folder 6, SND Provincial Archives, Reading, Ohio.
- ¹⁴ June 6, 1977. Dorothy Stang Folder 2, SND Provincial Archives, Reading, Ohio.
- ¹⁵ Jaime Holland and David Stonehill, "Sister Dorothy Stang: Struggling for Sustainable Development in the Brazilian Amazon," American University (n.d.), 5. Dorothy Stang Folder 6, SND Provincial Archives, Reading, Ohio.
- ¹⁶ Jaime Holland and David Stonehill, "Sister Dorothy Stang: Struggling for Sustainable Development in the Brazilian Amazon," American University (n.d.), 5. Dorothy Stang Folder 6, SND Provincial Archives, Reading, Ohio.
- ¹⁷ Claire Callaghan SND, "Latin American Journal," November 1989, 3. Dorothy Stang Folder 6, SND Provincial Archives, Reading Ohio.
- ¹⁸ DS to Maggie and Elmer Horn, 25 July 1997. Dorothy Stang Folder 4, SND Provincial Archives, Reading Ohio.
- ¹⁹ DS to Archie Bruun, February 10, 1998. Dorothy Stang Folder 6, SND Provincial Archives, Reading, Ohio.
- ²⁰ "Religious and Union Members Denounce Threat." *O Liberal*, March 3, 2004. Dorothy Stang Folder 1, SND Provincial Archives, Reading, Ohio.
- ²¹ Dorothy Stang, handwritten prayer, n.d. Dorothy Stang Folder 1, SND Provincial Archives, Reading, Ohio.
- ²² Dorothy Stang Quotes, Dorothy Stang Folder 5, SND Provincial Archives, Reading, Ohio.
- ²³ Dorothy Stang, Anapú, Pará, September 3, 1998. Dorothy Stang, Folder 5, SND Provincial Archives, Reading, Ohio.
- ²⁴ Dorothy Stang, Anapú, Pará, September 3, 1998. Dorothy Stang, Folder 5, SND Provincial Archives, Reading, Ohio.
- ²⁵ Dorothy Stang, Anapú, Pará, September 3, 1998. Dorothy Stang Folder 5, SND Provincial Archives, Reading, Ohio.
- ²⁶ Sister Dorothy Stang's Response to the 13 May 1999 Letter. Dorothy Stang Folder 2, SND Provincial Archives, Reading, Ohio.
- ²⁷ Interview with Jo Anne Depweg, SND, 13 November 2014, SND Provincial Center, Reading, Ohio.
- ²⁸ Interview with Jo Anne Depweg, SND, 13 November 2014, SND Provincial Center, Reading, Ohio.

- ²⁹ Letter from Elizabeth Bowyer SND to Father Valentino Salvoldi (December 26, 2007). Dorothy Stang Folder 7, SND Provincial Archives, Reading, Ohio.
- ³⁰ Questions/Answers SND, Interview with Joan Krimm, November 16 2005. Dorothy Stang Folder 1, SND Provincial Archives, Reading, Ohio.
- ³¹ Matthew Fox, *Original Blessing* (Santa Fe, New Mexico: Bear and Company, 1984).
- ³² Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, Cincinnati, Ohio, "Quotes from Sister Dorothy Stang," SNDdeN, Dorothy Stang, Folder 5, SND Provincial Archives, Reading, Ohio.
- ³³ Joan Krimm, Jennifer Robertson, "Angel of the Amazon," *Organic Style*, October 2005, 92. Quoted in Jaime Holland and David Stonehill, "Sister Dorothy Stang: Struggling for Sustainable Development in the Brazilian Amazon," American University (n.d.), 6. Dorothy Stang Folder 6, SND Provincial Archives, Reading, Ohio.
- ³⁴ Br Jeronimo Rogerio Brandelerio .Letter to Milton R. Medran Moreira. SND Provincial Archives, Reading, Ohio. Dorothy Stang Folder 1, SND Provincial Archives, Reading, Ohio.
- ³⁵ Religious and Union Members Denounce the Threats. *O Liberal*, March 3, 2004. Dorothy Stang Folder 1, SND Provincial Archives, Reading, Ohio.
- ³⁶ Her murder was witnessed by her friend Cicero who had followed her and hid in the bushes to see what would happen.
- ³⁷ Interview with Jo Anne Depweg, SND, 13 November 2014, SND Provincial Center, Reading, Ohio.
- ³⁸ Dorothy Stang Time-Line, Dorothy Stang Folder 1, SND Provincial Archives, Reading, Ohio.
- ³⁹ Jaime Holland and David Stonehill,, "Sister Dorothy Stang: Struggling for Sustainable Development in the Brazilian Amazon," American University (n.d.), 11. Dorothy Stang Folder 6, SND Provincial Archives, Reading, Ohio.
- ⁴⁰ Sister Dorothy Stang died fighting for Brazil's landless; 10 years later, not much has changed.
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Laudato Si': An Ethical Reflection

MARILISE SMURTHWAITE

ABSTRACT

This paper reflects on the ethical and moral aspects of *Laudato Si'* and argues that the encyclical is not merely about ecological issues but raises a wide range of ethical concerns at various levels: the systemic, the organisational and the individual. The author contends the content of the encyclical seems to provide answers to certain implied ethical questions. The paper uses these questions as a framework for reflecting on the ethical issues raised in this encyclical.

INTRODUCTION

While much popular opinion has hailed *Laudato Si'* as the environmental encyclical, such classifications are not necessarily helpful when considering the ethical aspects of the encyclical. It seems that in reality there is a far deeper and broader canvas before us. It may well be a mistake to pigeonhole such a comprehensive and complex message in so neat and complete a manner. Let us recall that *Centesimus Annus* (1991), reputed to champion capitalism, in fact presented a carefully nuanced argument on types of capitalism as well as dealing with many other issues. So, in considering *Laudato Si'*, we will look further than its environmental message and concerns.

Gula (1989:10) (following Gustafson) distinguished between ethics and morals as looking at the same subject matter from different perspectives. The ethical perspective considers the nature of the good, which includes the goal of a moral life and the reason for being moral, as well as the

nature of the human person as a moral agent and the criteria for making a moral judgement.

Morals, by contrast, refer to the practical rather than the theoretical aspect of what Christians call *moral theology* and are concerned with “directing human behaviour in light of what one believes to be right or good” (9). In other words, morals concern what should be done. Clearly the answer to the question “What should I do?” will be influenced by a person’s fundamental beliefs and character, the situation where the moral problem arises and the appropriate norms. (9-11). *Laudato Si’* may be seen as considering both the ethical and the moral in its examination of our contemporary 21st century context.

It is clear from the outset that certain key ethical principles (often known as the principles of Catholic Social Teaching) underlie *Laudato Si’* as is the case in many of the encyclicals. It is these principles which are foundational to the holistic approach taken to the human person and her place in the universe, to nature, to the problems we face both socially and ecologically and to possible ways forward to deal effectively with these problems. While the literature reveals many different lists of these core principles, I suggest those underlying this encyclical include respect for the dignity of the human person, solidarity and stewardship of the earth and all resources, subsidiarity, a deep awareness and concern for the common good and justice, and most significantly, the preferential option for the poor. The principles are well known and it is not my intention to explain them here.

Given that ethics asks questions about the purpose of human life, what it means to be human, about what constitutes a good life and about how best to be and act, an initial observation is that the content of the encyclical seems to provide answers to certain implied ethical questions. We might frame these in the following way:

- How are we living now?
- What are the effects of living in this way?
- How should we live? What changes do we need to make?

Thus the content of the encyclical details the elements and causes of our present situation, the consequences for humans and environment of living in this way and the changes we need to make in order to find ways to move forward from this current destructive position. In covering these themes, we are presented with the ethical crisis that confronts us. This crisis, in which human and ecological aspects are interconnected as one complex crisis, reflects the fruits of our ethical degradation, a degradation that is interconnected with our human and ecological degradation.

GENERAL REMARKS: POINTS OF SIGNIFICANCE

In considering the encyclical and its ethical perspective it may be useful to begin by making four general remarks.

First, the encyclical stresses repeatedly that everything is interconnected and interrelated and that the crisis that faces us is one complex crisis and not two separate crises. In other words, we should not separate the ecological and social aspects of this one crisis by erroneously claiming that the two are separate crises. The notion of a single crisis bears witness to a deep understanding of relationship and interconnectedness: the relationship of human beings to God, to others and to the earth. We might argue that it is the nature of these relationships that is both the problem and the solution: our problems originate from, at best, a misunderstanding, or, at worst, as the encyclical intimates, a *delusion*, about who we are, our place in the universe and our relationships to God, others and to the earth. Likewise, if we are to find answers and solutions, this will only be possible on the basis of working together as community in a spirit of solidarity aimed at ensuring that any solutions are inclusive rather than exclusive of all nations and peoples and do not merely benefit the elite, the special, the rich or the powerful. Holistic, integrated, ethical and inclusive solutions must be found with a view to justice, particularly for the poor and marginalised and with a view to ensuring the common good.

Secondly, one of the most striking sentences in the encyclical is “We are not God” (*LS* n.67). This short sentence serves to alert us to some of the

underlying ethical questions to which this encyclical gives consideration and explanation. At a deep underlying level the questions pertain to the purpose of our human life and to what our place in the universe should look like.

Related to this, there are four further pertinent questions: What have we become and what have we done? Why is this the case? What *can* we do? How can we *change*? It is not difficult to deduce that, while we are not God ((*LS* n.67), we have acted as though we are God. Our behaviour has suggested that we own and control the universe and the symptoms of our use and abuse of power are evident on many levels, including the financial, the political, and the economic. We have used our power to foster self-interest, individualism, consumerism, and we have used it to exclude and to destroy at the cost of both the environment and human beings. We have simply failed to see that our paradigm is one of mastery and control where we have lost sight of the interconnection between persons and God, between persons and persons and between persons and nature. Perhaps what the sentence does is to force us to consider that repeated ethical question: what does it mean to be a human person and to live a human life? What options are there and which *have we taken*? Which *should* we take now?

Thirdly, despite this indictment of much in our current way of living, we find confidence and hope running through the encyclical like a golden thread: hope and confidence that we can change, behave differently, make more ethical decisions and use our humanity to make things better.

Finally, an observation on some interesting patterns in the language of the encyclical. The language of this particular encyclical might well be classified as “user-friendly,” being simple and easy to understand, without being simplistic or lacking in depth. However, its simplicity is not what interests us here. What is fascinating about the discourse, is that a brief analysis relevant to ethical principles and issues discussed, reveals that certain words and/or word themes are repeated many times. This is

significant as it points to certain ethical and moral priorities in the argument and subject matter (see Table 1 below).

Taking those relevant words which occur more than 50 times, it is interesting that *power* is the most frequently used word: the encyclical deals with the use and abuse of power as a central theme. The priority given to the rights, plight and needs of the *poor*, to *relationships* and *interconnectedness* and to the importance of *love* are likewise highlighted by the frequency of the terms used. The word *change* is pre-eminent after the first four terms already discussed. What is striking about this encyclical is that the necessity for us to change our ways and to bring about constructive and just changes is essential if we are to remedy or contain those changes which will be and already are, destructive of both planet and persons.

We may also observe that words connoting the principles of Catholic Social Teaching are likewise so repeated: *interconnected* and *relationship* as well as the actual term *solidarity* occur together 80 times; *respect and dignity* together occur 70 times; *common good* (30); *justice* (24). The terms *moral*, *ethics* and *ethical* together also occur repeatedly (36 times).

TABLE 1: Occurrence of words: Repetitions

Word	Number of occurrences
Power	76
Love	70
Poor	61 (poverty 12)
Relationship	61
Change	56
Respect	37
Common good	30

Responsibility	30 and responsible (8)
Waste	29
Crisis	28
Justice	24
Consumerism/consumerist	24
Dignity	23
Harm/harmful	23
Ethical	18
Violence	15
Solidarity	14
Poverty	12
Behaviour	11
Moral	10
Destruction	10 (and destroy 9)

Such analysis, gives us a snapshot of the themes and priorities dealt with in this encyclical. Even so brief a consideration of the discourse suggests a hierarchy of values, with authentic and inauthentic values clearly contrasted.

THEMES

At the outset, Pope Francis notes that certain themes will recur (*LS* n.16). These themes (listed below) bring to mind the underlying ethical principles mentioned earlier, most particularly those of the respect for human dignity, solidarity, the preferential option for the poor and the concern for the common good. These themes are as follows:

- The relationship of the poor to the environment (it is important to note that this is his first example)
- The interconnection of everything
- The critique of “new paradigms and forms of power derived from technology”
- The value of all creatures
- Requests to find other models of economy and progress
- Responsibilities of policy at international and local level
- The “throwaway culture” and calls for a new lifestyle.

In addition, we find that reference is made more than once to ethical decline and the need for ethical foundations on which to base our discussion and choices.

CONSIDERATION OF THE ETHICAL ASPECTS OF THE ENCYCLICAL

I will frame this discussion within what I have earlier referred to as the implied ethical questions:

- How are we living now?: i.e. the elements and causes of our present situation
- What are the effects of living in this way?: i.e. the consequences for humans and environment of living in this way
- How should we live: what changes do we need to make? i.e. possible ways forward.

How are we living now?

The first question then concerns how we are living currently. The short answer to this question is that we live as though human beings have unlimited freedom and that theirs is the power to master and control the

universe to facilitate individual self-interest for only some nations and peoples, irrespective of the human and ecological costs to others.

However, the encyclical answers this in more detail, and so we need to consider several aspects of this way of living including the elements and causes of our present situation, our relationships to environment and, technology, our use of power, our economic and political arrangements and what this means *for* and does *to* the human person.

The elements and causes of our present situation

The encyclical notes at the outset that despite calls for “a global ecological conversion” and change in respect of the environment dating back to 1971 (*LS* n.5 citing *PT* n.5), we have instead caused both ecological and social damage (*LS* n.6) through our irresponsibility. Our attitude is rooted in a belief that human freedom is limitless and such an attitude demonstrates a failure to understand that authentic human development has a moral character which must incorporate respect for both nature and the person (*LS* n.5).

Ours is not the integral approach to ecology found in St Francis of Assisi, characterised by fraternity, openness, and wonder and not limited by biology and maths. Rather we are “masters, consumers, ruthless explorers, unable to set limits on our needs” (*LS* n.11).

Environment: How are we living now?

It was the poet T.S. Eliot who said “Humankind cannot bear very much reality” (*Four Quartets*). This comes to mind when considering the current relationship of humankind to the environment as depicted in *Laudato Si'*. It would appear there are a number of ways we currently avoid reality and deceive ourselves about our behaviour in regard to the environment itself. There is, for example, the “rise of a false or superficial ecology which bolsters complacency and a cheerful recklessness” (*LS* n.59) where we do nothing or little, despite the signs of problems and where we claim things

are “not too bad.” In this way we endorse our current lifestyles and modes of consumption and production:

This is the way human beings contrive to feed their self-destructive vices: trying not to see them, trying not to acknowledge them, delaying the implications and pretending nothing will happen (*LS* n.59).

This latter comment is a stark reminder that there are better and worse ways to live a flourishing human life: feeding vice is not generally regarded as either ethical or moral or beneficial to human development and relationships.

In our current way of living, we have developed a short sighted and, indeed, unethical approach to resources reflected in economic, commercial and production processes which simply exploit resources, using them as a means to an end (obviously profit) and attaching no value to the earth or its resources in themselves (e.g. forests, animals and so on). The consequence of this is a **loss of biodiversity** and our approach to **ecosystems** is careless and short sighted. (*LS* n.32-40).

As Pope Francis notes, where profit is the uppermost priority, the preserving or repairing of the ecosystem will not be the main priority. *Laudato Si'* also points out that developed countries have a responsibility to pay the ecological debt (*LS* n.52).

In addition to this type of destructive behaviour, there are those who continue to champion the “myth of progress” believing ecological problems will just “solve themselves” by applying new technology “without any need for ethical consideration or deep change” (*LS* n.60). Of course, some believe humans should not intervene in the planet at all. While these may be views at the extremes of a continuum, we need to find some way to a more balanced assessment of the reality and to generating options which will improve the current situation. By contrast, in fact, Pope Francis stresses that we have a relationship of mutual responsibility with nature: we must respect the laws of nature and the equilibrium of the natural system and creation (*LS* n.68-9). (To disregard our responsibilities

has destructive consequences as illustrated by the story of Cain and Abel). Modern anthropocentrism has resulted in us valuing technology over nature so compromising the dignity of “the world” (LS n.115).

The encyclical suggests that an ecological approach must include a social view which considers the needs of the poor and marginalised. In this respect, we are reminded that private property is not an unqualified right: it is always subject to the common good and that this understanding is the “first principle of the whole ethical and social order” (LS n.93: quoting CA n.71)). In understanding the link between ecological and social, we need to be particularly concerned at the condition of spaces where the marginalised are to be found. In these “more hidden areas where the disposable of society live” (LS n.45), we find a lack of green spaces. In addition, we may find that due to privatisation, such spaces are not available to the marginalised. *Laudato Si’* cautions us that our relationship to nature is inauthentic if we lack compassion and concern for other humans, are indifferent to their suffering, and are not concerned about the poor (LS n.91) because everything is interrelated.

An open heart and sense of fraternity which includes all is required (LS n.92): cruelty to people or animals is not acceptable. It is clear, therefore, that to consider some human beings as more worthy and others as “disposable” and so less worthy, would be to show a deep misunderstanding of the dignity of each person and the importance of solidarity. Gutiérrez and Müller in the book entitled *On the Side of the Poor* (2015: 88) have reminded us that the term *poor* was, in the 1960s, discerned by liberation theologians to have three meanings: poverty where people have nothing (referred to as *real or material poverty*); *spiritual poverty* typified by a lack of attachment to worldly goods and “poverty as a *commitment* in solidarity with the poor and in protest against poverty” (88).

While we can hope and we can choose differently as a solution, we need to note how serious the situation is now - i.e. at “breaking point” (LS n.61) and unsustainable “for we have stopped thinking about the goals of human activity” (LS n.61). For Pope Francis it is relativism that drives what we

can call our instrumentalist way of looking at life (*LS* n.123). However, we might argue it is less relativism than *instrumentalism* itself which results in our using people and things as a means to our own ends.

Technology: How are we living now?

In regard to technology, the focus of the encyclical is the technocratic paradigm and the place of humans and human activity in the world. Technology, like economy, is not simply a neutral phenomenon: humans make decisions about what to develop, how to develop it, what to use it for and so on. The encyclical notes that technology has done much good and can improve human life. However, it has also given us great *power* in a variety of areas. Such *power* rests especially with those who have the knowledge and resources not only to *use* technology but to *dominate* all humans and the whole world by means of such prowess.

Laudato Si' argues that there is no guarantee that we will use technology wisely, especially if we consider how we use it currently. Goodness and truth do not automatically come from technological and economic power (*LS* n.105).

Unfortunately, our development in “human responsibility, values and conscience” has not matched technological development (*LS* n.105). We are reminded that we have no training in how “to use power well” (*LS* n.105) and we do not have “a sound ethics, a culture and spirituality genuinely capable of setting limits and teaching clear-minded self-restraint” (*LS* n.105). Regrettably, science has not taken account of the knowledge found in philosophy and ethics. We do not have an ethical basis on which to proceed and so we simply succumb to the technology and also to its consequences (*LS* n.110). This view is reinforced by Gutiérrez and Müller (2015: 84) who ask

In the world of the technological and information revolution, of the “globalisation” of the economy, of neoliberalism and so-called postmodernism, is there room for those who today are poor and

marginalised and who are seeking ways to free themselves from an inhuman state that tramples on their status as human persons and as children of God?

This brings us to the roots of the current problem which lie in the way we human beings have adopted and used technology. Currently, the technocratic paradigm dominates lifestyle, as well as the economic and political domains. Castells (2000) argued many years ago that ours is a *new economy* in which those who have the specialised skills to interact in a networked and global context are advantaged and are in demand. Those who do not have such skills are not. Gutiérrez and Müller (2015:93) have argued that the future looks good for those “who have a certain social standing and who take part in cutting-edge technological knowledge.” These people belong to a sort of club which excludes those who do not have these attributes, namely, the poor. The future of those excluded from the club is different: “cruel,” with increasing “poverty and marginalisation” as well as greater numbers who live in misery “unless we make an enormous effort at solidarity” (2015:93).

However, our reality currently does not demonstrate this orientation. Imposing the methods and aims of science and technology on both human and social reality has destructive effects on human and social life (*LS* n.107). Technological products are not neutral “for they create a framework which ends up conditioning lifestyles and shaping social possibilities along the lines dictated by the interests of certain powerful groups” (*LS* n.107). We are reminded that apparently instrumental decisions actually point to the type of society we want to build (*LS* n.107). Because our paradigm is a rational one aimed at control, mastery and transformation, we accept the notion of unlimited growth and so we have a “confrontational relationship” with nature (*LS* n.106).

As an example of the more negative effects of technology, Laudato Si’ contends that the media and the digital world can be an obstacle to people learning “how to live wisely, to think deeply and to love generously” (*LS* n.47). An accumulation of data can just result in ignorance and confusion.

In addition, in our current way of living, where we substitute internet or media relationships for authentic relationships, we are protected from “direct contact with pain, the fears and the joys of others and the complexity of their personal experiences” (*LS* n.47).

... when technology disregards the great ethical principles, it ends up considering any practice whatsoever as licit ... a technology severed from ethics will not easily be able to limit its own power (*LS* n.136).

However, it is possible for us to use technology differently and more creatively so as to relieve suffering and enable more people to live with dignity. For Pope Francis, technology which produces constant novelties and new products and huge dull structures does nothing to engender hope in people. Often human life is dull and monotonous in spite of technology and its developments and its apparent power to transform lives. We are exhorted not to accept that life is a mere superficial and dull process, with no hope of change. Rather we need to

wonder about the purpose and meaning of everything. Otherwise we would simply legitimate the present situation and need new forms of escapism to help us endure the emptiness (*LS* n.113).

Laudato Si' exhorts us to a “bold cultural revolution” (n.114), to consider slowly and thoughtfully and to use our technological progress in a different and more fruitful and sustainable way. Perhaps most importantly, and in keeping with the ethical emphasis of the encyclical, “we need to recover the values and the great goals swept away by our unrestrained delusions of grandeur” (*LS* n.114).

Power, Economic and Political Arrangements: How are we living now?

CST has consistently held that the economy is not an end in itself and that it should be at the service of human beings not just as economic beings but as whole persons. In addition, it has held that the way an economy is

ordered must enable all persons to participate in economic life and that the justice of an economy may be judged in relation to the extent to which human dignity and the common good are central to the functioning of that economic system. Thus it was that the US Bishops in their pastoral letter *Economic Justice for All* stated

Every perspective on economic life that is human, moral, and Christian must be shaped by three questions: What does the economy do *for* people? What does it do *to* people? And how do people *participate* in it? (US Catholic Conference 1997:21).¹

In addition they noted:

Economic decisions have human consequences and moral content; they help or hurt people, strengthen or weaken family life, advance or diminish the quality of justice ... (US Catholic Bishops 1997:13)

Where economic justice does not pertain, we must make changes. CST has championed such change for centuries. As one example:

Justice and equity demand that, without prejudice to personal rights or the character of particular peoples, we strenuously try to remove as quickly as possible the present huge and growing economic inequalities, which involve unfairness to men and to sections of society (GS n.66).

Laudato Si' reminds us that we live in a context where special interests, economic interests, and a lack of leadership interested in real change, dog efforts not only to intervene creatively and constructively in the area of environment, but also to make systemic changes in the interest of both people and planet. In this global context, those who hold economic power endorse the current economic global system where profit is prioritised and context, human and environmental degradation. are not (LS n.56). Thus *Laudato Si'* argues that

Here we see how environmental deterioration and human and ethical degradation are closely linked (LS n.56)

And it is not just *Laudato Si'* which makes such observations. A similar point is made by Hendry (2004):

To an extent unprecedented in history the pursuit of self-interest at the expense of others, traditionally condemned as morally reprehensible, has come to be seen as morally acceptable and socially legitimate (Hendry 2004: 2).

Gutiérrez and Müller (2015: 94) also commented that our world is one in which

A market without restrictions, called to regulate itself on its own, has become the nearly absolute principle of economic life.

Our global economy “challenges commonly accepted moral norms ...” (2015:97) and

Envy, selfishness and greed become the driving forces of the economy; solidarity and concern for the poorest are seen, by contrast, as obstacles to economic growth and in the end as counterproductive in achieving a situation of well-being from which all persons might benefit one day (Gutiérrez and Müller 2015: 97-8.).

Yet we read in the encyclical that, for many, there is no awareness of having done anything immoral, unethical, or wrong. Consciences have been dulled and demands for change are viewed as a nuisance or as mere fantasy. Instead of real change, what you get is sporadic or partial and superficial efforts to right problems: “The alliance between the economy and technology ends up side-lining anything unrelated to its immediate interests” (*LS* n.54).

Laudato Si' also contends that politics and business have not responded very fast to the challenges of our world and, we might add, that this is despite the fact that they have the power to do so. Politicians' will to solve the problems is affected by their difficulty with short-term versus long-term goals and perspectives. Powerful financial interests do not care to see

the types of violence which will ensue from environmental and social degradation. While some progress has been made in raising ecological awareness, lack of political will, poor implementation of solutions, resistance of those with power and who pollute the most, dog progress. Token gestures like carbon credits can prevent real and radical change. Thus it is that "... economic interests easily end up trumping the common good and manipulating information so that their own plans will not be affected" (LS n.54).

Pope Francis reminds us that with respect to economy and economic life, we have not learnt from 2008 and the global financial crisis. We continue to espouse a 'profit-only' economic paradigm and are unconcerned with a more equitable distribution of wealth. We know the market cannot facilitate authentic development but we don't develop those institutions and solutions to ensure the poor access to basic resources. Neither do we see the real roots of our "present failures." These have to do with the directions, goals, meaning and the social implications of technological and economic growth (LS n.109). We would do well to remember that "human costs always include economic costs, and economic dysfunctions always involve human costs" (LS n.128 citing CV n.105).

In line with the principle of subsidiarity, *Laudato Si'* is supportive of small enterprises and of the importance of civil authorities assisting and facilitating these rather than trade regulations making it impossible for them to operate (LS n.129).

In addition to commenting on the macro-economic sphere from an ethical perspective, this encyclical also highlights certain ethical problems in the meso-ethical area. For the purposes of this paper, we will take note of the comments on the relationship between people, politics, business and work. Work is a key part of any economy and of human endeavour. While we need to understand our relationship to God, nature and others, we also need to understand work correctly. Such an understanding reflects on the question of purpose and meaning of all our human activity (LS n.125). "Underlying every form of work is a concept of the relationship which we

can and must have with what is other than ourselves” (*LS* n.125). Work enables us to grow, to develop, to use our creativity. We are “created with a vocation to work” (*LS* n.128) and it is not satisfactory for technological progress to replace human work. This is a very different perspective from that of the dominant economic paradigm: here we see a disregard for humans other than as a means to the end of profit or as a mere economic unit, efficiency and profit are prioritised and work may merely be a means to an end: for the worker a means to a wage, for the employer, a means to obtain profit. In regard to the poor, assistance to the poor is not the ultimate answer: the aim is to enable the poor to participate in work as a way of living a dignified life.

People: How are we living now?

If we ask how we are living now in respect of human persons, the short answer, based on *Laudato Si'*, would be something like what follows. Our world seems to be characterised by a lack of respect for the dignity of the human person, by scant regard for the common good and by a lack of solidarity and justice particularly in regard to the poor. In addition, we are faced with the exclusion of certain persons, inequality, lawlessness, cultural homogenisation, a profit-centred rather than a person-centred orientation, and the use of power to prolong the privileged position of some at the expense of others.

Earlier, in 2012 the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace made a similar point in respect of our globalised society: “*Globalisation* has brought efficiency and extraordinary new opportunities to businesses but the downside includes greater inequality, economic dislocation, cultural homogeneity, and the inability of governments to properly regulate capital flows” (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace 2012: 2).

The Pope’s concern for the poor and the awareness of their exclusion from power, from discourse about resources and their vulnerability to changes in the environment is very clear. He notes that

... the deterioration of the environment and of the society affects the most vulnerable people on the planet (*LS* n.48)

And

... there is little in the way of clear awareness of problems which especially affect the excluded (*LS* n.49).

The argument of *Laudato Si'* is as follows. As a society, we do not address the vulnerability and disadvantage of the poor. Where we have international or political or economic discussions, the problems of the poor are merely an “afterthought” (*LS* n.49), a sort of side problem which remains “at the bottom of the pile” (*LS* n.49). This is often the case because those in power have little or no contact with the poor and where they live. Such people “live and reason from the comfortable position of a high level of development and a quality of life well beyond the reach of the majority of the world’s population” (*LS* n.49). Consequently, we can get a “numbing of conscience” (*LS* n.49) and an analysis of reality which is aimed at presenting a particular point of view and which excludes certain aspects of reality (another reminder of the wisdom of the TS Eliot quotation given earlier). For Pope Francis, *justice* has to be part of the debates on environment and the *social* approach must be part of the ecological. He shows we cannot compartmentalise human and social degradation on the one hand and environmental on the other. They are related.

Our world demonstrates vast inequalities (*LS* n.90). We tolerate notions of some people being better and more deserving than others:

We fail to see that some are mired in desperate and degrading poverty, with no way out, while others have not the faintest idea of what to do with their possessions, vainly showing off their supposed superiority and leaving behind them so much waste which, if it were the case everywhere, would destroy the planet. In practice, we continue to tolerate that some consider themselves more human than others, as if they had been born with greater rights (*LS* 90).

In addition to inequalities and exclusions, we live in a world where law is not always respected (*LS* n.142), and where there is corruption and poor institutional capacity in some countries. We are also faced with the homogenisation of cultures via “a consumerist vision of human beings, encouraged by the mechanisms of today’s globalised economy” (*LS* n.144). Respect for people and their rights and cultures is important. Yet the way we live now does not necessarily demonstrate this.

What are the effects of living in this way?

We turn now to the second of our implied ethical questions: and consider the consequences for humans and environment of living in this way. While we may prefer to turn a blind eye to possible consequences of our way of life, we are reminded that there *are in fact* consequences to “environmental deterioration, current models of development and the throwaway culture.” (*LS* n.43). We may argue that we are currently experiencing the consequences of an abuse of freedom as well as a lack of concern for ethics and a tardiness or, perhaps, unwillingness, to deal with ethical issues.

We have already begun to touch on some of the consequences of this way of life for humans and environment while answering our first question (How are we living now?). However, we may add a few further remarks in this respect.

In the first instance, our way of life fails to facilitate the common good and fails to ensure that all people share in the resources available such that they can live lives of dignity. The world as it is now does not necessarily contribute to the common good or to sustainable human development (*LS* n.18). In the section of *Laudato Si’* which discusses the common good (*LS* n.156 ff) we read:

Human ecology is inseparable from the notion of the common good, a central and unifying principle of social ethics (*LS* n.156).

Foundational to this principle is respect for the human person, their rights and their holistic development. This principle relates to the overall good of society and the development of various groups “applying the principle of subsidiarity” (*LS* n.157). The common good

calls for social peace, the stability and security provided by a certain order which cannot be achieved without particular concern for distributive justice, wherever this is violated, violence always ensues (*LS* n.157).

Peace, justice and preserving creation are interrelated themes: they cannot be separated (*LS* n.92). The natural environment is a “collective good”: it is everyone’s responsibility. Resources are for all, not some (*LS* n.93).

Secondly, we see toxic environmental consequences which in turn have a reciprocally destructive effect on human beings, more especially on the marginalised. The climate is also a “common good” (*LS* n.23), yet we are experiencing the fruits of climate change. This is a “global problem” (*LS* n.23) which has serious implications for the environment, as well as for social, economic, and political life and for the distribution of goods (*LS* n.25). It is the developing countries, the poor, who are the most impacted. It is the poor who often must leave their houses and then have no legal status or protection (*LS* n.25). Those who have “more resources and economic or political power seem mostly to be concerned with masking the problems or concealing the symptoms, simply making efforts to reduce some of the negative impacts of climate change” (*LS* n.26).

In addition, we have a wasteful culture where we do not re-use or recycle but simply pile up more rubbish. We have pollution, waste problems, as well as health problems arising from pollution and other environmental hazards. In respect of the depletion and pollution of water we are reminded that it is again the poor who become very ill from drinking contaminated water and who also contract waterborne diseases. Likewise the privatisation of water excludes the poor:

Our world has a grave social debt towards the poor who lack access to drinking water, because *they are denied the right to a life consistent with their inalienable dignity* (LS n.30).

It is clear that the current way of life, means the exclusion and disempowerment of some (for example migrants). Yet we do not want to respond to their tragedies (LS n.25). Without changes, our model of economy and current way of life will result in the continuation of problems.

Such problems and consequences, especially for the poor, come from the way we live and organise our society, our economy, and the way we treat our environment. As Pope Francis notes, where we forget we are not God, and we put ourselves in His place, we worship the inauthentic and destroy God's gift of creation. Everything is interconnected and nature is not to be used just for profit. We must understand the value of nature, of animals for themselves not just as a means to an end. "The ultimate purpose of other creatures is not to be found in us" (LS n.82). "We are all moving to God together. While humans are unique, taking an instrumentalist approach to nature, has destructive consequences and notions of "might is right" has caused injustice, inequality and violence" (LS n.82).

How should we live and what changes do we need to make?

The final question now confronts us: How should we live and what changes do we need to make? What are the possible ways forward for us given the problems which face us?

It is generally well known that human beings cannot solve a problem until they acknowledge that there is a problem. Therefore, to find solutions we must acknowledge the problem and our own particular role, be that significant or insignificant. Let us therefore consider what acknowledging the problem implies with reference to *Laudato Si'*.

As a first step, we need to understand that everything is interconnected, and that we have a single complex social and environmental crisis, not two separate crises. The ecological crisis can be viewed as

one small sign of the ethical, cultural and spiritual crisis of modernity, we cannot presume to heal our relationship with nature and the environment without healing all fundamental relationships (*LS* n.119).

In trying to, first *remember* and, secondly, to *understand* our relationship to others and our transcendent relationship to God, we need also to acknowledge that a mere *technical* solution to ecology will fail to take account of the interconnectedness of everything. As humans, we really need to reflect on our place within the context of the universe and in relation to others and to God. Where we fail to see how we “fit” into our context and what our actual importance is, and where we put ourselves at the centre demanding instant gratification and satisfaction, our lifestyle is “misguided” (*LS* n.122). If we do not find our true place, we lack understanding of ourselves and we act against ourselves (*LS* n.115). Pope Francis states that humans must “respect the natural and moral structure which has been endowed” (*LS* n.115, quoting *CA* n.993). Therefore, we need to change our mind set from one of domination over the universe to one of stewardship:

Once the human being declares independence from reality and behaves with absolute dominion the very foundations of our life begin to crumble... (*LS* n.117).

For Pope Francis we need an ethical and spiritual orientation (*LS* n.15). Therefore, acknowledgement of the problem also means recognising that we have not understood how we are related to God and the rest of creation. To consider the ethical and spiritual means then that we cannot merely “throw money at the problem” or provide an efficient technological solution. This way of thinking is not holistic or inclusive and will result in a partial solution at best. It seems critical to realise that decisions on these

issues “are primarily ethical decisions rooted in solidarity between all peoples” (*LS* n.172). This in turn means we need to understand that science does not completely explain human life and that ethical principles have value and ought not to be dismissed by claiming they are in “religious language” (*LS* n.199).

What this leads us to understand then is that finding solutions requires a comprehensive and integrated approach. Such an approach must use knowledge from different fields to achieve an integral solution instead of merely looking for economic solutions. Our need is to move to global and inclusive solutions, not solutions which represent special interests. It is this type of integral solution which could, in turn, facilitate “combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded and at the same time protecting nature” (*LS* n.139). What is needed is a “new universal solidarity” in contrast to “obstructionist attitudes to solutions” (*LS* n.14) which fail to develop such solidarity.

Consideration of our own role in such a process leads us to the understanding that we can choose to contribute to positive solutions or add to the suffering. “All it takes is one good person to restore hope” (*LS* n.71). We are reminded that “truly much can be done” (*LS* n.180) and we are challenged to work together to search for and find “sustainable and integral development” (*LS* n.13). Time and again we are reminded that change is possible because we humans can change our behaviour, decisions, priorities and ways of doing things. While Pope Francis preaches hope, he also notes that much effort is met with no interest or with “powerful opposition” (*LS* n.14).

However, generating different, appropriate and creative solutions² to complex problems means cultivating openness to doing things differently and thinking in a DIFFERENT way about diverse areas such as education, policies, lifestyle, and spirituality. Not only must we change our way of living from a lifestyle characterised by greed, self-centredness, and obsessive consumerism leading to violence and self-destruction, but we need a change of *heart*. What is required is a sense of solidarity and

community to address the contemporary problems which are counterproductive for humans. Part of this process means adopting a “less is more” mentality.

In considering such changes we may heed the example cited in *Laudato Si'*. Pope Francis draws attention to the way in which the poor practise what he calls a “commendable human ecology” via the creation of communities, solidarity, and belonging which makes “hell on earth” a “setting for a dignified life” (LS n.148). However, there are also a number of other specific suggestions made such as adopting what we may understand to be an inclusive approach to public spaces within urban settings, so that all are welcome and a sense of solidarity develops (LS n.151).

In addition, we are reminded that it is not only in urban settings that dignity is overlooked, but also in rural settings; that a house is important for a sense of dignity and for developing of family life (LS n.152); that where we have makeshift towns we need to develop rather than destroy these and that if people must be moved it should be done humanely so as not to “heap suffering upon suffering” (LS n.152). In addition, public transport should be developed or improved as its lack causes suffering to people.

In other words, *Laudato Si'* suggests that it is in relationship, generosity and creativity that we become more human and dignify life for each other. Love is more powerful than all the misery and degradation that poverty brings and can overcome violence and other ills.

With reference to politics, *Laudato Si'* reinforces the important principle of *subsidiarity* (LS n.196) and emphasises an understanding of the common good. We are reminded that while some economic sectors are more powerful than nation states, it would be unacceptable to let economic interests subsume the political as this would give us a one-sided interest and, we may add, solution, to our current problems. Power politics is unhelpful. States must take on their responsibilities within their borders for planning, law enforcement and so on.

Unless citizens control political power – national, regional and municipal – it will not be possible to control damage to the environment (*LS* n.179).

We are also cautioned against politics abdicating responsibility to business which may appear beneficial but may wield power in their own interests and exempt themselves from rules. For example, in the environmental arena, business pays a very small percentage of social and environmental costs and it would only be ethical if they paid all the costs they incurred. We need to recognise that “...using up shared environmental resources” incurs both social and economic costs and paying these should be the responsibility of “...those who incur them...” rather than that of future generations. Currently

an instrumental way of reasoning, which provides a purely static analysis of realities – the service of present needs, is at work whether resources are allocated by the market or by state central planning (*LS* n.195).

We are reminded of the need for transparent processes free of bribery and corruption. There should be no special favours and interests when discussing the environmental impact of business ventures. This environmental impact needs to be integral to the planning so that costs or profits can include it.

The culture of consumerism, which prioritises short-term gain and private interest, can make it easy to rubber-stamp authorisations or to conceal information (*LS* n.184).

It is clear that the environment cannot be protected on the basis of a pure cost-profit paradigm. The current dominant economic paradigm, with its heavy emphasis on profits, cost cutting, efficiency and so-called “free trade” stands in contrast to the position taken by *Laudato Si’* where a purely profit-oriented view of economy is not supported.

However, the roots of the problems we face lie deeper and so we are reminded that

...even the best mechanisms can break down when there are no worthy goals and values or a genuine and profound humanism to serve as the basis of a noble and generous society (*LS* 182).

Politics and economics are connected: both impact on human lives and neither function in a space isolated from each other. Together they should serve the common good and to be at the service of human life: they are not an end in themselves. Regrettably,

politics and the economy tend to blame each other when it comes to poverty and environmental degradation (*LS* n.198)

This is clearly unhelpful and points to an unwillingness to be accountable and to solve problems. Furthermore, our inadequate response to the financial crisis of 2008 meant we did not rethink the “outdated criteria which continue to rule the world” (*LS* n.189). The “magic of the market” is now well known to be a myth and cannot, as we also know, solve poverty or environmental problems despite notions and convictions to the contrary. The constant emphasis on growth and on the so-called “trickle-down” effect whereby all will benefit from the vagaries of the free and unfettered market economy is also known to be a myth.

Actually the encyclical states that we need to *rethink growth* and in some of the more powerful countries we should advocate less growth so that other countries can grow reasonably. In this respect, reference is made to Pope Benedict urging more advanced countries to adopt a less consumer-orientated lifestyle and a more modest energy consumption (*LS* n. 193). This type of argument, of course, is not only made in encyclicals: economists, philosophers and environmentalists writing today make similar observations.

We must also consider our accountability to future generations and the fact that we find it difficult to be serious about this “has much to do with an ethical and cultural decline which has accompanied the deterioration of the environment” (*LS* n.161). Today, there is great risk of a very individualistic

approach to life, a self-centred and instant gratification orientation. Thus we do not consider the broader issue of intergenerational solidarity for which there is a great moral need (*LS* n.162). The encyclical notes that the *common good* principle also applies to future generations: we must consider this responsibility when we consider “sustainability” (*LS* n.159).

Intergenerational solidarity is not optional but rather a basic question of justice, since the world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us (*LS* n.159).

In fact, if we do ask what kind of world we wish to leave to others, we are really asking about its direction, meaning and values (*LS* n.160). And if we consider these issues in any depth, we will be faced with the question of the purpose of human life: i.e. why are we here, what is the purpose of our world, and so on. As we have mentioned before, these are ethical questions.

We therefore have an educational challenge as well: we must challenge the myths of

a modernity grounded in a utilitarian mind set (individualism, unlimited progress, competition, consumerism, the unregulated market) (*LS* n.210).

To achieve change we must understand our behaviour is influenced by certain mind sets and so education must promote

a new way of thinking about human beings, life, society and our relationship with nature. Otherwise the paradigm of consumerism will continue to advance with the help of the media and the highly effective workings of the market (*LS* n.215).

We need educators who can provide an “ethics of ecology” (*LS* 210). *Laudato Si’* reminds us that

Good education plants seeds when we are young, and these continue to bear fruit throughout life (*LS* n.213).

And that

Only by activating sound virtues will people be able to make a selfless ecological commitment (*LS* n.211).

Christian communities too have an important role to play in ecological education. The encyclical notes that the kind of ecological conversion called for requires not only individual effort, but community effort and commitment as well. Likewise it requires attitudes of gratitude, gratuitousness, stewardship, generosity and humility, without which we succumb to pride.

CONCLUSION

It is not possible in a paper of this length to deal in detail with every ethical perspective given in this encyclical. However, the paper has illustrated the ethical concerns (both environmental and other) raised at various levels (the systemic, the organisational and the individual) by considering at least some of the answers found to what we called certain ‘implied ethical questions’. It is clear, even in so brief a reflection, that how we are living now is destructive and unsustainable and also significantly advantages the powerful and wealthy nations, people, and organisations while disadvantaging substantially the poor and the marginalised majority. The effects of living in this way are complex, varied and most often destructive of or counterproductive to living a flourishing human life of dignity. These effects impact extensively and extremely negatively on the poor and marginalised, while ensuring that a wealthy and powerful minority uphold their power and privilege. Finally, the encyclical has clearly pointed to the fact that solutions to the way of life and its effects in contemporary society will not be found without an acceptance of the ethical and the spiritual dimensions of human life. In other words, the political, economic technological solution, devoid of ethical consideration will not provide a holistic or sustainable solution to our problems. Thus, in closing, we may note the following caution of Pope Francis:

We have had enough of immorality and the mockery of ethics, goodness, faith and honesty. It is time to acknowledge that light-hearted superficiality has done us no good. When the foundations of social life are corroded, what ensues are battles over conflicting interests, new forms of violence and brutality, and obstacles to the growth of a genuine culture of care for the environment (*LS* n. 229).

NOTES

¹ All quotations from the US Bishops Pastoral Letter *Economic Justice For All* are taken from the Tenth Anniversary Edition *Economic Justice for All* 1997 Washington: United States Catholic Conference Inc.

² There are many examples of this at *LS* 192 such as recycling, re-using etc. rather than developing products that are just aimed at quick profit.

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Discrimination Rooted in Culture: The Basis of Violence against Women

BUTI TLHAGALE

ABSTRACT

The main argument of this paper is that violence against women is based on discrimination against women. Even though great strides have been made in recognising women as inherently equal to men, the sedimentation of culturally sanctioned behaviour-patterns in the past, continue to haunt the present. The denial to women of the twin-right of equality and participation has a direct bearing on the types of violence classified as domestic violence, namely: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional, verbal and psychological abuse, economic abuse, intimidation, harassment, stalking etc. It has often been pointed out that the shortcoming of the international treaties on Human Rights has been their failure “to penetrate below,” and radically transform local cultures, customary law and tradition. Alongside this failure, is the lack of conviction and political will of States to commit resources in order to bring about change.

INTRODUCTION

The main argument of this paper is that violence against women is based on discrimination against women. The exclusion of women from positions of leadership and authority feeds the mistaken perception that women are inferior and that public life is a man’s domain. Inferior beings are treated as property by men. They are treated with violence in order to succumb to men’s will and desire. The doctrine that women have an inherent dignity, a right to be respected and a legitimate claim to be treated as equal to men, goes against the grain in the minds and hearts of many men who marshal to their defence cultural norms and practices of times gone by. The privileging

of males throughout generations has moulded and conditioned the minds and attitudes of men towards women. Such mental conditioning is comparable to the acceptance of racism or of slavery prior to its abolition, or to human trafficking in our day and age. To compound matters, the privileging of males and the exclusion of women is steeped in traditional beliefs that do not take kindly to the revision of established norms, set human relationships and the traditional way of life. It is a belief that revision of culture will invite misfortune, fear of the unknown and retribution.

Even though great strides have been made in recognising women as inherently equal to men, the sedimentation of culturally sanctioned behaviour-patterns in the past, continue to haunt the present. The denial to women of the twin-right of equality and participation has a direct bearing on the types of violence classified as domestic violence, namely: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional, verbal and psychological abuse, economic abuse, intimidation, harassment, stalking etc. (Domestic Violence Act 116 of 1998, South Africa). There are also other forms of violence such as abduction, human trafficking, rape etc.

The next step is to look at male domination, the privileging of the male and the exclusion of women in both tradition and culture. While recognition is duly given to the fact that legal, cultural and socio-political changes have effectively taken place, it is equally important to note that the previous condition has not been totally overhauled - hence the on-going spectre of violence and discrimination against women.

It has often been pointed out that the shortcoming of the international treaties on Human Rights has been their failure “to penetrate below,” and radically transform local cultures, customary law and tradition. Alongside this failure, is the lack of conviction and political will of States to commit resources in order to bring about change. Thus the doctrine of the United Nations Human Rights remains by and large, a utopia for those who bear the brunt of discrimination and oppression (Messer 2009:121).

SOCIO-POLITICAL ORGANISATION

Traditional political structures historically differ from country to country. Historically, these structures have been affected by colonial rule, dictatorial forms of government and more recently by the democratic, modern political dispensation. The hierarchical system of traditional rule has survived the far-reaching political changes in most African countries. Traditional modes of government have been accommodated by the democratic forms of government. Irrespective of the historical formation of a traditional political kingdom, political authority is vested in the King or Chief. "He is at once, ruler, judge, maker and guardian of the law, leader in war, priest and magician of his people" (Schàpera 1956:176).

SUCCESSION TO CHIEFTAINSHIP

Chieftainship in most African tribes is inherently a male function. The rightful heir to such a political office is the eldest son of the Chief's "great wife." Among the peoples of Southern Africa, if there is no direct heir, the chief is succeeded by the man next in order of seniority. Women are politically excluded from this role. Traditional chieftainship is an invaluable function and position in the eyes of the people. But it is also inherently discriminatory. The discriminatory male function of the chief is bound up with mystical values which have a direct bearing on the land, fertility, well-being, peace, social order and the prosperity of the inhabitants of the land. The authority of the chief derives from a long line of ancestors. The chief is both a political and a spiritual, religious leader of his people. Writing about the Bemba chiefs, Audrey Richards expresses a view that the "social identification" of an ancestor with his living successor appears "to be particularly complete." Such a reigning chief is believed to possess supernatural powers in his own person (Richards 1970:97). The functioning of the socio-political system is the responsibility of the chief. That structure is vouched for by myths, ritual beliefs and sacred symbols. "This socio-political structure," writes Fortes and Evans-Pritchard, "is, as it were, removed to a mystical plane, where it figures as a

system of sacred values beyond criticism and revision” (Fortes & Evans-Pritchard 1970:18).

Like the hereditary position of the King, the positions of the chiefs and headmen are also hereditary in a patrilineal society. They too have a cultic function amongst others. They conduct religious and magical functions on behalf of their people. (Schàpera 1956:58-59). Roles and functions set aside exclusively for males have their origin in the distant past and are believed to enjoy the blessings of ancestral spirits. But such beliefs thrived on what Charles Taylor refers to as an “enchanted world” of spirits and moral forces. It is an environment where people are “open and porous and vulnerable to a world of spirits and powers”; where people have not yet come to a “new sense of the self” and to a belief that “the only minds in the cosmos are those of humans” (Taylor 2007: Chapter 1). Discrimination against women was, and continues to be buttressed by a social structure that is immersed in an “enchanted world” which in turn defies the overhauling of a patriarchal society.

MATRILINEAL SOCIETIES

There are some noteworthy exceptions to the male dominated political system. Among the Lobedu tribe in South Africa, the Chief is always a woman and she is succeeded by the eldest daughter of the first wife. (Schàpera 1956:1:174). Another exception is that of Mantatisi, the famous chieftainess – regent of the Batlokoa tribe of Lesotho. Mantatisi’s claim to fame was her rare bravery in conducting successful expeditions and her sheer wisdom in dealing with intrigue at the royal kraal (Ellenberger 1992: Chapter IV). Both the examples of the Lobedu and Batlokoa tribes led by chieftainesses are aptly described as exceptional. Even though honour and respect accrue to the women in positions of leadership and authority, such recognition does not have an impact on ordinary women in specific communities. Exceptional female leadership has not changed men’s attitude to women. Men continue to be privileged over women. Recognition of some women in powerful political positions, together with

female members of “their lineage,” does not translate into recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all women.

Nkiri Nzegwu argues strongly that in an achievement-oriented society of Western Igboland, females can be both wives and husbands at the same time. This “shifting identity” means that Igbo women (*Umunwanyị*) are “never in either a permanently subordinate or dominant situation.” Furthermore, the same honorific titles are given to both successful men and women. Igbo daughters (as males) enjoy the same authority and privileges as their brothers. Nzegwu’s point is that Igbo culture and tradition does not privilege males but rather recognises the inherent dignity of both males and females. This certainly cannot be said of most patriarchal societies on the African continent. (Nzegwu 2004:47). The Lubedu Rain Queen was regarded as “male” and had “wives.” But this did not apply to members of her lineage group (Schàpera 1956:1:175).

In the matrilineal tribe, as opposed to the patrilineal tribe, descent is based on female ancestry. This is the case among the Bemba of Bembaland (Tanzania) (Richards 1940:7). Chieftainship is based on matrilineal descent. A man’s legal identity, his right to succession to office and his standing, derive from his maternal descent group. Headmanship and Councillorship are hereditary offices. The striking feature of the Bemba society is that the balance between the powers of the maternal and paternal relatives (bilateralism) “is a very even one in spite of the legal emphasis on the matrilineal side.” This allows for flexibility and for a broader participation of the members in their society (Richards 1970:89). Now women of the royal household participate in tribal councils and are also heads of villages. This privilege does not extend to ordinary members of the tribe. Even though positions of leadership and authority appear to be largely dominated by men with matrilineal ties, it is men and not women, who are in a privileged position. However, both the Igbo and Bemba societies offer solid examples of local cultures where sexual difference does not loom large in the definitions of roles of men and women. In the case of the Bemba tribe, female descent is the basis of individual identity and in the Igbo case, seniority is a dominant value (i.e. wives are

subordinate to both lineage daughters and sons). These two local cultures are open to the recognition of the inherent dignity and equal rights of its members. They can therefore be seen as potentially strengthening and enriching, at local level, the universality of a human rights culture.

Traditionally, all initiated males participated in the political life of the Chiefdom. Women were excluded from playing any political role. Some claim that traditional government was governed “by consensus and broad participation” (Deng 2005:503). But this was a consensus of males alone and a participation of males only. Paradoxically the Chief is the dispenser of justice and the protector of all his people. But it never dawned on the outlook of traditional societies that the exclusion of women was in itself an injustice. Political, jural leadership was exclusively a male function.

The Tribal Council that advised and kept the Chief in check consisted of senior male relatives or his own appointees. This instrument was extremely valuable for it limited the excesses of power. Again here women were excluded because of their gender.

MARGINALITY OF WOMEN

In patriarchal societies, rank is acquired *patrilineally*, that is, children of one man are considered to be of one blood. Mönnig points out that in spite of being of one blood with their male siblings, women “are always inferior not only to the men of their own blood but to all men” (Mönnig 1967:268). Men acquire status through political and jural office. Women are traditionally excluded from such roles. Women acquire status through marriage if they get married to a man of high rank and status. Furthermore, Mönnig has this to say about the status of women in Pedi society:

The position of the whole female sex in Pedi society is such that everything which is despicable is usually ascribed to women. Only they can become impure (*ditšhila*) and so contaminate men (Mönnig 1967: 271).

Jean Comaroff records the same experience about the Tswana women.

Women are closely associated with agriculture and have a fragile hold over it because as females, they lack “the innate closure necessary to permit them to act masterfully upon the world.” Women are open to defilement. Their bodies generate heat, “a force that constantly threatened to spill over and infuse other persons and things with its disruptive qualities” (Comaroff 1985:67). This is why women were forbidden to walk across the cattle kraal. Their bodily “heat” would neutralise protective medicine. It was believed that they threatened with their heat, rituals of initiation, rain-making, ancestor veneration and the decisions of the Chief’s court.

Comaroff points out that a prominent index of the marginality of women is cattle possession and cattle management. “Cattle,” she writes, “provides the single most condensed symbol of the constitution of the body politic among the Tswana” (Comaroff 1985:61). Formerly, cattle represented wealth. They were used to transact a marriage. Clients paid with cattle to gain patronage. They were used in ritual sacrifices to appease ancestral spirits. Cattle were central in all major transactions. Such transactions were a male prerogative. Thus women were not allowed to own cattle, except perhaps a few. Women were excluded from the most valuable activities in the political economy of their society. Essentially, women could not be involved in public transactions because their lack of physical closure potentially threatened existing material, social and spiritual orders. The “polluting heat” of women had to be contained by confining women in space. The “polluting heat” of women leave behind “hot tracks” on public pathways, and these “hot tracks” threatened the health of members of the public (81). Mönnig adds that all night witches are women – for it is believed that “only their sex is capable of such an inborn compulsion to do evil” (Mönnig 167:271).

Jean Comaroff explains that “yet, at the political centre, communal politico-ritual enterprise stood in constant jeopardy of being “spoiled” (*gosenyega*) by the polluting effect of heath (*bothitho*) carried within the inadequately enclosed female body.”

The same principle of exclusion covers other traditional male activities such as hunting, stock management, farming, warfare and iron-smelting. Menstrual taboos apply in all these cases.

In order to reinforce the argument of J. Comaroff, Eugenia Herbert points out that in most iron-smelting areas on the African Continent, the twin-taboo of the “polluting heat” of menstruating women and the prohibition of sexual relations are in force during the production of iron. Women are not allowed anywhere near the foundry; smelters are expected to abstain from sexual relations the day before smelting takes place. The degree of strictness differs from area to area. Herbert writes that in her research in Zaire (Democratic Republic of Congo) there was a strong belief that if a woman ignored the taboo, she would be doomed to *les menstrues infini* (“menstruation without end”) and in the case of an offending male, he too would be doomed to impotence. Menstrual blood symbolises the failure to conceive. The presence of a “polluting heat” would cause the molten slag to “run from the furnace like the menses of a woman.” Herbert draws attention to the Asante (Ghana) belief that if a woman with “polluting heat” entered a stool room, “her state would drive away the spirit of the ancestors.” And so, sexual taboos (including the prohibition of menstruating women) are observed in order to forestall dangerous situations. Herbert notes that these taboos in no way suggest that there is a revulsion against the body or sexuality “but rather it is because sexuality is too powerful a force socially and cosmologically, to leave unregulated” (Herbert 1993:227). It is preponderantly women’s sexuality that is seen by men to be dangerous and therefore in need of control.

Mary Douglas writes that “most activities which custom allocates entirely to one or the other sex are protected by sexual taboos” (Douglas 1954:6). Work roles are rigidly categorised according to sex or the quality of age – the older the better. Such rigidity of work roles “tends to preserve power-relationships.” For example, some occupations are hereditary; participation in political structures is a male prerogative that excludes women; access to goods, technical skills and ritual performance are generally divided strictly along gender-lines. Herbert points out that “with the passage of time the

division of work-roles takes on a timeless authority, valid because this is the way things have always been” (Herbert 1993:222).

AFRICAN MARRIAGES

Some aspects of African customary marriages are responsible for the serious undermining of the freedom and dignity of women. The fact that they have been in force over a lengthy period of time and that women have tolerated them, does not mean that they should not be overhauled and brought into line with the declarations of the Human Rights doctrine. Customary marriage as an institution survives because of the patrilineal kinship system that privileges the male.

Marriagable Age

Poulter in his *Family Law and Litigation in Basotho Society*, points out that

Where the values of any society are in a state of flux the traditional rules will often appear to many members of the younger generation not only to be outmoded, but positively unjust (1976:58).

The age of marriage is a case in point. Some parents still arrange marriages for their teenage daughters and sons. This practice is still in force in some areas even though it is increasingly found to be outmoded. Some parents arrange marriages for their daughters while they are still young in order to prevent them from being deflowered before marriage. (Accad 1978:620). Some traditional parents also argue that marriage is between two families rather than between two individuals. In this day and age the marrying off of a girl between the ages of 12 and 16 is repugnant to justice because chances of the girl improving her education become radically curtailed. Besides, the choice of what a father considers to be a suitable partner ignores private and intimate issues such as love, feelings and general compatibility. Reuter in his *Native Marriages in South Africa, According to Law and Custom*, observes that the age of marriage for women, among Africans, is irrelevant

because “women as a rule never reach the stage of full age or independence but remain ‘minors’ at law under the guardianship of their father or husband or the lawful heir respectively” (1963:106).

Polygamy

Polygamy has not disappeared entirely. It is alive and strong even though it is no longer commonly practised. Polygamy conditions the minds of men. It suggests to men that you can have as many wives or concubines as you can afford. Polygamy flies in the face of monogamy. It contributes towards the undervaluing of women and compromises their individual dignity. Some married men feel entitled to take some other woman as a concubine (*nyatsi*). The practice of polygamy encourages promiscuity among men who are not in polygamous relationships. The Tswana idiom says: *Monna ke pôô ga a agelwe lesaka* (“A man, like a bull, cannot be confined”). A man’s infidelity is condoned. But a woman’s infidelity is taken seriously and may even lead to domestic violence. This is a case of double-standards. Wives are treated as subordinate to men (Schàpera 1970:156).

Miller in his discussion on Senegal women-writers, gives an example of a 30 year old woman named Yacine who was brought by her husband from Senegal to Ivory Coast. One night her husband brought home with him a woman and he declared, “This is my new wife. You will let us have the bed” (Miller 1990:254). Such brazenness, such impunity feeds on a culture that considers women subordinate to men. A polygamous mentality promotes licentiousness and a profound disrespect for women. The intention of polygamy in olden days was to create political alliances, to augment a labour force, to enhance one’s standing in the community and to increase one’s chances to have a male heir. It was also argued that it was better to have legitimate children within a marriage than children born out of wedlock. Tradition maintained that polygamous relations were inherently valuable to the community. While polygamy is no longer commonly practised, its negative impact is still widely felt. It is also responsible for moulding men’s attitude towards women.

There are other cultural practices (concerning customary marriages) which

have equally dented the dignity of women. These practices have fallen into disuse but they have shaped the mentality and attitudes of men and are still remembered as what was permissible in the past.

- (i) Among the Sotho speaking people when a wife died, her sister was expected to replace her as a substitute (*seantlo*) in order to fulfil her family's duty of bearing children to the husband. This practice ignored the independence and the right to freely choose a partner in marriage. This situation brought about humiliation and embarrassment to the wife.
- (ii) If a wife was unable to have children, custom dictated that the husband could take another wife as a "seed-raiser" (*Mala marriage*). This move was to ensure that the wife retained her position as senior wife. The new wife would then live in the shadow (*seriti*) of the senior wife and would be attached to the house of the senior wife. It was also hoped that the new wife might produce a male heir for the senior house.
- (iii) A husband could also marry junior wives called daughters-in-law (*lingoetsi*) who were regarded as helpers of the senior wife. "The husband cohabited with the *ngoetsi* if he wished to and they were also lent out to others." (Poulter 1976:162). Clearly this practice was repugnant to justice and morality. Women were obviously treated as men's property.
- (iv) If a young man died before getting married, his father, anxious to have a son and an heir, would pay *bohali* for a wife for his deceased son. The wife would be said to have been married for the grave (*lebitla*). This was a ghost marriage. (Poulter 156-164).

These cultural practices, collectively and cumulatively, show that there was an excessive preoccupation with having an heir who would ensure the continuation of the family lineage. Lineage succession is still a major concern among African families. This preoccupation also stems from the belief that the ancestors of a particular lineage that has come to an end would no longer have dependants who would offer sacrifices to them.

The assortment of partnerships referred to above, could hardly have been

called marriages. They were family arrangements at best. If one were to stray into religion, these arrangements were a far cry from the assertion of the book of Genesis: “*This is why a man leaves his father and mother and joins himself to his wife and they become one body*” (Gen. 2:24). These arrangements highlighted the subordinate status of a woman. Women were at best seen as men’s property. With the passing of time these customary practices have naturally fallen into desuetude. But this does not mean that their disappearance has radically changed men’s attitude towards women. Women are still not treated as equals to men.

Bogadi (Ilobolo): Payment (bride-price)

Bogadi is the payment of cattle or money given to the wife’s parents by the family of the husband. *Bogadi* is said to be an act of appreciation (*têbogo*) to the wife’s parents for having brought up their daughter and for the loss of the services she would have offered them in future. It cements a bond between two families. Schapera states that the main function of *bogadi* is “to transfer the reproductive power of a woman from her own family into the family of her husband. This transfer makes the marriage legitimate” (Schàpera 1938:139). The amount paid, traditionally, depended on the affordability or generosity of the husband’s family.

Poulter points out that among the Basotho, *bohali* (*bogadi*) payment is often a long-drawn out process that unduly delays marriages. At times it is even paid by an heir after his father’s death. *Bohali* debts do not prescribe. This inevitably leads to elopement, subsequent litigation and the demand for compensation according to the laws of Lerothodi (Section 4(2) of Part II, Poulter 1976:84). The custom of paying *bohali* (*ilobolo*) continues to be pivotal in the arrangements of marriages among the African people in Southern Africa. Poulter is right in observing that the *bohali* custom “seems to be generally favoured by women who say they feel “more married if *bohali* has been paid for them” (333). *Bohali* is an outmoded custom. It subordinates the wife to the control of the husband’s parents. It definitely curtails the freedom of a young couple to make their decisions about their future. Increasingly the husband’s parents adopt a mercenary

attitude towards *bohali*. In North Africa, men pay some money (*mahr*) on signing the marriage contract. “But this custom,” writes Accad, “has acquired the taint of money, of transaction and bargaining” (Accard 1978:621). *Bohali* has increasingly become unreasonable and an unnecessary burden to those who want to marry. If *bohali* is not paid, the father has no right to his biological children. There does appear to be a need to emancipate women from this onerous tradition of depending on the payment of *bohali* in order for them to get married.

One of the conundrums of *lobolo* custom is that an unmarried young man may have a child with a girl. He does not have any responsibility towards his child and the mother. Custom dictates that he pays for the damage done. He pays a once-off *inhlawulo* (“damage payment”). The child becomes the responsibility of the girl and her family. This injustice continues to plague women. Some men neglect to pay maintenance money even if it is a court ruling.

INHERITANCE

The traditional inheritance rule clearly reflects the subordinate position of women. When a married man dies, the eldest son, if he is of age, takes after his father as head of the family even if there is an older sister. The heir receives a large share of the estate. He then becomes responsible for his mother and siblings. He assumes his father’s status, rights and duties. The intention of the customary rule of primogeniture is to guarantee an uninterrupted continuation of the lineage of the deceased, so pivotal in the African value-system. The eldest son becomes the proverbial hen that gathers her chicks under her wings. He ensures the well-being of the family by keeping the family assets undisturbed. These assets might be divided if the estate is allocated according to a will (see Bennett 2004: Chapter 12). If a married man dies without having had any son, his estate becomes the responsibility of his younger brother or nearest male relative. Traditionally, the brother of the deceased could, if he so wished, co-habit with the wife of the deceased with a prospect of raising a son who would

then in time become the heir. Or he could also arrange that some other relative co-habit with his brother's wife in order to "raise the seed" (Schàpera and Goodwyn 1937:163; Schàpera 1938:232).

The traditional inheritance rule that privileges the eldest son or in the absence of the eldest son, a male relative, is patently repugnant to justice and morality. When the husband dies, the wife becomes subordinate to her own son or to some male relative. This is not just a question of role, this is an obvious discrimination based on sex. The customary rule of male inheritance has effectively changed. *The South African Interstate Succession Act 81 of 1987* considers the customary male inheritance rule inconsistent with the Constitution and therefore discriminatory. The Act specifies the surviving spouse of the deceased as an interstate heir. (Media Release by South African Law Reform Commission, Pretoria. 7 March 2008; Du Toit 2009:464). Furthermore, *The Recognition of Customary Marriages Act 120 of 1998*, grants a wife in a customary marriage, on the basis of equality with her husband, "full status and capacity, including the capacity to acquire assets and to dispose of them, to enter into contracts and to litigate" (Government Gazette, 1 November 2000).

These pieces of legislation, based on the values of equality and human dignity enshrined in the Constitution are a breakthrough for women. They have granted women full *locus standi* before the law. Customary Law has been made consistent with the Constitution. However the gap between the law and practice remains. That gap accounts for the continuation of violence against women.

In real life, women continue to be treated as "minors" in spite of the declarations of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Some men beat or punish their wives on the grounds of adultery. Some even go to the extent of suing their wives' paramours. On the other hand, custom tolerates a husband's infidelity. Wives are not in a position to sue

their husband's concubines. Traditionally a wife cannot prevent her husband from marrying other women. Some women get killed by their husband. Rape within families is often done by either a member of the family or by somebody known to the family. The toleration of violence against women is largely encouraged by the traditional power-imbalance between men and women. The patriarchal structures favour males. Men have abused the privileges granted to them.

Even though some customs have undergone some radical changes, the prevalent attitude of men towards women is that of superiority - hence the assumption that women can be beaten or punished or treated like children.

Repeated domestic violence creates an environment of fear and intimidation. It "seriously inhibits women's ability to enjoy rights and freedoms on a basis of equality with men" (Fitzpatrick 1994:534). Violence against women is not just confined to Africa. It is also prevalent in other parts of the world. Take for example the "honour-killings" in Brazil.

It is said that instances of domestic violence "can be justified or excused because the actions of a man's wife or lover, allegedly offended his honour" (Roth 1974:331).

WOMEN AND WITCHCRAFT

The belief in witchcraft has caused incalculable harm to many communities. Witchcraft accusations have led to family breakdowns, the burning of homesteads, even villages, forced relocations, ghastly retaliations and even mob justice against those suspected of witchcraft. The resilience of witchcraft beliefs are encountered in many African countries. Witchcraft is believed to be the manipulation of supernatural powers or extra-human forces in order to heal, protect, harm or to kill. Witchcraft is also seen as a means of enforcing conformity to social norms and thereby making for social stability. It is also generally accepted that a daughter receives "the power and inclination to harm" from the mother (Niehaus 2001:24). Monica Wilson records that "a woman always gives

her *Tikoloshe* ('familiar') to her daughter." She goes on to say that "the worst majority of accusations of witchcraft or sorcery are against women (Wilson 1961:316). Now women appear to have a special relationship with the uncanny. Harriet Sibisi writes that "women are marginal and can thus fulfil the important social role of forming a bridge between the two worlds (Sibisi 1975:50). Paradoxically, it is this very role that also adds to the exposure of women not only to domestic violence but also to violence from their own communities. The Ralushai Commission (1996) declares that while witchcraft cannot be empirically proven, "no one can (now) argue that witchcraft is a myth which can only exist in the minds of the ignorant." In other words, those suspected of witchcraft should be put on trial, and if found guilty, be punished. The stubborn persistence of the belief in witchcraft will see many, especially women, exposed to violence based on superstitious beliefs (Harnischfeger 2003:45).

Another sinister belief, not unrelated to witchcraft, is that freshly harvested body-parts (e.g. heart, sexual organs) contain energy or power that can be used to make magic potions in order to "strengthen" or "protect" the user. The killing of people or children for the specific purpose of making medicine potions (*muti*) is known as "medicine" or "ritual murder." This illegal practice does not specifically single out women or girls even though they too may become victims (Minnaar 2003:86-91).

HIV-AIDS INFECTIONS

Another form of serious violence against women (in Southern Africa) is the fact that some women have been infected with HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases by their partners or husbands. Some men refuse to go for testing in spite of the fact that they know that they have several partners. HIV-AIDS has increased the number of orphans and vulnerable children. It has destroyed families and caused immense human suffering. The brazen attitude of men is attributed to the power-imbalance between men and women. Often some women feel trapped in a situation of poverty and, in the absence of viable alternatives, succumb to their plight. If the

“right to be informed of one’s own and one’s partner’s HIV status” were easy to implement, perhaps that might ease the conflict. (Viljoen 2012:255).

GENITAL MUTILATION

Genital mutilation of women and children in the name of cultural identity is yet another form of women subordination. Its aim is to control the sexuality of women. Fitzpatrick points out that some practise genital mutilation in order to ensure the marriageability of girls (1994:541). But this cultural practice scars women for life.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

The trafficking of women (and children) on the African continent is said to be rife even though reliable comprehensive statistics are hard to come by. Syndicates traffick women for sexual exploitation and for cheap labour. Women become victims of domestic servitude and debt bondage. Some are used as drug-mules by drug syndicates. While it is true that low levels of education, unemployment and abject poverty expose women to the dangers of human trafficking, it is equally true that the deeply entrenched legacy of male domination has facilitated the exploitation of women. The increase of public transportation across the porous boundaries of the African countries has bedevilled a situation already compounded by the lack of a political willpower on the part of governments to implement anti-trafficking legislation. Human trafficking inflicts unbearable mental and physical violence on women. (Shelly 2010:265-293). The kidnapping of women and girls by Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria illustrates the attitude of men who act with impunity towards women. The victims are threatened to be sold to human traffickers in order to humiliate the Nigerian government. To many men, the human rights of women are a figment of the imagination. This attitude continues to be largely informed by traditional cultures.

OTHER EXAMPLES OF POWER-IMBALANCE

Power relationships have shaped both the attitudes of men and women. Among the Pedi, women greet all men first with respect. In public their attitude is changing but within families, it is still very much prevalent. (Mönnig 1967: 272). This practice is the opposite of “ladies first” custom.

Among the Tswana, divorced women have a stigma. Schapera observes that a divorcee is regarded as a typical example of “feminine frailty.” He quotes the Tswana proverb that says:

Letsêlê go tshwarwa la moswêlwa, la motlhadiwa kemogôfe (“Seize the breast of a widow, that of a divorced woman is unstable”).

Barren women, instead of being looked at with compassion, are regarded with disdain. Traditionally women sat on the floor while men sat on chairs. This reality has changed but attitudes have not. Women by and large have to put up with an inferior status (Schàpera 1939:106-107).

Perhaps the most telling outcome of the various forms of discrimination and subjugation of women embedded in the different but internally related cultural forms, is the denial of education to African girls. This denial threatens to entrench the inferior status of women. It is a denial bent on confining women to the margins of society and keeping them in subservient positions. Little or no education means that the destiny of women will continue to be determined by men – on whom they will continue to depend for their livelihood. This becomes a vicious circle that impoverishes the self-image of women. African men continue to see women as potential wives and mothers. The image of women as leaders and professionals is extremely distant and vague. School drop-outs and the increase in teenage pregnancies simply play into and maintain the traditional image of women. This state of affairs compels women into a state of silence. Without education women will remain the silent ones, the ones without a voice.

The traditional cultural forms and the African belief-system have

conspired to subdue women. Even though many cultural practices are falling into disuse, genuine cultural change takes place at a snail's pace. The roots of culture are deep and stubborn to uproot. Enlightened legislation is difficult to monitor and implement. Women in advanced Western societies still complain about discriminatory practices against them - hence the Feminist Movement. Change will therefore be an uphill struggle for the developing countries. It is incumbent upon women - with the cooperation of men – to work towards vigorously removing those aspects of culture that are hostile to women. It is imperative that National governments incorporate into their Constitutions the Human Rights doctrine and commit themselves to implementing these rights. If that happens, African women will be on the threshold of a new dawn.

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Book of Ruth: Liberation in Action?

LAWRENCE MDUDUZI NDLOVU

ABSTRACT

This article sets out to explore the intertextuality of the Book of Ruth as a text which can inform and enrich our understanding of *liberation in action*, from both historical and contemporary perspectives. It seeks to identify a number of key themes in the Book of Ruth and make explicit the connections between them and other motifs found throughout the Old Testament. These observations will allow one to situate the Book of Ruth within the broader liberation narrative of Israel and also communicate something deeper about God and God's role in liberation. Further, it will use characteristics of liberation theology to see if the manner in which these themes are dealt with in Ruth concurs with the general movement of liberation theology. Since the Book talks fundamentally about the female experience, a brief reading of the text from a feminist perspective will be also offered.

INTRODUCTION

Kristin Saxegaard remarked, rightfully so, that the book of Ruth is not one of the central books of the Old Testament but it is a hidden treasure within a larger story of pre-monarchic heroes (Saxegaard 2010: 4). The book of Ruth is a short book comprising only four chapters. Hidden in the book is the most progressive and remarkable story of strength of two women – Naomi and Ruth. Even though the book has male characters in it, the book is about the female experience in society. This is the most obvious theme of the book and it is one that shall be explored with a great deal of prominence in this essay.

This essay sets out to explore this book already holding the view that the book of Ruth is liberation in action. There is a plethora of liberation theologies but for the purpose of our discussion focus will be on the general content of liberation as specified and alluded to by liberation theologians like Leonardo Boff and Gustavo Gutiérrez. This means that the engagement with the liberation theological body of work will be to find common characteristics that form the content of all liberation theology. In addition, a brief reading of the book of Ruth from a feminist perspective will be conducted because the book is fundamentally about the female experience.

The approach of this essay therefore is to find key themes in the book of Ruth and to make connections with the other sections in the Old Testament. This exercise will be beneficial in finding the real causes and reasons as to why these themes are deemed to be important by the author(s) of the book of Ruth. Having identified these themes in the book of Ruth, including the general metaphorical, literal movement of the book, we will then use the already identified characteristics of liberation theology to see if the manner in which these themes are dealt with in Ruth concurs with the general movement of liberation theology. However, before the attempt to engage the book of Ruth with the general characteristics of liberation theology is made, it is important that all the background analysis and overview of the book of Ruth be embarked upon. The overview serves to consider all the issues with regard to style, linguistics, history, authorship and the general intertextuality of the book of Ruth within the Old Testament corpus.

THE OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK OF RUTH

Any attempt to study any book of scripture must begin with going through some external, internal and historical analysis that could have given the motivation or influenced the book. This is so because like every book there are nuances and even technicalities that could be misread or even under-appreciated which could potentially enrich our understanding of the book. To be able to do justice to this first and very important investigation, an

exploration of issues relating to the dating of the book will be made. This will be followed by a discussion on the structure and genre of the book. The final background will be to assess the book of Ruth within the broad body of texts (intertextuality) of the Old Testament.

Dating

There is a lack of consensus amongst scholars around the date of composition of Ruth. For Katrina Larkin, the arguments on the date of the composition of the book fall into two categories; those who appeal to evidence internal to the book and those who attempt to consider evidence from outside, taking into account the historical and literary contexts (1996:18-19).

The exploring of internal evidence starts with exploring the linguistic forms in the book of Ruth. The book of Ruth is alleged to contain late Aramaic linguistic forms. For some scholars, this is an indication that Ruth was composed at a time when the Aramaic language predominated over the Hebrew language. Scholars place this time as being after the Babylonian exile (Campbell 1975:24). As exploring of Aramaisms in Ruth advanced, it became evident to scholars that these Aramaisms were very few. Paul Joüon found that there are only four Aramaisms that seemed persuasive (1924:24). These four Aramaisms were still contested by later scholarship and reduced to the point where none of the alleged Aramaisms were found to be compelling (Larkin 1996:18).

The other unconvincing post-exilic argument is found in the assessment of grammatical forms, particularly those indicating gender. This observation is made in seven areas in the book where a masculine plural suffix has feminine plural antecedents. This view seems to neglect the fact that in all these cases there are two women involved. These so called masculine suffixes could in fact be dual suffixes which are dialectal (Campbell 1975:24). This assertion cannot be dismissed as an attempt to negate the argument for grammatical forms but rather as Campbell points out, such dual suffixes are found in other earlier narrative texts. Campbell also adds

that these dual suffixes are probably archaic and dialectal (1975:24). There are enough instances in Ruth that indicate earlier usage.

For Campbell, the problem is trying to figure out if these are archaic, archaistic or conceivably dialectal (1975:25). There are six cases where the paragogic letter *nun* is used. This letter is commonly used in older texts. In the Book of Ruth the letter appears in the second person feminine singular imperfect verbs and is used in this manner in four areas; at 2:8, 2:21, 3:4 and 3:18. This type of usage is rare and appears in Samuel 1:14, Jeremiah 31:22 and in Isaiah 45:10. The other examples in Ruth are in the third person plural and both are in 2:9. There are also other seemingly archaic verb forms (3:3 and 4) and spellings that seem to be odd to scholars (Myers 1955:8-10). Campbell points out however that even though there are a good number of such cases in Ruth they only occur in the dialogue between Naomi and Boaz. It seems for Campbell that the author employs these cases to indicate the senior status of Naomi and Boaz. He also adds that in 3:3 and 4 they are used in a rather artistic manner to balance out two series of verbs. They are therefore carefully chosen by the author making them in some sense archaistic (1975:25-26). Campbell therefore concludes that when assessing the internal evidence trying to find the date of composition of Ruth, there is more evidence to suggest that it was composed earlier.

The attempt to find clues in the internal linguistics of Ruth gives interesting insights but it still does not give anything definitive about when the book was composed. For this reason, an exploration of the arguments from external evidence is necessary. When assessing the movement of the story of Ruth some scholars are drawn to what seems to be its depiction of a positive relationship between Israel and Moab. The context of this observation will be explored later because it forms part of the discussion about our attempt to read Ruth as liberation. It is worth noting though that given the hostile history between Israel and Moab it is not impossible to be drawn to how it is depicted in Ruth. Scholars suggest that perhaps Ruth dates from a time when there was tranquillity, when Moab was no longer an enemy, a time between the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah on one hand

and the conquests of Alexander on the other – the late fifth to mid-fourth century (Larkin 1996:22). What is evident even through just discussing some (not all) the issues, is that consensus about the date of composition of the book of Ruth is very difficult to find, whether through assessing internal or external evidence. The story has strong old roots and there are traces of lateness making it difficult to place it comfortably in any period.

Structure and Genre

The book of Ruth is one of the easiest books to read in the Old Testament because it is a coherent book. Kirsten Nielson points out that the significant characteristic of the book is its use of dialogue. Of the 85 verses, no less than 55 are in dialogue form with narrative sections gathering around them and adding background (saying what will follow e.g. 1:1-5), creating transition from one section to the next as exemplified in the ending of the first two chapters (Nielson 1997:2).

For Nielsen, the structure of the book is best undertaken through the treatment of individual scenes. The changes of time, place, and the grouping of persons determine the criteria of division of scenes. She also adds that there is constant movement; “Bethlehem – Moab – Bethlehem – the field – Bethlehem – the threshing floor – Bethlehem – the town gate – Bethlehem” (Nielson 1997:2).

Another approach pointed out by Murray D. Gow is that the author of Ruth prefers chiasmic structures. In addition, the structure of the book starts and ends with genealogies. Furthermore, the book's outline can be summarised as “ABC DEF D, E, F, B, C, A” (1992:46). For Gow this is an almost perfect chiasm because the first and the last chapters correspond with each other and the middle chapters must be read in light of each other (Gow 1992:46).

Another area of importance in approaching Ruth is to understand to which genre the book belongs. The book belongs to the narrative genre. Hermann Gunkel has classified the book as a *novelle*, a short story and an idyll (1913:84-86). Generally those who regard Ruth as a narrative tend to disregard the final David genealogy because they view it as being a late

addition to the story. In fact Campbell calls Ruth 4:18-22 an editorial appendix (Zenger *et al.* 1986:22-25). However, it is important to note that [narratives?] often end with a genealogy (Genesis 22:20-24; 25:12-18; 25:19; 35:23-29; 36). Jack Sasson noted that genealogies signal the ending of a story and also new beginnings (1989: 214). On a macro scale, this notion is important for our exploration of the themes of liberation theology in Ruth and the narrative of the liberation of Israel. However the classification of Ruth as a narrative or story or even an idyll should not deter the exploration of its theological motivation.

Intertextuality and Position of Ruth in the Canon

Proceeding in the attempt to explore the book of Ruth it is imperative also that the book be studied amidst other books. In the Hebrew Bible Ruth is placed in the third division of the canon, *Ketubim Writings*, as one of the five Megilloth for festal occasions and it is read on the feast of Pentecost (McShane 1969:303). There is also evidence in the Talmud (*Baba Bathra* 14) of an older arrangement in which Ruth preceded the Psalms (Smith 1953:829). Smith makes the observation that the *Septuagint* did not take into consideration the distinction between Prophets and Writings and probably combined Ruth and Judges because the content seems to suggest that they are of the same period just as the attaching of Lamentations to Jeremiah fitted apocryphal books into appropriate places (1953:829). There is evidently the hand of the chronologist at play with regards to the position of the book of Ruth. The book begins with a notice that the events recorded therein took place in the days when the Judges were judging and it ends with the assertion that Ruth is the ancestor of King David. Alice Laffey points out that; “Since the book of Judges deals with the period when the ‘Judges were judging’ and since David arrives on the scene in 1Samuel 16, it is easy to assume that anyone presuming the texts literal historical accuracy would rearrange the books to give Ruth its logical place in the sequence” (1968:554).

The book of Ruth also has a special intertextual relationship with other Old Testament books. The book incorporates several Pentateuchal legal

systems within the narrative; the field rights of the widows, the orphan and stranger (Leviticus 19:9-10, 23:22, Deuteronomy 24:19-22); the prohibition of Moabites entering the community of Israel (Deuteronomy 23:4-5); the laws of the *go'el* (Leviticus 25:25-28), the redeemer and levirate marriage in Deuteronomy 25:5-10 (Berman 2007:22). The author presumes, therefore, that there is some prior knowledge about the legal structures of Israel and for this reason it is evident that the author had a Jewish audience in mind.

This discussion about the composition of the book is important because it attempts to give context to strong themes which are found in the book. This essay leans towards the post-exilic composition of the book based on what would seem to be typical post-exilic tensions like intermarriage. Although the book is in the narrative genre it does not take away its relationship with books from other genres (Ezra and Nehemiah) because the themes are similar.

It is imperative therefore that as this paper focuses on the book of Ruth it also establishes the fundamental tenants of the other side of its discussion by exploring the core tenets that make up a theology of liberation.

THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION: FUNDAMENTAL CHARACTERISTICS

Liberation is a recurring theme in the Old Testament. Jorge Pixley and Clodovis Boff note that the notion of a “preferential option for the poor” is not just a phenomenon of contemporary social justice but it is rooted even in the Old Testament. They note that from the beginning Israel was a community of peasants. For this reason, the Davidic monarchy proclaims itself as God’s instrument for the poor (1989:29-36). The attempt to read the book of Ruth as liberation in action is an attempt to read Old Testament liberation through the eyes of this single story. The point of departure is always the experience of suffering - the experience in which they find themselves; the desire to stand with and amongst those who witness the same situation and the movement towards liberation.

The Point of Departure

Liberation theology emerges out of an existential tension. The tension is the knowledge of justice and freedom versus the normative practice. This point of departure comes after assessing the existential situation and thereby seeing the need to respond. For example, in the Brazilian experience, it was the state of extreme poverty which made Gustavo Gutiérrez declare that moment as the *Kairos* moment through which God was making something new (Chopp 1986:51). June O'Connor summed up this new consciousness, this new way of seeing, as “the time which critically discerns the forces which create oppressive conditions in human life, those persons and structures which induce people to become victims of their world rather than creators and shapers of their world. It discerns the powerlessness that marks the daily lives of so many people, it is a conscientisation” (1975:105).

The *Kairos* moment does not mean that there is knowledge as to how the movement towards emancipation is going to take place, but it means that there is a burning desire and an urgent need for change.

Option for the Poor

The claim that differentiates liberation theology from other movements is that it reflects on human suffering and measures it against what is known about God. Leonardo Boff notes that liberation theology is not just a reflection on a theoretical subject but rather it is a concrete practice of liberation engaged in by the poor. They can engage in such a concrete manner because of their faith commitment (1984:12). This faith commitment is the first point of contention because human suffering of any kind always leads to reflection about the role and the nature of God. It is true that the human person can never fully comprehend God. However, the salvific narrative of humanity with God is that God is always closer to those who suffer. This does not mean that God is partial but as Gustavo Gutiérrez points out:

preference implies the universality of God's love, which excludes no one. It is only within the framework of this universality that we can understand the preference, that is, "what comes first" (1996:13).

Solidarity

In the Brazilian experience, fidelity and solidarity of the oppressed was and still is expressed through Small Christian Communities. It is in those communities, as Christopher Rowland put it, where they see, judge and act. It is in the solidarity of the suffering where strength and plans of action are found. Above all it is there where "reflection and the story of the community's life is intertwined with the community's life of sorrow and joy" (Rowland & Corner 1990:38). Solidarity is also the key to finding the strength which would ordinarily not have been there if the attempt was solitary. This notion of solidarity is not just a gathering of tears but a celebration of fidelity and the finding of a common vision. Gutiérrez notes that it is in solidarity with other people, in that union which is the melting point of ideas and friendship, that it becomes more evident that poverty is not about deficiencies, but is rather an exposition of the capacities and possibilities of those who are poor (1999:27). Solidarity is not just about holding to heart the needs of those who suffer but it about being with them; about sharing, deliberating and expressing commitment, love, fidelity to each other. This way of living becomes the new method, process or way of liberation. Gutierrez emphasises that what solidarity does is create a pattern of conduct which in itself is a drive for change. This new way of living and being with each other is not just about transformation which is future based but it is about transformation of the oppressed by the oppressed first (1999:30-31).

Protest: The Movement towards Liberation

When solidarity solidifies, then the need for the proclamation of liberation becomes inevitable. Often the word *protest* is seen as aggressive and perhaps a display of complete anarchy. Gutierrez notes that an important facet of liberation theology is making your plight heard and known with very little ambiguities or flaws. The driving force of this protest is hope.

The very act of communicating the demand for freedom is in itself liberating. However it is not the goal in itself but full emancipation based on the needs of the community (1999:32-37). This means that there is no “one size fits all” when it comes to liberation, but the scale of the response and the capacity of those oppressed has a major role to play. In the Book of Ruth for example, the major players do not even exceed five. But they are faced with systems that are in place, and how they proclaim their own liberation is in proportion to their abilities. They are not calling for a complete *coup* of the system of governance and law, but they are doing something that is evidently their own protest and proclamation of freedom.

THEMES OF MARGINALISATION IN THE BOOK OF RUTH

If the point of departure for liberation theology is suffering and marginalisation, then it is important to identify if these facets are also found in the Book of Ruth. The key areas to consider in this pursuit are Israelite Law, especially Levirate Law and Redemption; the relationship between Moab and Israel taking into account Israel’s xenophobia; and Ruth’s refugee status.

Israelite Law

The book of Ruth alludes to some features of the Law of Israel. It is important to mention that what happens in the book of Ruth, the laws applied, is very different from how the laws are stipulated. In the Old Testament, laws that speak to marriages and land agreements akin to what is in the book of Ruth are Levirate Law and Redemption. It is in the book of Ruth where these two laws are linked for the first time, thus creating something unique.

Levirate Law refers to a marriage of a widow to her brother-in-law or her late husband’s brother. The law also makes clear that if the husband dies childless, then the brother has an obligation to take the brother’s wife. The first son that the widow bears must assume the dead brother’s name so that the dead brother’s name will not be obliterated from Israel (Deuteronomy

25:5-7). It follows also that the son, who is considered to be the dead man's son, will be the rightful heir to the dead man's estate. The brother is almost compelled to do this because according to Levirate Law it is an honourable thing to do. If he refuses, then the brother (the one who lives) will be shamed in public and his family would be known in Israel as the *House of the Unshod* (Deuteronomy 25:10).

Redemption on the other hand is different in that it applies to a situation where an Israelite is forced by circumstance to sell his inheritance to pay debts or for another grave reason. In this case, it is the duty of the next of kin to keep the property in the family by buying it back or redeeming (*go'el*) it. Leviticus also expounds on how the land can be bought back if it had already been sold when the financial situation of the family becomes better (Leviticus 25:23-24, 47-55).

Just by assessing these two laws it is already very clear that Naomi and Ruth are even disenfranchised by the law. There is in law a term called a *lacuna* which is a word used to refer to a gap or a void in the law. This is a situation where there is no law that can be applied to that situation (Garner 2001:496). The case of Naomi and Ruth falls under this category because none of the laws provided can cater for an elderly childless widow who has reached her majority and can have no children, and there is no law for a childless widow who does not have a brother-in-law to marry her. How Ruth and Naomi manage to work around this problem is going to be vital in our exploration of themes of liberation in the book of Ruth.

Moabite and Israel: Xenophobia and Refugees

In some sections of the Old Testament intermarriage is presented as an accepted practice. There are cases of people in the Old Testament who marry people from other tribes. Abraham married the Egyptian Hagar, Joseph married an Egyptian priest's daughter Asenath and Moses married the Midianite Zipporah (Genesis 16:3, 41:45; Exodus 2:21). Even though there are many examples of such marriages in the Old Testament, it is important to add that the preferred pattern of marriage in the Bible is

endogamy – the marriage between members of the same tribe (Eskenazi & Frymer-Kensky 2011:XXXIX).

There are however other stories where intermarriage was opposed. For example, the book of Numbers warns Israel's men about the dangers of being seduced by Midianite and Moabite women when Israel is about to reach the Promised Land. It is because of this mixing that Israelites began to worship foreign gods like *Baal* and thus God punishes them severely (Numbers 25:31). Deuteronomy is also very clear about the groups that must be particularly excluded from the Israelite community. The book names Moabites and Ammonites as the groups that must not be admitted to the congregation of the Lord, and it goes as far as saying that even descendants from these tribes, even to the tenth generation, shall not be admitted to the congregation of the Lord. The book further adds that Israel should not even concern herself with the welfare and the benefit of these nations as long as they live (Deuteronomy 23:4-7).

The concern about intermarriage returned in the fifth century B.C.E when the Jewish people returned from exile in Babylon. The temple had been destroyed in 586 B.C.E. The temple had been a very important feature in the Jewish identity before the exile because the entire life of the Jewish people revolved around it. There was great difficulty in the Post-Exilic period to get the Jewish identity and life going once again. Their return from exile meant that Israel's status was not clear because they were subjects of the Persian Empire. The exile was so lengthy that many of the Jews began to settle and start lives with other nations, especially in Babylon. This meant that there was a serious problem in maintaining the distinct Jewish identity which they had tried to uphold because they considered themselves as a chosen people of God (Eskenazi & Frymer-Kensky 2011:XII).

There was a heated discussion that took place about this post-exile situation. Ezra, a priest and scribe, and Nehemiah the Jewish governor of Judah strongly opposed these intermarriages that had occurred between the Jewish people and persons from other ethnic groups. Ezra concluded that these unions with foreign women were in conflict with the teaching of God

and caused a threat to the survival of the Jewish community. The Jewish community, with the exception of a few, agreed to separate from their wives and the offspring of these unions. Later Nehemiah also voices the same sentiments against Jewish men who marry foreign women. In addition, Nehemiah is also critical of the fact that the offspring of such unions do not speak the Hebrew language but speak foreign languages of their mothers (Ezra 9-10; Nehemiah 13:23-30).

This context is very important for our discussion because one of the tribes listed as not being welcome to intermarry with Israel, is Moab. Ruth is a Moabite. The situation of the return of Ruth with Naomi is very similar to the situation in the fifth century. In the fifth century, the foreign women return with their husbands and are driven out because they cause a threat to the survival of the community. Ruth returns with Naomi from Naomi's self-imposed exile. Even though she is without a husband the very fact that she returns from Moab and the history and status of Moab and Israel is so fragile, she is in fact walking into a situation where she might be received with hostility. Even though Naomi makes her reasons clear as to why she does not want her daughters-in-law to return with her to Bethlehem, we can perhaps also attach this xenophobic tendency of Israel as one of her other reasons. She also perhaps understands that her daughters-in-law have a greater chance of finding husbands in their own homelands than they would amongst the Jewish people. It is interesting to add that the author of the book of Ruth makes it a point to mention often in the first two chapters, that Ruth is a Moabite. Furthermore, the comment made by Ruth to Boaz (2:10); "Why have I found favour in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, when I am a foreigner" (Ruth 2:10) shows that Ruth did not think or even expect to be noticed or even receive any favour because of her ethnicity. This speaks volumes about Ruth's bravery and that she is fully aware of what she is doing by walking into the eye of the storm.

Women and Childlessness

"According to Old Testament laws, women were legally and substantively dependant on men, although they possessed certain rights and

responsibilities under particular laws. A woman is either a mother who instructs and nurtures, or a wife who looks after her husband's interests, or an adulteress who endangers man's status and life" (Bird 1983:252).

Women have not always enjoyed the same treatment and rights as men. The historical narrative of Israel is no exception to this fact. Alice Laffey points out that the historical and theological narrative of Israel is told through the eyes of men. For example, it is the birth of males which is celebrated (Exodus 13) - they are the ones who recount the exodus to their sons; the ones to whom God promised Canaan and the ones who went down to Egypt in Numbers 20 (1988:12).

The scriptures are a good gauge with regard to the treatment and status of women as a whole and in particular during and after the time of Ruth and Naomi. An unmarried girl was under the authority of her father but it was a relationship of kinship. The girl enjoyed a place above a slave but lower than her brothers, especially with regard to education, worship and inheritance. Married women on the other hand were given an honourable and protected place but they were subordinate to their husbands. Their role was that of a mother, but ultimately, she will be below her own sons (Longenecker 1987:68). This means that women must be seen as belonging to someone. If there is no direct link between a woman and a man, be it her father or her husband, then they will be prone to abuse. Hence the statement by Boaz that he has ordered the servants not to abuse Ruth (Ruth 2:9).

Environment: Exploring Space

Another area which might seem peripheral in the story but is a classic example of the degree of marginalisation of Ruth and Naomi as women is in the assessment of the spaces they occupy. Ruth is in the field, a dangerous place for a young widow. This is confirmed by Boaz when he implores Ruth to stay in his field and that he has forbidden the men to abuse her (Ruth 2:9). This is a sign that this is a normal occurrence at the fields. Ruth is most vulnerable there amongst strange men who know that she has no one but Naomi. Ruth is also seen at the threshing floor basically selling herself to Boaz (Ruth 3: 6-10). We can contrast these spaces with

the gate which Biblically represents public power, a place of legal and economic transactions and a place for men who wield power in a patriarchal society. The gate as Ludwig Köhler puts it, “is the meeting place of those who really matter” (1956:153). It is interesting that men are able to deal about women without women being present. It is as if they are making transactions about property. In fact they are, because Ruth and Naomi are viewed as abandoned property because their masters (their husbands) have died (Linafelt 1999:64).

Naomi and Ruth are in a complex situation where there is more than one situation through which they are marginalised. They are disenfranchised not only by what they are as women but also for Ruth who is a Moabite. In addition to this they are marginalised by the situation that they find themselves in.

THE MOVEMENT OF LIBERATION AND THE MOVEMENT OF RUTH

A particular feature of liberation is movement. Movement in liberation comes about in two ways; it is by physical movement or a transition from one state of being to another. The hermeneutic of liberation is deeply bound in the notion of creation or (re)creation. Creation refers to that original position which is free of class systems or that position where all persons are equal. (Re)creation therefore becomes the very attempt to return to the original position. The book of Ruth is a perfect display of movement. It begins with a famine, thus a departure from Judah. It moves to complete loss (death of husbands and sons) including childless marriages. “The text moves from the emptiness of Moab to the renewed fertility of Bethlehem: a good harvest, marriage, security, and the birth of a son” (Levine 1992:78).

Movement is a strong feature in the Old Testament. Walter Brueggemann when discussing Old Testament Psalms, sums it up in three stages; orientation – disorientation – reorientation (1984:19). Brueggemann sums up these seasons by adding that the orientation phase is when human life consists of satisfied seasons, these are seasons of gratitude and wellbeing

(1984:19). Even though the book of Ruth does not speak about there ever being such a time, it can be deduced that there must have been such a time. It can be deduced that before the famine the standard of living was comfortable. Discussing the phase of disorientation Brueggemann calls it a season where life consists of anguished seasons of hurt, alienation and suffering (1984:19). This period is also found in the book of Ruth; when Naomi's husband and sons die and life in Moab is very difficult (1:3-5). Finally, Brueggemann defines the reorientation phase as when human life consists in turns of surprise, "when we are overwhelmed with new gifts of God, when joy breaks through despair" (1984:19). This in the book of Ruth begins more accurately when Ruth meets Boaz and ultimately marries him and they have a child. This movement starts in Bethlehem and ends in Bethlehem. It is also interesting to note that the stage or reorientation always goes beyond expectation in its abundance. What becomes of Ruth is unclear but she becomes an ancestor of King David who himself became the liberator of Israel. The Book of Ruth ends with the genealogy of David. This means that it broadens its claim of liberation to include the whole of Israel.

Protest: The Marriage of a Moabite and an Israelite

For some scholars, the main point of the book of Ruth is to protest against policies of the post-exilic establishment (Larkin 1996:53). As we have discussed before – after the exile, the Moabite wives that came back to Israel with their Jewish husbands, were cast out. Linked to this is not just the question of marriage but also issues about Israel's xenophobia towards Moab. In the eyes of Israel, Moabites lacked virtue, even historically, in their interactions with them. Ruth's virtues are a challenge that the views commonly held by Israel about Moabites are an unjust generalisation. Bonnie Honig therefore sees Ruth as a kind of model immigrant because she stages a protest, not of warfare and conflict but of *chesed*, which is the attribute of grace, benevolence and compassion (1999:53). Honig continues to explore Ruth's protest by engaging with two ideas from Cynthia Ozick and Julia Kristeva. For Ozick, the book of Ruth is a

narrative of invigoration by conversion and assimilation. While for Kristeva, Ruth unsettles the establishment she joins. Through Ruth, Israel's sovereignty is secure through her descendant David. At the same time this kingdom is rivalled by her by virtue of being wholly other – a Moabite (Honing 1999:54).

Ozick takes some time to look at Orpah and her place in the story. She makes an interesting observation that tradition has not always been fair to Orpah and for this reason she has always been seen as the one who went back to her homeland. For Ozick, Orpah represents normality, not singularity. Orpah should never be blamed for her choice but her decision proves her to be normal. This means that Orpah would have been a threat to Jewish culture because of her proximity with her homeland. However, what Ruth does in contrast to Orpah is that she opens herself to a world of learning and maturity. For Ozick therefore, Ruth does not threaten or corrupt Israelite order; that threat is projected to Orpah because her failure to emigrate is read as her failure to convert (1994:221-222).

Ozick, though acknowledging the role that Ruth plays, states there is still something in Ruth that places Israel above Moab. This means that the only virtue ascribed to Ruth is that of a perfect convert. What Ozick fails to see or read is that through her assimilation and conversion, she liberates Israel's mind towards the possibility of thinking slightly differently about Moab's virtues. Perhaps the author of Ruth wants to communicate something to Israel about what they have considered as the evil other. Ozick fails to understand what Ruth's conversion does: "Ruth disabuses them of their fantasies of identity and makes them more open to difference and otherness" (Honing 1999:54).

Kristeva's assessment of Ruth is not very different from that of Ozick but she does not look at Orpah at all. This is significant because Kristeva reads Ruth's entry as that which forces Israel to relook at issues of identity. Ruth is an outsider, the foreigner and the excluded one. Yet she founds a monarchic line that is revered in the history of Israel. On this issue Kristeva notes the internal rift that "If David is also Ruth, if the sovereign

is also a Moabite, peace of mind will never be his lot, but a constant quest for welcoming and going beyond the other in himself” (1991:75-76). Kristeva sees this as a good thing for David because David needs Ruth in order not to worry about the other but to be supplemented by his otherness (1991:75). What Kristeva is suggesting therefore is that having Ruth become part of Israel liberates Israel from constantly thinking in compartments, one with Israel and another as completely other. This is what Kristeva speaks about when she speaks of David having no worry. The issue of identity can never be defined based on purity anymore because the entry of Ruth in the bloodline changes that. Moab is no longer just another nation but one that is eternally linked with Israel. A reciprocal dimension now exists that was not there before. Ruth’s acceptance of the strangers and the strange life in Bethlehem also depends on the acceptance she receives from those in Bethlehem, so there is a mutuality that is introduced.

All this seems deliberate on the part of the author. It seems to be a clear protest to the restrictions on intermarriage. The narrative of Ruth seems to suggest that the view that Moab is not connected and should never connect with Israel is false because even the Davidic line has a Moabite. This movement of Ruth from being alien to being part of Israel did not just happen with ease. There must have been a struggle between what is known of Moab and the Moabite (Ruth) who was standing before Israel. If she had been exactly like they expected a Moabite to be, then Naomi would not have let her return with her to Bethlehem and Boaz would not have bothered himself with her. Ruth has changed how Israel sees Moab.

Stretching the Law

Having explored Levirate law and Redemption it is important to note that there are serious disparities between how these laws are specified in Deuteronomy and Leviticus and how the marriage between Ruth and Boaz comes to be. Josiah Derby in his exploration of the problems found in the book of Ruth summarises that the first serious problem is around the issue of Elimelekh’s property. When Elimelekh died, his property was inherited by his sons Mahlon and Khilyon. Both his sons died with no children of

their own. The statement that Naomi had sold the land seems to suggest that Naomi took ownership of the property after all the men died. Josiah finds this problematic because there is no law in the Old Testament that seems to suggest that wives could own or inherit the property of their husbands (1994:180).

Another problem according to Derby which impinges on the understanding of verse 7 is the linking of Ruth with Elimelekh's fields and by so doing establishing her deceased husband's name. This is confusing because in chapter 4:3 it is clear that Naomi is selling a piece of the property. Furthermore, it makes sense, in keeping with the spirit of the law that if the land is associated with Naomi then it is Naomi that needs a *go'el* (redeemer), not Ruth. How Ruth becomes indissolubly tied to the property is very unclear from a legal perspective (1994:181).

With regard to Levirate Law, Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky note that there are also a set of problems that emerge from the book of Ruth. Levirate Law stipulates that the actual brother must be the one who marries the childless sister-in-law. This is not the case in Ruth because nothing indicates that the *go'el* or Boaz is the actual brother of Mahlon. If anything, there is a clear sign from Naomi that there is no actual *levir* who exists to marry her widowed daughters-in-law and it was for this reason she begged her daughters-in-law to return to their homelands (1:8-13). Another important facet of Levirate Law is that the first child of the *levir* is considered to be that of the deceased brother (Genesis 38:8-9 & Deuteronomy 25:6). However in the genealogy provided in the book, the son of Ruth and Boaz is not considered to be the son of Elimelekh or Mahlon (Eskenazi & Frymer-Kensky 2011:XXXVI).

Another odd dimension in this transaction between the *go'el* and Boaz is how the agreement is reached. The removal of the sandal and transference to another person is not mentioned in Leviticus or anywhere else with regards to Redemption. The removal of the sandal is mentioned in Levirate Law but it appears to be done under completely different circumstances to those found in the book of Ruth. This is done only when the brother of the

deceased man refuses to marry his brother's childless widow, thus failing to preserve the name of his late brother. When he refuses, the widow is to appear before the elders at the gate of the city and there she removes the *levir's* (brother-in-law's) sandal, and spits. The *levir* will be known as "the unsandalled one" which is a title of scorn. In this context the removal of the shoe is an act of great shame because it means that the person neglected his responsibility to preserve his brother's name. It is obvious therefore that even in this context the removal of the shoe has nothing to do with the exchange of property (Derby 1984:182). This means that the removal of the shoe in the Book of Ruth is somewhat confusing because the *go'el* does not need to remove his shoe, as he does not own the property in question. If the shoe was removed as a gesture of refusing to marry Ruth, then, according to Levirate Law, it is Ruth who is meant to be removing the shoe and to spit because the *levir* is refusing to do the honourable thing (Derby 1984:183).

There are so many legal inconsistencies in the book that it is difficult to classify the type of arrangement that is found between Naomi, Ruth and Boaz. For Joseph W. Blots this is precisely the point of the book. The women find themselves in a system that is unjust to them. As discussed before, they are in a peculiar situation where there is a *lacuna* in the law. Their situation is not covered and thus they are prone to abuse and exploitation. It is for this reason that Blots is convinced that these women, Naomi and Ruth, use that unjust system to get them what they need to survive (2005:51). They understand that there is a necessity to read the signs of the times and gage that the best way to respond to their being marginalised *by* the law is to liberate themselves *through* the law.

Naomi emerges therefore as a key player in this plan to liberate herself and Ruth. Naomi is marginalised because she is elderly, she has no sons and she cannot remarry. Nor is she young enough to glean at the fields for food as she would be expected to do, as a widow. Ruth therefore becomes an extension of Naomi. Ruth gleanes the fields for both herself and Naomi. Ruth is linked to the property of Naomi in the place of Naomi. This is evidently Naomi's idea but how it finally comes to fruition seems to go

beyond even what Naomi had in mind. The actions of Ruth at the threshing floor go beyond what Naomi had told her to do. Tod Linafelt holds the view that Ruth took Naomi's plan further. Only by convincing Boaz to hold on to the land of Elimelekh can Ruth be assured that once she is married to Boaz she will be able to maintain her close connection with Naomi (1999:68). There is value in making such a reading because it makes the commitment of fidelity that Ruth made to Naomi even richer, for now there was nothing stopping Boaz from marrying Ruth. There is nothing in the narrative that seems to suggest that Boaz was married and Ruth was also a childless widow. This entire arrangement could have happened without Naomi.

The legal discrepancies leading to the marriage of Ruth and Boaz are in themselves an indication that the author wants to communicate something about the legal system and also about Naomi, Ruth and Boaz. It is evident that the use of symbols and gestures that are known in Jewish society is important in order to make this arrangement seem like it is authentic. Legally therefore it is evident that there is no breaking of the law but rather there is a very deliberate action of *stretching* the law. The use of the word "stretching" is important because in the absence of laws that cover people like Ruth and Naomi, there was a need for a plan to be devised which would cover those who find themselves unprotected. The author of the book goes into great length to make sure that Ruth, Naomi and Boaz do not denounce the unjust legal system. That would have been completely imprudent because no one would have taken them seriously or they would have received a lot of resistance from the Jewish community which values the law deeply. That style of self-liberation is one that can be compared to dialogue. Dialogue does not declare war but rather it chooses to work with what is there to find an amicable solution for all parties concerned. By so doing they are assured of a place in the community and they also achieve that which they wanted for themselves. To achieve this means that there must have been an agreement and a solidarity. The absence of solidarity would mean that there was no singular plan of action and there was no support.

Solidarity in Ruth

The activity of solidarity amongst those who are oppressed is very important in liberation theology. It might seem in the book of Ruth that there is an absence of this very important facet of liberation theology, thereby disqualifying the book of Ruth from being read as liberation. Solidarity in the book is found in Ruth's bold declaration;

Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people and your God my God. Where you die, I will die – there will I be buried. May the Lord do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you (Ruth 1:15-17).

Ruth, as Irmtraud Fisher points out, makes a very deep oath of fidelity to Naomi - to another woman. What is evident is that Ruth is perhaps not even thinking that there is going to be a possibility of her marrying again or that she is resigned from marriage if it means parting from Naomi. She is very clear about one thing - she wants to remain with Naomi for the rest of her life (1999:24). It could also be that she knows that she is not going to be married to another Jewish person because she is of the forbidden tribe. Even if she did marry someone else it would be unbecoming of her to bring her old mother-in-law along into her new marriage. There is reason to believe that the lifelong oath Ruth makes to Naomi is in fact a statement about independence. For Fischer this is a statement of independence because given the place of women in that socio-cultural and socio-religious mind-set typical of the age, it cannot even be considered that a young woman would not marry and secure for herself someone who would be her minder: "In a patriarchal society, where social structures are arranged from an androcentric viewpoint, women are discriminated against when surviving without men's companionship" (1999:27).

This is a completely new suggestion and a brave one to make. This is the solidarity of the disenfranchised, of those who are left out by the law. Ruth presents Naomi with companionship. This is another option which in the

mind of Naomi was not even there. It is a very progressive and liberal stance on the part of Ruth but Naomi does not understand it. Ruth ends up in the traditional *telos* of every woman of her time. This simple act can and should be read as liberation because it introduces another option that is normally not even considered for women. It begins to suggest a lot more about the nature and strength of women; that they can take care of themselves without men and be happy in their sisterhood and support. Above all, it introduces the dimension that women do not have to be married if they do not want to be. Even with this progressive stance found in the book of Ruth, there are still other interesting factors about women and feminist liberation.

THE BOOK OF RUTH AND FEMINIST LIBERATION THEOLOGY

The book of Ruth exposes the female experience and it is the quintessential book on how patriarchal societies deliberate about women. The book also places before the reader two women who are in effect somewhat different from each other. Naomi is very traditional and understands that the role of a woman is to be at the side of a man and raising a family. Ruth on the other hand has other ideas. Firstly, as we have explored, Ruth was prepared to have a life of fidelity and service to Naomi for the rest of her life, without a man. Secondly, what Ruth does at the threshing floor is something different. J.W.H. Bos notes that at the threshing floor Ruth does not wait for Boaz to tell her what to do (as she was instructed by Naomi). In fact, the opposite happens – she tells him (1988:62). By pointing out to Boaz that he is next of kin Ruth instantly introduces the notion of marriage and redemption. The latter is of particular importance because with it comes the obligation to take care of relatives and the inheritance of property. This means that Ruth is able to keep her promise of fidelity to Naomi.

After the deaths of Naomi's husband and her sons the book of Ruth turns to Naomi. What is most interesting is that Naomi, who now has lost everything, is not depicted as a woman who is paralysed by grief. What

comes as a surprise in Ruth is what some scholars like Mishael Maswari Caspi and Rachel Havrelock call the “Resurrection of Naomi.” Naomi’s first action is to rise and claim her place as family leader. She moves from the place of being a victim to being the driver of her own destiny. It is a kind of rebirth - an ascent from the obscurity designated for female characters (1996:140). It seems legitimate to make such an observation because even the language about Naomi changes from Naomi, Elimelekh’s *wife* to referring to Elimelekh as Naomi’s *husband*. Naomi is no longer referred to as ‘wife of’ or ‘mother of’ - it is as if she gets a new identity and a new purpose. Naomi’s new purpose is summed up by Ellen van Wolde as simply – to return (1997:10).

The feminist liberation theologian would read this as a kind of liberation of Naomi and indeed women who find themselves in her position. However, the Book of Ruth is problematic for some feminist liberation theologians like Amy-Jill Levine. For Levine, Ruth’s actions do not offer any improvement to the social system of Bethlehem. This is because the book does not offer any prescriptions for changing the circumstances for women, either native or foreign, who find themselves in impoverished and unprotected circumstances. The fact that the fate of both Naomi and Ruth is determined by men is a major deterrent in the agenda of women’s liberation. Levine notes that the stigma of Ruth being a Moabite continues to make it difficult for Ruth to be integrated. This lack of integration is made clear in the limited role that Ruth plays in the final chapters of the book. In fact the book chooses to concentrate on Naomi because she is not a gentile (1992:78-79).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

There is no doubt that the book of Ruth is liberation in action. This movement towards liberation is played out by the characters. Therefore it is not just an abstract claim but a very real occurrence. This is an important component of liberation theology – that it is not a theoretical pursuit but a movement that affects real people in real situations. Liberation is also both

a convention of society and a personal pursuit. These two dimensions are also found in Ruth. For example, as much as Naomi and Ruth are placed in a system where they find themselves disenfranchised, there is also between the two of them a tension which seeks to challenge how they define themselves. There is a contrast between Ruth and Naomi about how a woman ought to find wholeness in society. On the one hand Ruth is open to the possibility that liberation is in the solidarity of the oppressed and that does not have to include a man or marriage (Fischer 1999:27). On the other hand there is Naomi who believes that a woman finds her true purpose and liberation by being married and having a family. However there is a need to emphasise that because Ruth and Naomi are devoted to each other, they manage ultimately to pull each other out of their situation. Therefore solidarity is very well displayed in the book. However, the tension of how a woman ought to live out her life and the possibility that life does not really have to include a man, is abandoned by Ruth when she marries Boaz. If the two women had remained together without Ruth having to marry, that would have elevated the story of liberation for women to another completely different level. So to some degree there is a kind of limited liberation for women in the story of Ruth because there is an absence of complete emancipation from the dictates of a male dominated culture.

Towards Social Liberation

Social transformation is at the heart of liberation theology, not only personal transformation. The book of Ruth presents its liberation themes in a layered manner, as the narrative progresses from one liberation theme to another. For example, it begins with the migrant experience, to the migrant-poor experience, then to the migrant-poor-widowed and female experience. This continues to pile on themes of refugee, of disparity of cult because Ruth is not just a refugee but also not of the same faith, and even legal issues. As the book takes up these themes, it also untangles the tensions contained in them.

To some degree this paper has explored with great depth the fact that Ruth was a Moabite and her choice to migrate to Bethlehem with Naomi included the liberation themes that emerge from that experience. In addition a very detailed attempt has been made to discuss the stretching of legal norms leading to other liberation themes of the book of Ruth.

The book of Ruth presents women who are not just passive victims. Therefore the book makes a strong contribution to the stories of women in the Old Testament and indeed in this very age. Nielsen adds that the book of Ruth is in dialogue with other women's destinies, especially Lot's daughters, Tamar, Rachel and Leah: "Ruth lends her name to a story that offers a future to the marginalised for she is elected to be the ancestress of one of Israel's leaders" (1997:32). The liberation movement in Ruth mimics in a more precise and smaller scale, the liberation narrative of the Old Testament.

Book of Ruth and the Biblical Movement of Liberation

In the exploration of the background and makeup of the Book of Ruth there was an attempt to explore the intertextuality of the Book of Ruth. That exploration is also the key to exploring the possibility of the book being read as liberation in action. The themes of movement from Bethlehem to Moab and from Moab to Bethlehem can be compared with the move from Israel to the exile in Babylon and the return. In addition, the desert experience in Exodus can be compared to the famine experience in the book of Ruth. In Exodus the Jews are led to the Promised Land, later the exile ends and they return home; in Ruth, movement is such that they too are led back home from Moab to a new abundance in Bethlehem. These observations situate the book of Ruth within the broader liberation narrative of Israel and also communicate something deeper about God and God's role in liberation.

Liberation and the hand of God

Only twice does the book of Ruth mention God's intervention. In 1:6 there is reference made by Naomi that she has heard that God looks after his

people and feeds them. In another part (4:13) Ruth's ability to conceive is attributed to God. For Nielsen, both these references to God tell much more about *who* God is – God is provider of food and life (1997:30). Any form of liberation, most importantly theological liberation, fails if there is no acknowledgement of God. This fact is the meeting point of several facets of liberation which are found in Ruth. The claim for restoration is not false in Ruth. Famine is restored into plenty; unsafety by security; childlessness is replaced by a child; foreignness is replaced by acceptance and integration.

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BOOK REVIEWS

REED, Mark S. & STRINGER, Lindsay C. 2016. *Land Degradation, Desertification and Climate Change: Anticipating, Assessing and Adapting to Future Change*. London; New York: Routledge. xiv + 184 pages. ISBN: 978-1-84971-271-2.

A quick Google search reveals that *climate change* and *land degradation* are reasonably common terms in our modern world. They are most often addressed in isolation as autonomous phenomena, but, as the foreword of the book under review suggests, it is not an entirely sound methodology as they ‘actually’ ...*have an iterative relationship driving or exacerbating one another through positive and negative feedback loops* (p. xii).

In simple terms, the central thesis of the book is to highlight the interconnectedness of the processes of land degradation and climate change and to show how (together) they will affect diverse ecosystems in varied ways inevitably affecting environmental biodiversity and human livelihoods. Having said that, this thesis encompasses a number of elements that fall into each other. Climate change and land degradation are real challenges for *every individual in every region* of the earth. Through a peculiar interrelatedness, their past, present and future effects occur in different measures and in different time frames. It is thus imperative for all forms of government, for scientists and for land-users to recognise that climate change and land degradation definitely work in collusion. This awareness should enable close cooperation of policy and practice communities to supply contextual, effective anticipatory assessment and reparative and/or adaptive methods to slow down or even neutralise the negative effects of land degradation, climate change and the human suffering that is inextricably associated with them.

To be honest, I (like most) had never really considered the linkage in question. My initial gut feeling, when I started reading the book, was that one cannot legitimately pursue the connection between climate change and land degradation without having to stray into some ‘twilight zone’ or ‘far-fetched’ territory.

Thankfully, the introductory parts of the book sparked my interest, especially as the authors confidently point out that the book will also provide *new* scientific insights and recommendations. In principle, this publication is meant to serve as a tool to inform *anyone who treads any inch of this earth*. In practice, however, it may lean largely, though not exclusively, towards a more ‘academic’ crowd.

In their study, the authors deal with a number of critical questions:

- (1) What are *land degradation, desertification* and *climate change*?
- (2) How are these processes likely to act together in the diverse ecosystems around the world?
- (3) What are the possible vulnerabilities to the socio-economic condition and livelihoods of populations in the world arising from this collusion?
- (4) What measures have been put in place thus far to tackle the challenges posed by land degradation and climate change?
- (5) What methodologies can be employed to effectively anticipate their effects, continually assess the levels of exposure and sensitivity as well as successfully adapt to these challenges as they present themselves?
- (6) How can various stakeholders (policy and practice communities) cooperate effectively and exchange their knowledge regarding those dangers and possible solutions?
- (7) What else still needs to be done in pursuit of protecting environmental biodiversity and human livelihoods?

The book is arranged in a simple and logical structure with the following ten categorised sections: (1) Introduction; (2) Policy context; (3) Conceptual and Methodological frameworks; (4) Exposure and sensitivity of provisioning ecosystem services; (5) Exposure and sensitivity of other ecosystem services and feedbacks between climate change and land degradation; (6) Responses; (7) Monitoring and evaluating current and future effects of climate change and land degradation; (8) Monitoring and evaluating response options; (9) Involving stakeholders; and (10) Conclusion.

The introductory chapter is quite valuable as a tool to set up the reader with information on how to understand the topics of land degradation and climate change. It provides many useful definitions and acronyms. From the very beginning, the authors put an emphasis on diversity and interconnectedness as inherent features of the natural environment. This can be illustrated by their all-inclusive notion of ‘climate’:

...often we think of climate as being the conditions we experience at the earth’s surface. However, climate is really a summary of the state of the broader climate system, which includes a range of complex interactions between the atmosphere (the blanket of gases surrounding the Earth), hydrosphere (the water component present on earth), the cryosphere (the frozen parts of the planet) and the biosphere (parts of the earth where life is found) (p. 3).

Chapter 2 is dedicated to the Policy context. It elaborates well on the various international protocols and associated groupings currently in existence, geared to deal with climate change, land degradation and desertification. The three Rio Conventions are put into focus here. From this point on (chapters 3 & 4) the reading becomes progressively more challenging.

Chapter 3 deals with conceptual and methodological frameworks surrounding climate change and land degradation. It gives the reader a real sense of the impact of these phenomena and the points at which solutions could be found. The diagrams included in the text help make these methodologies and concepts more graspable.

Chapter 4 seeks to show the various ways in which diverse ecosystems can be exposed to climate change and land degradation, and how sensitive these ecosystems are to their effects. In their analysis, the authors also highlight the socio-economic significance of both the causes and the effects of climate change and land degradation and desertification. There is also some interesting information about the possible benefits of climate change in relation to rising carbon dioxide levels and increased productivity of certain food crops (p. 53).

Chapter 5 delves into the feedback relationships that land degradation and climate change have on the exposure and sensitivity of various ecosystem services; it shows just how far-reaching the impact of these phenomena is to all life on Earth.

I enjoyed Chapter 6 which displays the many ways in which the world has and is responding to the effects of climate change and land degradation. I found the discussion on approaches to adaptation quite essential to the main thesis of the book. As they spell out what ought to be done in the world to realise successful adaptation to the imminent changes in our environment, the authors refer to a number of more general principles of a “successful adaptation,”

In order for people to adapt to climate change and land degradation, they first need to perceive that something is changing, second, assess their options in light of their capabilities (the resources they have available to adapt) and third, mobilize their latent adaptive capacity to enact their adaptation decisions. Successful adaptations may be viewed as those actions that decrease vulnerability and increase resilience overall, in response to a range of immediate needs, risks and aspirations... (van Aalst *et al.* 2008)

The section on learning to adapt by using locally held knowledge and scientific knowledge is a must-read. Far from being idealistic, the authors present a number of barriers to adaptation and the possibility of maladaptation.

In Chapter 7, the reader learns about the present and future approaches to monitoring and evaluating the effects of climate change and land degradation. After discussing them individually, the authors explain how, in synergy, they can yield greater positive results.

Chapter 8 is a somewhat heavy read, full of content on informing policy on political, economic, social and technical factors related to monitoring and evaluation of response options.

Chapter 9 on involving stakeholders reveals already existing interconnections and encourages dialogue between groups that often seem to function independently of each other, in particular policy makers and practice communities. It strongly encourages participation, cooperation and knowledge exchange without claiming that such interaction can be easily brought about, the authors argue strongly that multilateral cooperation is not only a positive and effective, but indeed, a *necessary* way forward.

In Chapter 10, the authors offer adequate conclusions to the questions of their study, highlighting clearly that little is yet understood or shared about the existence of the links between climate change and land degradation and desertification. What is clear is that;

- (1) Climate change and land degradation are real and already occurring challenges
- (2) Different regions are exposed to and suffer different sensitivities to their effects, and in collusion they will unpredictably but inevitably affect biodiversity of the environment as well as the livelihoods and welfare of a vast majority of people
- (3) Stakeholder participation involving wide cooperation and knowledge sharing is definitely required.

The authors also point out that further research is needed and they outline several research gaps that should be filled by the relevant stakeholders. The questions that still await answers include:

- (a) How might the effects of climate change be moderated by interactions with other future social-ecological trends and drivers of change to make ecosystems and populations less vulnerable to land degradation?
- (b) How can we build efficiently on available knowledge, success stories and lessons learnt, to promote implementation of better adapted, knowledge-based practices and technologies?
- (c) What are the most important variables in monitoring interactions and feedbacks between climate change and land degradation?

Each chapter carries enough content to properly inform the reader, but thankfully, not too much content as to become long drawn-out and tedious. The book makes use of a few clever features or devices to help show the information as more interrelated and useful. The authors use a small synopsis at the beginning of each chapter to solidify the information from the previous section and, in some cases, enabling the reader to make the necessary intersections between the preceding, current and ensuing chapter. Another useful feature is the summary-style section at the end of each chapter ('Synthesis'); it indeed helps to put together the key ideas that should not be lost from the active memory as one reads through the book. These *synthesis* sections also serve as an invaluable point of quick reference. In addition to this, the thesis is bolstered by several illustrative boxes used throughout the book that give a myriad of relevant examples taken from *all over the world*. The clever boxes also offer more substantial explanations of some important points mentioned in the main text. The text incorporates citations from numerous and applicable sources spanning a wide range of years and specialties, all put together to give quite an informative read.

With as much praise as I have given this book, it pains me to have to highlight a couple of small annoyances. I found the policy sections to be somewhat tedious and draining. Even though for a policy maker they may prove to be the most thrilling parts of the book, to most readers who, like me, belong to the 'practice community' – be it that of scientists or that of land users, it is a challenging read.

There is also the matter of the general aesthetics of the book: the sterile monochrome pages and the page-long paragraphs in tiny font ‘look’ is not particularly appealing and gives the book a justifiably *serious* but *insipid* look. Some may find it a daunting publication to approach thinking that it is an exclusively academic work for the ‘upper ten thousand’ of the population with two PhDs and over, which is definitely not the case. My concern is that due to this unfortunate layout many potential readers could be discouraged to buy the book and thus lose out on the opportunity to expand their ecological horizons. Fortunately, the Kindle edition is also available, which partly solves the *aesthetic* issue.

Lastly, I was disappointed by a few typographical errors. One may wonder how Routledge let such slip-ups pass under their radar. To quote one of the remarks from the end chapter of the book,

This book is one of the first attempts to consider how the land management and climate change communities can work together to better anticipate, assess, and adapt to the combined effects of climate change and land degradation (p. 169).

And what a great and worthwhile attempt it is! I encourage all those who have any interest in ecological topics to get a copy for themselves. Some sections may prove a little bit challenging to readers without any background in natural sciences and/or policy making. However, overall the wealth of insights that we gain from this book as we go forward into a world that is to survive climate change, land degradation and desertification, far outweigh any of its shortcomings.

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GODFREY, Phoebe & TORRES, Denise (eds.). 2016. *Systemic Crises of Global Climate Change: Intersection of Race, Class and Gender*. Abingdon: Routledge. xxviii + 360 pages, ISBN 078-1-1388-3006-6.

This book is not for the fainthearted, though it is totally committed to the issues of gender, class and climate change. It is hard hitting, yet gentle in some places. It does not miss its mark and the issues raised are cogently brought home to the reader. It is one of a series devoted to advances in climate change research, authored by an international team of scholars of experience in the field of climate change. One of the most exciting things about this book is its transdisciplinary approach to global climate change (GCC). This is not a challenge separate from the rest of our existence. If life is to be looked at holistically, then so are the challenges to abundant life. Intersectionality is the order of the day – gender justice, race, class, xenophobia and climate change – all supported by capitalism. The contributions in this volume strongly support this practical approach which is authored by *inter alia* community workers, activists, culture workers, academics, policy analysts. They concur that GCC is an historical issue caused by domination, extraction and institutionalised oppression; they are also aware that they operate in a context where the rules are written by anonymous corporations whose core value is denial in the face of overwhelming evidence.

The book begins by indicating that the current situation is distinguished by a return to primordial chaos (Part 1). It then focuses on the primary elements of air, water, fire and earth (Parts 2, 3, 4, 5) in order to develop the theme of the extensive relationships between GCC and the totality of human and environmental existence. Some contributions are personal; yet they draw also on societal trends. Others draw on public perceptions including media fora.

The relationship between GCC and food security is interrogated as is the related vital contemporary issue of climate-induced migration. This is not only practical; it is also intensely moral for the future of others is at stake

and faith leaders, even from the evangelical perspective, have taken up the challenge although they have failed to get the ultimate message that it is not domination but a failure in gendered masculine stewardship that has led to the current situation. It is active and not passive partnership in stewardship that is required.

A number of contributions of culture work – poems, photographs, paintings, drama – are included which demonstrates that this is not just an academic discourse but an intensely personal and affective one too. It is clear that transformation is an individual as well as a corporate responsibility. Every little bit helps and we cannot depend on multi-national corporations to give up profit for the future of the *cosmos*, even though systems change is non-negotiable.

Several points are basic to this text. First, it is apparent that those who are in positions of power within institutional systems have no ultimate control for they are constrained to leave a nightmare legacy for their children and their children's children to inherit; what an inheritance! Secondly, GCC is interlinked with other environmental issues and the totality of our existence; so an issue by issue response is totally inadequate. Thirdly, only radical conversion, transformation – call it what you will – really does mean and requires a totally unique and innovative confrontation with reality. As hip hop performer Andre 3000 (2003) rather indelicately refers to the current situation as *motherfucking*: 'And when I say *motherfucker* I do mean *motherfucker*/ Because Mother Earth is dying and we continue to fuck her to death' (followed by an explanatory note: '*fuck* literally means not only "to engage in heterosexual intercourse," but also "to harm irreparably; finish; victimise"' (Shiedlower 1999:124).

This book delivers solidly in terms of its aims and objectives. I am reminded of Rudolf Bultmann's call for an existential decision: It is either – or!

Reviewed by:

Emeritus Professor Graham A. Duncan
University of Pretoria

KAOMA, Kapya John. 2015. *The Creator's Symphony: African Christianity, the Plight of the Earth and the Poor*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications. x + 166 pages. ISBN 978-1-9206-2010-3.

The global ecological crisis has become a major concern in theological discourse in recent decades. This has, so far, made little impact on political, social and economic discourses on the care and future of the environment and there is little hope that the powerful nations of the world will undergo a sudden or even gradual change of heart while there are still people to be exploited and resources to be plundered. One of the problems is that a distinction is made between dependent people and their environment. At least in theological and some other domains, a change is emerging as the totality of cosmic creation is viewed as **Earth** – interdependent and whole (holy).

Further, this issue has too often been regarded as a western instigated problem as the result of colonialism and modern empire. However, this is not only a western instigated matter, as universal human greed is ubiquitous. The depletion of Africa's resources is often sanctioned by African leaders and others out to make a fast buck to be filtered away in Swiss bank accounts. The issue which is the focus of this work is the plight of the earth and that of the poor. The earth is defenceless against the depredations of multi-national corporations and the ambitions of politicians. They are all secure (at least in the meantime) and are careless in their overuse of Earth in all its varied forms, human and otherwise. The poor have always had to live on their wits and the available resources. In their use they have demonstrated enormous flexibility and innovation. These meagre resources are now being stripped before their very eyes and they are helpless and even the few resources they depend on are being destroyed.

To date, most writings emanate from the same western context whose solutions have proved to be inadequate and inappropriate in contexts outside their own.

Here is one of the first books to be devoted to the African context. It begins by acknowledging the captivity of African Christianity to imported colonial models. It then proceeds to focus on means of arresting and improving the situation. For this, the development of an authentic African theology is a vital component in offering an alternative and positive view of the past and future of creation. The author then proceeds to discuss the person of Jesus as the ecological ancestor and guardian of the land, followed by a chapter on sacramental visibilities in which he examines manifestations of ancestors in African religion. This is followed by an analysis of the earthly aspects of African Traditional Religion (ATR) and then an ecological perspective on bringing Jesus and the ancestors to Earth. The final reflection is practically based on educating towards ecological consciousness by serving and tending the Earth.

The author's thesis is that an African theology for Africa can ameliorate the situation if not save it. For centuries the material and spiritual resources have been tended by African Earth keepers (see the work of Prof Inus Daneel in Zimbabwe) and still are. This is an enterprise that requires all to work together for the future of Earth. Hence the title of the book, *The Creator's Symphony*. The world is the symphony and God is the conductor. This is God's mission; it is the *missio Dei* in which we are all called and invited to participate. God help us all if we fail in this task. The author is to be congratulated for raising and helping us to reflect more on this crisis.

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REV PROF GERARD WHELAN, S.J., is a lecturer in the Department of Fundamental Theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome. He was awarded an MA in Economics from Trinity College in Dublin, and then entered the Society of Jesus. He completed a Bachelors' Degree in Theology at Hekima College, Nairobi, and then proceeded to graduate studies in Boston and Toronto, where he was awarded a PhD in Systematic Theology from St Michael's College, Toronto. While in Nairobi, besides pastoral duties, Fr Whelan worked as a member of the Commission on Ecumenism for the Kenyan Episcopal Conference and as an advisor to the Apostolic Nuncio to Kenya in representing the Holy See to activities of the United Nations centred at Nairobi. He was appointed ecclesiastical assistant to the World Union of Catholic Womens' Organisations by the Pontifical Council for the Laity, and helped to organise an international conference at the Gregorian: "Revisiting Lonergan's Anthropology." He has published a book: *Redeeming History: Social Concern in Bernard Lonergan and Robert Doran* (Rome, G & B Press, 2013) and he is currently working on a variety of publications about Pope Francis.

PROF SUSAN RAKOCZY, IHM, earned her PhD in spirituality from the Catholic University of America. Her doctoral thesis focused on the emerging theology and practice of discernment since the Second Vatican Council and this theme has remained a central research focus. She has taught in South Africa since 1990 at St Joseph's Theological Institute and the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Her publications focus on feminist theology, cross-cultural spiritual direction, spirituality and social justice and ecofeminism and include *In Her Name: Women Doing Theology* (Cluster Publications, 2004) and *Great Mystics and Social Justice: Walking on the Two Feet of Love* (Paulist Press, 2006). She is working on a book on women's experiences of discernment.

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HIS GRACE ARCHBISHOP BUTI TLHAGALE, OMI, previously Archbishop of Bloemfontein (1999-2003), was appointed Archbishop of Johannesburg in 2007. He studied at the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland, as well as at the Gregorian University in Rome where he obtained a Licentiate in Systematic Theology. He taught Philosophy at St Peter's Seminary and St Joseph's Scholasticate in Pietermaritzburg. He was ordained to the Priesthood by Archbishop Fanyana Butelezi in 1976 and ministered for several communities in Soweto until 1999. He worked in the Justice and Peace Department of the South African Council of Churches (1979-1980) and served as Secretary General of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC) between 1995-1999. He was Grand Chancellor of St Augustine College (1999-2010). Buti Tlhagale has written extensively on Theology, Inculturation and Labour matters, and has been one of the leading Black Theologians in South Africa in the last decades of the struggle against apartheid. He has published several articles in various journals and co-edited a number of books.

REV LAWRENCE MDUDUZI NDLOVU is a Catholic Priest for the Archdiocese of Johannesburg. He holds a BA in Philosophy (St John Vianney Seminary), BD (University of London), STL (Bellarmine Institute, Heythrop College). He is currently studying for an MTH (University of London) and STL (Bellarmine Institute, Heythrop College). He is a contributing columnist for *Daily Maverick* and serves in the Editorial Advisory Board of the *Southern Cross Catholic Weekly*. He is also a Trustee of the St Augustine Education Foundation Trust.

ABOUT ST AUGUSTINE COLLEGE OF SOUTH AFRICA

The idea of founding a Catholic university in South Africa was first mooted in 1993 by a group of academics, clergy and business people. It culminated in the establishment of St Augustine College of South Africa in July 1999, when it was registered by the Minister of Education as a private higher education institution and started teaching students registered for the degree of Master of Philosophy and Doctor of Philosophy.

It is situated in Victory Park, Johannesburg and operates as a university offering values-based education to students of any faith or denomination, to develop leaders in Africa for Africa.

The name 'St Augustine' was chosen in order to indicate the African identity of the College since St Augustine of Hippo (354-430 A.D.) was one of the first great Christian scholars of Africa.

As a Catholic educational institution, St Augustine College is committed to making moral values the foundation and inspiration for all its teaching and research. In this way it offers a new and unique contribution to education, much needed in our South African society.

It aims to be a community that studies and teaches disciplines that are necessary for the true human development and flourishing of individuals and society in South Africa. The College's engagement with questions of values is in no sense sectarian or dogmatic but is both critical and creative. It explores the African contribution to Christian thought and vice versa. Ethical values underpin all its educational programmes in order to produce intellectual leaders who remain sensitive to current moral issues, who 'think rigorously so as to act rightly and to serve humanity better' (*Ex Corde Ecclesiae*).

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AUTHOR GUIDELINES

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St Augustine Papers is a biannual multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary journal published by St Augustine College of South Africa. This academic journal publishes scholarly, refereed articles and book reviews in all the fields in which academic programmes are offered at the College, including Theology, Philosophy, Applied Ethics, Peace Studies, Education, Social Sciences and the Humanities in general. Interdisciplinary articles are especially welcome. All manuscripts submitted for review undergo a double-blind peer review process. Final publishing decisions are made by the Editorial Committee.

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Original research articles should be between 5000 and 9000 words in length in a particular field within or related to the focus and scope of the journal. Articles may be e-mailed to Prof Jakub Urbaniak at j.urbaniak@staugustine.ac.za using software that is compatible with MS Word. The first page of the manuscript should carry the proposed title and author's name with highest degree. Under the name, an identification line, giving title and position held, the institution and its location, should appear. Personal details and a short biography (max. 100 words) should also be submitted. A brief abstract (no more than 150 words) should follow the author identification data.

NOTES

Notes should be numbered serially throughout the text by superscript numbers (without parentheses) to the right of any punctuation marks. The notes themselves should appear at the end of the manuscript but before the references, under the caption 'Notes'.

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The Harvard Referencing Style should be used. All references should be specified in parentheses in the text (and in the text of notes) by surname(s) of the author(s), the year of the publication and page number(s), for example (Dworkin 1986:45-52) or (Solomon & Higgins 1996:157) or (Grant *et al.* 1976:58). 'Et al.' is to be used for three and more authors. The complete citation should appear at the end of the manuscript (after the notes, if any) under the caption 'References'. Such citations should be listed alphabetically by surname of author; for authors cited more than once, by year of publication, with the most recent references first. Please note the use of capital letters, punctuation marks and italics in the following examples:

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