

SCHOLARS IN WRITING:
A Journal of Undergraduate
Research in the Humanities



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About This Issue

Elizabeth Hinson-Hasty & Annette Harris Powell

Victor Ferrall, former president of Beloit College, writes about the importance of liberally educated students during a time of flux and change. Ferrall suggests, Society needs well and broadly educated citizens. The more liberally educated the better it will be ... A liberal education defines the relationship of its holders to the world around them. They are seldom satisfied with their level of knowing. They wonder, and bring their analytical resources and knowledge to bear on their wondering. The life of their minds is not limited by or to their daily experience. For them, the fact of not knowing can be a source of pleasurable challenge. Creativity is central to what they value.¹

Courses in writing or with extensive writing and research assignments cultivate a sense of wonder within students and challenge them to read critically, reflect personally, think analytically, explore issues, formulate their own ideas, solve problems, write persuasively, defend their own arguments, and sometimes even to change their own opinions. Mastering the art of good writing is central to a liberal arts education and one of the most valuable skills that our students at Bellarmine University master. Our goal is to enhance the culture of writing by embedding it throughout the university's curriculum. Writing enables us to express our fears, hopes, and joys and helps us to make sense of the world. Good writing is much more than a skill; it provides a tangible way of remembering our place within a much larger and broader societal narrative and creates a bridge to the future.

In this third volume of *Scholars in Writing* you will find award-winning essays written by students between 2016 and 2020 for Bellarmine's First Year Writing Contest and submitted to the annual Theology Essay Contest. The circumstances of the pandemic created a distinctive context in which to edit this volume and slowed the usual timing of its' publication (every two years). However, the essays included here will not disappoint you and represent students' thinking on a wide range of topics and issues, including challenging the way the role of women has been defined in Christian tradition, the importance of an intersectional approach to theological reasoning, interpreting the biblical narrative as a story of migrants, Merton's approach to solving problems within the Catholic Church, disability justice, the culture of small-town coffee shops, and more. Their work illustrates well how students grapple with their own place

¹ Victor E. Ferrall. *Liberal Arts at the Brink*. Harvard University Press, 2011, 17.

within a much larger and broader societal narrative. Students writing these essays also represent a wide variety of academic disciplines, such as Anthropology, English, International Studies, Political Science, Psychology, Refugee and Forced Migration Studies, Theology, and more.

Readers will now have an opportunity to read their essays in a new and very different context. The COVID-19 pandemic forced a speedy move to online course offering in March 2020 that transformed university classrooms across the nation within the short span of about 14 days. Finding your voice and entering into dialogue in virtual spaces presented new challenges for many students and faculty. Questions raised by faculty and students often led to longer than usual pauses sometimes interrupted by electronically raised hands. In addition to the health and learning challenges created by the pandemic, institutions of higher education and our society as a whole are in a state of flux and change. Demonstrations for racial justice in response to ongoing police brutality, market fluctuations, budget shortfalls, elections campaigns, and shifts in the balance of privilege and power continue to capture the nation's attention as many people are reaching out to each other in search of a collective way forward. These essays and the events that unfolded in the past year will urge all of us to reflect on the vital importance of a liberal arts education in preparing individuals and citizens to think and write broadly and craft well-reasoned arguments in response to some of the most significant issues we are facing as a society.

This is precisely what sets apart liberal arts colleges from other institutions of higher education—our focus on critical thinking, good writing, and broad, inclusive, and humanistic inquiry. Our hope is that these and other students graduating from liberal arts institutions today will continue to cultivate a new sense of wonder within themselves and others and use their knowledge and creativity to build a bridge for all of us into the future.

Brief Student Biographies

Lycette Belisle successfully completed the Honors program with a double major in Theology and Communication. Her Honors Thesis focused on “Exploring a Qualitative Approach to Arts Advocacy and Evaluation.” She graduated from Bellarmine in 2020.

Joy Board is a junior English major at Bellarmine University. On campus, she is an Academic Peer Coach, member of the Student Advisory Council, intern for Bellarmine’s “Knights Lighting the Path to College” program, and looks forward to studying abroad in the future. She is ecstatic to return to campus in the Fall and rejoin the Bellarmine community in-person!

Megan Burger is currently majoring in Political Science and History with minors in International Studies and Refugee and Forced Migration Studies. She is involved in Student Government Association, Pre-Law Society, and International Club. After graduating in May 2023, Megan hopes to attend law school and focus on international law.

Logan Funderburg is currently a Junior majoring in English and minoring in Creative Writing. Logan loves to tell stories. After graduating he plans to teach English at a private high school and help cultivate more writing fanatics like himself.

Jasmina Harambasic is majoring in Psychology with a focus on clinical work and counseling with minors in Refugee and Forced Migration Studies and Anthropology. She anticipates graduating in May 2023 and is currently exploring various fields in psychology. After graduating she plans to continue her education in graduate school and pursue a master’s degree in Psychology.

Kayla Martin graduated from Bellarmine University in 2019 with a Bachelor of Arts degree and majored in Theology and Political Science. She earned her Master of Arts in Theology in 2021 from the University of Leeds in the United Kingdom. Her dissertation was titled “On Stewardship: an examination of dominion interpretation, stewardship practice, and creation care for the future.” Her other works include a TEDx talk titled “The Theology of Difference” and “The Problem with Human Uniqueness: An Examination of Morality in the Great Apes and the Implications of Imago Dei.”

Matthew Moore received a B.A in Theology from Bellarmine University in 2019. He is currently studying for a Masters in Theology at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore Ky. He lives with his wife, son, two dogs, one cat, four chickens, one duck, and 80,000 bees in Lawrenceburg Ky.

Laura Pierson graduated from Bellarmine in May 2018 with her double major in theology and communications. Following her graduation, she moved to Boston to pursue a Master of Theological Studies and a Master of Arts in Teaching. Starting this fall Laura will be a 10th grade American History teacher in a Cincinnati Public School.

Robert E. Ranney graduated from Bellarmine University in 2019 with a Bachelor of Arts degree and majored in Political Science and Theology. He's now a law student at the Louis D. Brandeis School of Law at the University of Louisville, where he's an Ordered Liberty Program Fellow and a member of the *University of Louisville Law Review's* editorial board. He recently married his wife, Mary, a Bellarmine nursing grad, whom he met on his third day of Bellarmine's freshman orientation. The two reside in Bullitt County, Kentucky with their loyal dog, Benedict Kolbe.

Jillian Sauer graduated from Bellarmine University with a Bachelor of Arts degree and majored in Political Science with minors in Theology and History. She is currently a law student at the Brandeis School of Law at the University of Louisville and plans to use her law degree to serve vulnerable and marginalized communities.

Kathryn Combs Truman graduated from Bellarmine in 2018 with a Bachelor of Arts in Design, Arts & Technology and Art: Digital Emphasis. She now works as Designer and Multimedia Producer in the Office of Enrollment, Marketing and Communication at Bellarmine University.

2016-2017
ACADEMIC YEAR

Theology Essay Prizes

The Theology Department Essay Contest is sponsored annually by the Department of Theology and the Master of Arts in Spirituality program. Students submit outstanding papers written for any of the theology classes that they have taken while at Bellarmine. Papers are written for classes taken within either the fall or spring semesters and can be submitted to the chair of the theology department any time before the deadline for submissions is announced in the spring. All submissions are refereed by faculty members in the department. Winning essays are presented and discussed at the annual theology department colloquy which is ordinarily planned during Undergraduate Research and Study Week.

A Story of Migration through Suffering - An Exegesis of Psalm 137:1-9

Robert E. Ranney

Psalm 137 depicts in detail the depressing lives of Israelites captured by the Babylonians. Despite their sorrow, the Israelites remain faithful to their homeland of Jerusalem and vow never to forget. Throughout the story, the psalmist expresses emotions of extreme sorrow, confusion, and anger – and makes them very clear in the text. In the final verses of Psalm 137, the psalmist wishes to condemn the land of Babylon to destruction, and their infants to death. The study to follow will examine this interesting story through the lens of a migrant and assess what meaning it held in Biblical times, as well as what lessons can be learned from it today.

Text

1 By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. 2 There on the poplars we hung our harps, 3 for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!” 4 How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land? 5 If I forget you, Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill. 6 May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy. 7 Remember, Lord, what the Edomites did on the day Jerusalem fell. “Tear it down,” they cried, “tear it down to its foundations!” 8 Daughter Babylon, doomed to destruction, happy is the one who repays you according to what you have done to us. 9 Happy is the one who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks.

Form and Structure

The complexity and confusion of Psalm 137 have been discussed by theological scholars for centuries. One mutual ground many scholars agree with is the concept that Psalm 137 may be outlined in strophes as follows based upon content and meaning:

- A. Grief (137:1-3)
- B. Remembrance (137:4-6)
- C. Suffering and Revenge (137:7-9)

The language used throughout the psalm allow it to easily be broken up into the previously mentioned strophes. Key words are implemented into each strophe, suggesting its topic. Verse 1 begins with “By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept.” There is no other combination of words that could more perfectly serve as the starting point for Psalm 137. The feelings of grief, sadness, despair, and aching for how life used to be are all

expressed to the reader. This theme of grief continues on through verses 2 and 3, when the captured Jews are asked to sing songs of Zion. This was a horrid offense to the Jews – singing songs of God outside of the Holy Land was forbidden. The Babylonians used this against the Jews, willfully torturing them for no other reason than being Jewish. Transitioning into verse 4 the central theme changes from extreme grief and sorrow, to loyal remembrance. It was vital to the Jewish people to never forget the Holy Land. The psalmist states remembering Jerusalem is what makes him function, claiming that without it his hands would forget their skill, and he would be unable to speak. Jerusalem is his life force, and why he is able to continue on even in his unfortunate living situation. Due to his love of Jerusalem, the psalmist desperately desires revenge. This is made clear in verses 7-9. The psalmist prays to God asking for the destruction of Babylon, and even the death of their “infants” or citizens.

Historical and Biblical Context

To understand Psalm 137, it is vital to understand the tensions between nations during this period in history. Between roughly 612 BC-516 BC, Babylon was slowly working towards the ultimate destruction of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. This destruction was imminent and unavoidable. This is made known to us in the Book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah was divinely chosen by God to inform Zedekiah King of Judah, of Judah’s future destruction by the hands of Babylon. This destruction is a punishment by God for the failure of both Judah’s ancestors, as well as the current population, to honor God’s command to free all Hebrew slaves after their sixth year of service. Jeremiah relayed God’s message to Zedekiah King of Judah. Jeremiah informed Zedekiah that Judah was doomed to destruction by Babylon as punishment for profaning God’s name. Jeremiah also warned Zedekiah of the Jewish relocation to Babylon they will soon face as a result of the siege. (Jeremiah 34:3) The first hostile encounter between Babylon and Judah is recorded at 605 BC, imminently leading to the first wave of forcible Jewish deportation from the land of Judah to Babylon. In 601 BC, Babylon went to battle with the Egyptians, leading to drastic casualties on both sides. Shortly following this battle Judah realigns with Egypt. This served as a strategic alliance, based on the idea that forming an ally with the mutual enemy of Babylon would serve well for the land. Not long after, in 597 BC, God’s warning becomes reality - the Babylonians capture Jerusalem. This led to the second wave of forced Jewish deportation out of Judah to Babylon— one of the deportees being the prophet Ezekiel. The Babylonian people dealt the final blow in 586 BC, ultimately leading to the final siege of Jerusalem. After overtaking the land, the Babylonians were ruthless to the Jewish people, they executed many and forcibly migrated the remaining into Babylon, enslaving them. King Zedekiah was not exempt from suffering; he was forced to watch as his sons were executed. Just moments after, Zedekiah’s eyes were gouged out and was led 700 miles to a Babylonian prison. The Temple was destroyed, Jerusalem was burned, the walls torn to the ground - just as Jeremiah had prophesized. All religious, military and civil leaders were executed or sent to prison. After hearing word of the destruction of

Jerusalem, Ezekiel immediately began prophesizing about the restoration of the land of Israel, and its bright future (Ezekiel 33.) This siege of Jerusalem marked the beginning of the Jewish Diaspora, and the end of the Biblical Period. The psalmist of Psalm 137 also served as a prophet, as his claims of the ultimate destruction of Babylon did come. In the year 539 BC, the reign of Babylon came to an end due to a crushing blow by the Persians. Ezekiel's prophecy began to take shape in reality following the fall of Babylon. Cyrus the Great of Persia issued a decree allowing the captive Jews to return to their homeland. The Jews immediately began work on rebuilding the Temple. It is quite clear how the Jews suffering through forced deportation took on the part of migrants. After being deported from their own homeland, they suffered scrutiny, ridicule, belittlement, mockery, and slavery. This narrative is similar to that of many migrants in our world today.

Application

A. Original Setting

The psalmists' intended audience were the enslaved Jews in Babylon. This may have been an attempt to console the enslaved Jewish community. By sharing his experience of enslavement and torture, he may console others experiencing the same pain, encouraging them to reinforce their faith. During the period it was written, Psalm 137 taught Jews to remember the Holy Land and to stand strong in faith with God. It emphasized the importance of remembering, and the devastation caused by forgetting. The identity of the psalmist is unknown. However, it is implied in Psalm 137 that the psalmist was a former, or is a current Jewish prisoner in Babylon at the time of writing. The psalmist was writing to reflect and share his experience as a prisoner in Babylon. Psalm 137 invites us into the minds of the Jews during this time of enslavement and suffering. Jerusalem had recently been conquered and the people forcibly relocated to Babylon. It is important to note that at the time of these events, Babylon was defined by wealth, hostility, idolatry and moral laxity. (Liddon) Some interpreters even refer to Babylon as a symbol of satanic power. (Buttrick) Because of this, there were many Jews that believed they were being punished for their idolatry and disobedience, a twisted irony. Others however felt they were being punished without reason, or possibly even as a test of faith. These theories proved to be false, according to Jeremiah's account with God's word. God made it very clear that those of Judah were being punished and why. Being a captive Jew in Babylon following the destruction of the Holy Land would be devastating. It would be difficult to understand why God would allow this, especially to His chosen people. The Psalmist turns to anger – condemning the Babylonians to destruction just as they had done to Jerusalem. In this time of frustration, it is important for the Jews to remember Jerusalem as a Holy place. Verse 3 displays the taunting by the Babylonians, forcing the Jews to sing the songs of their God as to say, "Where is your God now?" He questions how anyone could sing the songs of the Lord while not in the Holy Land. This taunting even served as a form of suffering and torture, undoubtedly contributing to the weeping of Jews by the Babylonian rivers. Largely because

singing these songs outside of Jerusalem is considered unholy, especially in a place such as Babylon - the hub of idolatry. This is just one example of the psalmists' deep love and respect of Jerusalem that is prominently displayed in the psalm. His desire to remember forever the Holy Land is explicitly stated, even asking for a punishment if he forgets. Jerusalem is personified to express a sense of loyalty and origination, much like a mother. This is done to preserve the love and Holy name of Jerusalem to the Jews. This love for the Holy Land will never disappear. Some commentators even argue that some of the Jews held captive in Babylon may have never even seen Jerusalem prior to being enslaved, however they still had the love for Jerusalem because it is much more than just a place. It is God's land, the Holy Land. If life in or of Jerusalem is ever forgotten, then song will become forever impossible and life as they know it will never again be the same. This is demonstrated in verses 5 and 6, depicting how vital it is to Jewish life that they preserve not only the memory of Jerusalem as a geographical area with which to live, but rather what Jerusalem stands for and the pure holiness of the land. It would be more painful for the Jews to forget the Holy Land of Jerusalem. When transitioning into the final strophe of Psalm 137, verses 7-9, it is important to keep the major theme of revenge in mind. These three lines are mutually agreed upon by commentators and analysts to be the most difficult passage to interpret and understand in the entire Book of Psalms. They are a plea for revenge to God issued by the Psalmist. The psalmist is clearly crying and praying to God. He is asking for consolation of the Jewish people for what happened to Jerusalem, in the form of the destruction of Babylon and the thrashing of their infants against rocks. When the psalmist refers to infants being thrown to rocks, he is actually referring to the Babylonians themselves, not necessarily suggesting the execution of children. The psalmist chose his wording based on the fact that the idolatrous Babylonians considered themselves children of Babylon rather than children of God. By requesting the demise of Babylon as retaliation for their actions committed against the Holy Land, the psalmist was acting loyally to God. He interpreted this act as just and necessary, as anyone who defiles the Holy Land deserves not the mercy of God in the eyes of the Old Testament. The psalmists' overarching lesson for the Jews of the period is to never forget the Holy Land of Jerusalem, and to remain faithful to God despite the circumstances. This lesson helped the captive Jews of Babylon cope with their suffering and reinforced the holiness of God.

B. General Principle

A general principle that can be drawn from this Psalm is that suffering will come to all, but stands as a test of morale and strength. In order to fully overcome suffering we must remember the greatness of God, the great things of the world, and our fondest memories. This must be done to remind us why we are fighting this difficult battle, rather than giving in to sorrow and suffering.

C. Contemporary Relevance

Although the general principle of Psalm 137 can be applied to any person, these

lessons are especially applicable to that of the migrant. Many migrant workers suffer from belittlement, harassment, being undervalued, performing back-breaking work, even blatant racism all for the goal of supporting their families back at home. Often times migrant workers will be away from their families for years. Migrant workers must remember to engage in active remembrance of their families and God in order to push through the suffering that comes along with migrant work. Without constantly reminding themselves of the reasons they are going through so much pain, they would risk giving into suffering – giving up. Migrants sacrifice so much for their families – much like the Jews during the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem sacrificed to preserve the reverence of the Holy Land of Israel. Throughout the story of Psalm 137 the reader develops an extreme feeling of sadness in realizing that a group of people could have been exposed to such immense trauma and suffering. Experiencing Psalm 137 in the 21st century, and still being able to sense the pain in the psalmist's voice is incredible. This powerful piece undoubtedly would drastically inspire someone in a similar situation, such as a suffering migrant trying to support their family. Psalm 137 was written as a story of forced migration into slavery and clearly demonstrates the feelings of grief, remembrance, and revenge in which the Jewish people had to internalize while being enslaved.

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African Independent Churches: Infusion of Witchcraft, Cultural Elements, and Traditional Christianity

Kathryn Combs

At surface-level consideration, one may think it impossible to meld Witchcraft and Christianity in any way, shape, or form. It might be a contradiction; it could even be deemed ‘sacrilege’. However, in the context of inculturation, some religious leaders and scholars claim that understanding can be justified for this unusual combination of beliefs. By studying the history of the Western Christian mission, African culture, and traditional beliefs, comprehension of the doctrines of African Independent Churches can be achieved.

Christianity has always been set apart from other religions due to its emphasis on ‘the Great Commission’, the necessity to spread the gospel message and grow the body of believers. This is evident in Acts 1:8, which states, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth”. That is what Christians have strived to do: deliver their religion to the ends of the earth. Because of the desire to reach so many different people groups, the religion has been affected by an assortment of cultural beliefs. However, the one that seems to dominate is the Western perspective; European and American ideals have become the popular ‘definition’ of Christianity.

In the early days of Western Christian missionary outreach in Africa, the majority of missionaries tried to force all of their beliefs and aspects of their own cultures onto the Africans they were trying to convert. According to Cletus Umezina, an expert in African Traditional Religion and Analytic Philosophy, “everything African was dismissively tagged fetish, satanic, barbaric and diabolical, and as such, unworthy to be around the sanctuary” (Anagwo, 276). Obviously, this cultural rejection was not received well by the Africans, and it caused a great delay in the establishment of Christian churches with consistent aboriginal members. Witchcraft was, and still is, predominant in the societies of many African nations and villages, and is perceived in an entirely different manner than the Westerners presumed.

Matsobane J. Manala, who teaches in the department of practical theology at the University of South Africa, explains the origins of widespread association of evil with witchcraft in Africa. Manala describes witches as people who “reverse all acceptable standards”. For instance, witches are known for causing turmoil among their kin, eating their own children, digging up corpses, and a number of other disturbing deeds.

Based upon this behavior, many African people associate witches with death, illness, drought and famine, natural disasters, and essentially all misfortune (Manala, 1495).

S.S. Maimela, a South African black theologian, states that, "It is against this background of appalling terror and deep revulsion against witchcraft that the traditional African is apt to call every premeditated enmity, hatred, evil speaking, or any act directed towards the destruction of the life of others 'witchcraft' and therefore evil and sinful in the highest degree in God's sight" (Manala, 1495). In these terms, African Christians view witchcraft as sin, and incorporating a belief in witchcraft into African Independent churches is an alternate way of describing sinful behavior in their culture. In his article, "Witchcraft and its Impact on Black African Christians", Manala boldly asks the question, "is witchcraft real?" His answer is very culturally informed, and it helps to further rationalize the inclusion of witchcraft in African Christianity. Manala states that, "From the western worldview, which is largely influenced by enlightenment thinking, the answer to the abovementioned question will be an emphatic 'no'". As for the answer from an African mindset, Manala flatly states that the question of the existence of witchcraft has no place in their culture. It is not a question; it is a reality for them (Manala, 1503). Suggesting that Africans discard all notions of witchcraft was essentially equivalent to telling them to alter scientific, medical, and moral beliefs about the world.

For example, many members of African society believe that AIDS, which is such a prevalent issue in their area, is caused by witchcraft. "Africans basically assort the causes of illness into three categories: ancestors, witches or sorcerers, and nature; it is sicknesses caused by witches that are said to be fatal" (Manala, 1499). Additionally, they generally associate most illnesses, infertility and miscarriages, poor economic situations, negative emotions, drunkenness, sexual promiscuity, and lack of progress in life with supernatural evil (Asamoah-Gyadu, 24). These beliefs intensely contrast western scientific reasoning and moral virtues.

In various African regions, both successes and failures are believed to be brought on by supernatural forces. Wealthy, successful, and talented people can sometimes be victims of skepticism that they have attained their qualities and good fortune through the performance of blood rituals (Asamoah-Gyadu, 24). On the other hand, people with deformities or disabilities are viewed as having been affected by negative supernatural forces.

Like most Christians, members of the African Independent Churches believe that gratifying experiences and good aspects of life are blessings from God. Therefore, the positive side of the African supernatural order is excluded from the beliefs of African Independent Churches. However, The supernatural evil elements of witchcraft are included in the doctrines of the church.

In order to successfully reach the indigenous people with the gospel message, it was necessary to assert a compromise of beliefs. Western missionaries had to go to the effort of translating their views of demonic activity into the Africans' view of witchcraft. Emmanuel Milingo, a Zambian ex-archbishop who is known for his practices of healing and exorcism, compares the Catholic Church's beliefs and recognition of spirits

and demons to the forces of evil in African culture. Milingo notes that, “[the powers of evil] are ultimately destructive and enslaving; it is important to recognize them rather than deny them, and to learn to apply the power of the Holy Spirit in healing, so that sick people will not be driven to seek help from an alien and dangerous source” (Milingo).

This kind of thinking is exactly what led the African Independent Churches to incorporate witchcraft and non-medical healing into their theology.

Instead of shutting it out, they made the wise decision to accept the belief and to use the Holy Spirit in place of traditional African methods of dealing with evil. African Independent Churches rely heavily on prayer and “*ise iwosan*” (divine healing).

Typically, the churches will hold two weekly services solely dedicated to prayer time. On Wednesdays (the day of mercy) and Fridays (the day of healing), the church doors are open to everyone and elements like oil and water are available for healing. “[They] believe that faith may be assisted with concrete objects like holy water, anointing oil, and the use of candles for prayer to be efficacious” (Ayegboyin, 6). At first, this was difficult for Western missionaries to grasp. They were so accustomed to hospitals and the technologically advanced medical treatments they provided. However, after witnessing the experiences of the indigenous people, their views began to shift. Spiritual healing in the churches provided cures for many people who were undergoing illnesses or injuries that defied medical attempts by missionaries. These instances inspired a broader gap between the missionaries who rejected inculturation and the indigenous people who held even more strongly to their beliefs about supernatural evil.

Contrary to common misconceptions, many people begin practicing divination not to create or control evil, but to receive protection from evil forces by uniting with a benevolent spirit world (Asamoah-Gyadu, 24). When it comes to warding off evil, people will go to great lengths. Ritual sacrifices and creation of amulets are measures that are often taken. In many African societies, it is common for people to spend large sums of money on medicines that allegedly protect against witches. Some families will hire a witch doctor to envelop their homes with protective medicines each year (Manala, 1501). For these people who simply desired separation from evil rather than involvement with witchcraft and a need for power in the supposed hierarchy of the supernatural world, conversion to Christianity was a fairly easy, logical decision. Since African Independent Churches acknowledged witchcraft, the churches could help people fend off negative aspects of the supernatural in an alternative religious manner. This is an instance of liturgical inculturation.

Emmanuel Anagwo defines liturgical inculturation as, “a process whereby texts and rites used in worship by the local church are inserted in a framework of culture, that they absorb its thought, language, and ritual pattern...the process of liturgical inculturation involves the interaction of cultures with the Christian faith in which both are re-interpreted in the light of each other. One can, therefore, say that liturgical inculturation is not unilateral; rather there must be a reciprocity and mutual respect between the liturgy and culture” (Anagwo, 282). At the turn of the nineteenth century, some Western Christian groups changed their missionary styles and began practicing

inculturation in certain areas of Africa. This way of thinking is partially responsible for the establishment of the African Independent Church in 1870.

It is important to recognize that Africa's fifty-three countries are highly diverse, and they cannot necessarily be generalized into a singular 'African culture'. However, it can be agreed upon that 'Western culture' which largely influences Christianity, opposes the cultures and ideals of most African nations, according to Emmanuel C. Anagwo. A "working definition" of African culture was created to encompass African ways of worship (Anagwo, 281).

While it may seem like the African culture's version of Christianity has been successful for the most part, the Independent churches have not moved beyond all disagreements with ideals of Western Christianity. Recent popularity of the prosperity gospel in America has not translated well in Africa. "Prosperity gospel teaches that God has met all human needs of health and wealth through the suffering and death of Christ.

Believers are therefore encouraged to claim these blessings—including insulation from disease, poverty, and sin—by making positive confessions and sowing seeds of tithes and offerings" (Asamoah-Gyadu, 25). In areas where African Independent Churches are located—areas where poverty and disease dominate—this is not an easy concept to accept. Instead of blaming God for all things, good and bad and questioning why God would not protect them from sickness and suffering, they consider the negative aspects of life to be products of witchcraft.

Aside from witchcraft, another supernatural element of African culture, which has been incorporated into the local Christian churches, is the use of 'charismatic gifts'. Church leaders seek out prophets to interpret dreams, to present their visions and prophecies during church services. They encourage private meditation time for these prophets, whom they believe to possess 'inner eyes' and powers beyond the reach of average human beings (Ayegboyin, 8). This was a belief that existed in their communities prior to the entrance of western missionaries. After reading numerous passages in the bible—chapters in Genesis, Daniel, and Revelation, just to name a few—that described dreams and visions, the indigenous people decided that their perspective on the matter aligned with scripture and was still acceptable to practice in the Christian context (Olayiwola, 45).

Ayegboyin presents the opposing view of what can be deemed as an acceptable form of Christianity. In other words, he describes the viewpoint of Christians who are closed-minded, viewing dream interpretation and inculturation in general as negatives. "The so-called resemblance between their mode of African Christianity and elements of traditional religion has led some scholars to conclude that African Independent Christianity is a sect within the traditional African Religion with a borrowed Christian veneer [...] However, it is important to stress that the phenomenon of healing, visioning, dreaming, prophesying, and so on are all spiritual experiences which are scripturally legitimate" (Ayegboyin, 10).

While symbolism holds value in western churches, African churches bring their own unique symbols into the mix. Water is believed to symbolize life itself. Therefore,

many Africans regard water as a sacred substance. This belief is derived from the idea that non-Christian divine beings dwell in bodies of water. Unlike indigenous religious groups, members of African Independent churches do not think of water as a “magical potent, rather, it is perceived as a symbol for spiritual warfare; a symbol that is capable of combatting spiritual forces, demonic activities and the healing of diseases believed to have been caused by evil forces” (Oduro, 77). As a result of this mindset, water is used in a variety of church services, including the blessings of the newborns.

Matsobane Manala paints a picture of just how serious an issue witchcraft is in Africa, and how disbelief from westerners was able to drive aborigines away from Christianity. He describes a scenario in which pastors who immigrated to Africa believed in teaching the purest form of the gospel: Jesus’ death and resurrection, nothing more and nothing less. Leaders of those churches that refused to believe in the supernatural drove away thousands of recruited indigenous members. These newly converted African Christians were offended that missionaries would not sympathize with them and they were afraid that their religious leaders did not see the threat that existed so imminently from their perspectives (Manala, 1502).

Perhaps the best way to describe a healthy relationship between religion and culture comes from Emmanuel Anagwo. He states, “There is need to be pragmatic, urgent, and realistic about the formulation and engagement of the African worldview and thought without altering the standard tenets of the Christian faith. Admittedly, every culture has something to offer as well as areas that need transformation. Christianity, while maintaining its identity, needs the positive cultural elements for enrichment. At the same time, cultural values need Christian values for transformation” (Anagwo, 294). In accordance with this give and take between culture and religion, the example of translation is very helpful. The name of God is an important symbol in local religions, and that importance has been transferred into African Independent churches as well. Igbo names for God include ‘Chukwu’ and ‘Chineke’. “Chi means immaterial, spiritual, and imperceptible being who exists on himself, while ukwu means big. Thus, Chukwu means the imperceptible being who is greater than any other being” (Anagwo, 290).

Employment of local names for God into the new Christian churches adds an extra layer of depth and meaning into the name of the Lord. Outsiders might consider this to be an unacceptable change to the name of the Christian God; but to Africans, it is preferable to use a term from their own background rather than a foreign word that has no meaning to them.

Another way in which African culture has been implemented in the church is the worship style. The level of energy is enormous and often leads to loud cries, leaps, and stomps from members of the congregation. Clapping and traditional dancing styles are blended into the service seamlessly. The songs echoing through African Independent churches are often created spontaneously, using native instruments such as bells and djembes (Ayegboyin, 7). The combination of these elements has constructed a lively, highly involved spiritual atmosphere. Interestingly, many of the church musicians, who compose songs in an improvisational fashion, claim that they have not been

trained musically whatsoever. Instead, they accredit their vast abilities with the instruments to the Holy Spirit.

Thomas Oduro, president of Good News Theological Seminary in Ghana, communicates the importance of the Holy Spirit in African Independent Churches. He says that these churches “were taunted as ‘spiritual churches’ because they attributed almost every practice and belief to the Holy Spirit. They claimed that whatever they do or believe was attributed to them by the Holy Spirit” (Oduro, 72). “Unlike Christian musicians in other Christian traditions who attribute their musical prowess to either being educated or being gifted, most members of the African Independent Churches who have no knowledge of the basic rudiments of music but are able to compose and sing songs claim to receive the lyrics and rhythms of songs from the Holy Spirit”(Oduro, 74). The fact that the African Christians have placed the Holy Spirit on such a pedestal can be related back to their culture’s emphasis on spiritual energy within realms of good and evil in the supernatural hierarchy.

Upon comparison and evaluation of African Independent Churches, it should become evident that there is no single version of Christianity that is ‘correct’ or supreme throughout the world. “It is only Africans who can genuinely make the Christian faith relevant to the African situation. Christianity must be interpreted within the African context to have lasting effect. This is the ultimate motive of liturgical inculturation” (Anagwo, 295).

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2017-2018 ACADEMIC YEAR

Violence, Structural Sin, and an Intersectional Approach to Solidarity

Lycette Belisle

I have become very accustomed to hearing that millennials are lazy, disrespectful, sinful and disruptive – just to name a few. An article published by the National Catholic Reporter “Editorial: Young people are not the problem” addressed an upcoming gathering of church officials, Synod of Bishops on young people, and the need to postpone it if the direction would follow that of a recent conference at the University of Notre Dame. At this conference, speakers “postulated reasons for young people’s disassociation from the Catholic Church.”

This reasoning stems from the view that “the problem lies with young people who have acquired culturally influenced defects.” On the contrary, the NCR argues that fear no longer draws people to the church as young people desire inspiration and people who truly embody God’s word rather than postulating as accepting when they discriminate against LGBTQ, show little mercy towards those part of broken homes, and marginalize women.

My generation lives in an age where radical reform such as the fight for the legalization of gay marriage, equality for men and women, recognition of racial oppression and fight for stricter gun control are discussed regularly. It seems as if previous generations seek to criticize those who speak up for change solely based on age and often ask where these children’s parents are and why they do not control them, as has been common in cases such as the Parkland shooting. The character of young teens is attacked when they speak up and superficial topics such as piercings, tattoos and sexual endeavors are addressed often in what seems like attempts to discredit young adults. Rather than acknowledging the need for change and relevance of the topics many young adults are now bringing to the forefront, those in power focus on the “sins” these young adults commit and ignore the structural sin and evil that they are combatting.

The scapegoating of millennials as the problem reveals a culture of dominance that aims to maintain the status quo. NCR stated, “Perhaps the breathless pursuit of young people in its embarrassing obviousness should be set aside to give church leaders time for deep reflection on what it means to be authentically humble.” This approach acknowledges the relevance of what young people might have to say and the participation of those in power in a system that is oppressive and unjust.

Intersectionality provides a useful approach for how to recognize and dismantle these structures by changing focus and participating in radical changes. In this paper I will attempt to describe what intersectionality is and how it is a useful lens that

recognizes the complicated relationship among the roles – privileged, oppressed, and bystander – that we occupy. I will suggest that intersectional evaluation of how we understand what violence is, talk about sin and evil, describe God, and view Jesus highlights a structural nature of violence. Ultimately, my aim is for us to move beyond scapegoating and blaming and move toward collective redemption. In that way we move away from defining roles and assigning responsibility to perpetrators and toward the possibility for community and reform.

What is Intersectionality?

Patricia Hill Collins states that upon trying to explain what criteria characterized the papers she selected for a session she organized centered around the ideals of intersectionality her initial response was “much like that of US Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart’s dilemma” when he acknowledged that he had no definitive definition of pornography but proclaimed, “I know it when I see it” (2). She knew what papers were appropriate for her “Race, Class and Gender” session when she saw them, but her standards for selection were unclear despite the fact that the “and” seemed to matter in relation to the three. Collins claims that intersectionality “participates in the very power relations that it examines and, as a result, must pay special attention to the conditions that make its knowledge claims comprehensible” (3). It becomes important not to define intersectionality too narrowly or too broadly so that its true intentions are not distorted, and its importance is not reduced by mere popularity.

One can apply intersectionality to numerous situations, yet there is no clear definition as to what constitutes intersectional practices. In addition, intersectionality appears differently when applied academically versus when applied in practice. These factors combine to make intersectionality almost impossible to label despite one’s ability to recognize it. I understand intersectionality as the recognition of how various aspects of one’s own life – including things such as race, gender, sexuality, social class – work together to form their overall experience with facing social injustices. It is important to recognize that to gain understanding of the struggles that various groups face and fight the injustices that prevail we must look at the experiences and conditions of those who are oppressed. Ultimately, I understand intersectionality as the practice of recognizing the importance of combining different facets of one’s own experience in order to fight the injustices many face in society.

US Black Feminism was instrumental in bringing intersectionality to surface by being one of the first to really combine race, class, and gender in an attempt “dismantle multiple social inequalities” (7). It recognized the importance of addressing the interconnectedness of these various topics when it comes to facing injustices, and the power that incorporating multiple facets could provide. The experience of US Black women was recognizably different from that of a white woman but sharing in the experience of facing gender discrimination and oppression allows for understanding of how an even more hostile environment could be created with the addition of racial discrimination. This combination of ideals was a crucial turning point and brought forth the idea that addressing injustices is not something that you can do from only one angle. It also illus-

trated how one can function within privileged and oppressed roles simultaneously.

Covert Acts of Violence in a Heteropatriarchal Society

Violence permeates our everyday existence. It is often perceived as physical actions that cause visible harm but looking at violence through an intersectional lens allows one to see the various ways in which it exists in our society and how it functions within privileged structures. Violence reveals itself in various forms, not just physical, and Elizabeth T. Vasko states that the impact that this violence has on individuals in minority and oppressed groups is significant. The impact can be ignored by those who do not face the consequences of structural violence, but it is these individuals who hold the responsibility of addressing and aiming to resolve these issues. Intersectionality can serve to provide a deeper understanding of how ignorance and rejection of others has become justified due to the ways we view the different experiences of others and allow those in power to create a separation centered around an “us vs. them” mentality.

Vasko describes the “bystander effect” as our disposition to reject our own true nature to be in relationship with one another and instead remain silent when faced with injustices. According to Vasko, to be a bystander is not a neutral act. Not having compassion for others or speaking up in the face of unjust practices and systematic oppression is an act of violence in itself. Many often conform to the norms of our society and allow oppression, violence and injustices to continue. This is not something that is always done consciously, many are often unintentional participants in this system. However, recognizing that there is something wrong with the way things are and not taking action to reduce the suffering of others simply contributes to the problem and allows other bystanders to remain in the shadows as well.

The ways in which God is described contributes to how violence operates in society as it determines certain understandings and prevailing images that are accepted as the norm. Vasko argues structural violence that results in social injustices is often disguised and perpetuated by the norms of the majority that function at the expense of others. Although participation in violence towards minority groups can often be covert, even when it is obvious or physical those who are privileged can view it as serving towards peace since they often do not have to experience the direct consequences that accompany these acts of violence. These dominant norms greatly influence the ways in which people interact with one another and the continuation of oppressive systems.

It is easier than ever in our society to remain connected to numerous people without actually having to personally interact with them. This removes opportunities for relationship and to face the pain others might be experiencing. Even when faced with this pain and suffering, however, Vasko argues that many often ignore it and try to justify their actions in a way that allows them to maintain control without claiming responsibility for the consequences others face.

Vasko states that the term heteropatriarchal “points to the ways in which patriarchy and heterosexism are linked” (52). She also claims, “in US culture, hegemonic masculinity also intersects with class, race, ability, and ethnicity” (53). She argues that the pressure to conform to the dominant norms that define masculinity creates an en-

vironment where violence often manifests itself in actions such as gay bashing and slut shaming. Bullying exhibits a violence that is complex in nature and ultimately reveals the need to evaluate the ideals that fuel how people view and relate with one another. A heteropatriarchal view excludes many people from the understanding of who is worthy and capable of achieving power. It also perpetuates the culture of rejecting and diminishing the actions and choices of other groups, especially women and those who identify with the LGBTQ community, through domination and acts of violence. This is one example of structural violence that prevails not only because of those committing the acts of violence, but also those who participate in its continuation by failing to take action.

This kind of violence, unethical passivity, and systemic ignorance can also be seen in white racial privilege. Vasko states “white racism functions to maintain and justify white privilege” (76). Similar to the gay bashing and slut shaming that many face due to prevailing heteropatriarchal views, persons of color face violence and oppression that is maintained by values that uphold whiteness as the standard for what is good. The life and death of Jesus is used to uphold this standard and provide a basis for which the suffering of others is glorified and maintained as necessary to atone for the sins that mankind has committed. This allows those who conform to these norms and are the dominant group to maintain power without claiming responsibility, and to justify their action or lack thereof while allowing others to suffer at their hands.

Although these topics may not seem directly related, those who experience discrimination due to gender, race or sexual orientation can understand the struggles that other groups might face in relation to their own oppression. These issues all ultimately stem from the same social norms that prevail in a culture of ignorance and domination. Addressing them from that perspective allows one to recognize the problem is systemic and connects to the dominating views that result in social injustices and must be resolved in order to create change.

Understandings of Sin and Evil

Sin and evil function in the world in very dynamic ways that often work together to create such systems of oppression. The ways in which sin is talked about greatly influences the experiences of different groups of people. Vasko states that “the categories of sin and evil allow us to name actions and structures that generate brokenness and suffering in the world” (115). She also addresses the difference between suffering and pain and argues that the act of naming makes an important difference and is crucial to achieving resurrection (116).

The way in which sin is talked about has an especially large impact on the perpetuation of systems of injustice and the tendency for bystanders to continue viewing themselves as unable to make a difference and/or not responsible for contributing to that change. Vasko points out how sin has functioned as a set of rules to be followed that explicitly involves individual actions and elicits a response from God that is equal to that of a tyrant rather than a loving creator to foster relationship with. This is dangerous because it not only opposes our nature to be in relation with God and one another,

but it ignores the sin that occurs not as actions from individuals but in conformity with oppressive systems that cause the suffering of others.

A fear of violence being turned on oneself or the idea that one individual cannot impact change perpetuates this culture of self-deception that allows these injustices to continue. The ability to separate oneself from others and give into the oppression of other groups is indicative of a system that functions on privilege and the suffering of others. In order to change this sin must be addressed in a different way and people must be pushed to engage in uncomfortable conversations that promote change.

Intersectionality can function as a catalyst not only to encourage people to relate their own suffering to how others might experience oppression, but as a way to create initial reflection to discover these experiences. Many people often suppress the sin that they take part in by being bystanders as well as the own pain and suffering they encounter as a part of seeking to conform to the status quo. Intersectionality could serve to promote reflection and the recognition of everyone's role in systems of oppression as the interrelated nature of being a part of creation does not allow for anyone to be considered innocent. In order for change to happen there must be a shift in the way sin is discussed and the suffering of others is recognized. Only once people recognize their own suffering and the part they play in the suffering of others can they begin to attempt to have these conversations that reveal the connections between the oppression of various groups and how things such as racism, sexism and classism can together reveal corrupt systems.

Dangerous Consequences of Structural Sin

Vasko argues that viewing Jesus Christ almost exclusively through the lens of privileged perspectives and structures of dominance has dangerous consequences for both those who are marginalized and those who benefit from Western Christian theology making Jesus out to be a privileged person. Vasko says, "The dominant Christian tradition has made Christ escape the realities of economic deprivation and political irrelevance" which has ultimately created a "comfortable Jesus" (154). This has a profound impact on the experience of marginalized peoples and the way they identify with Christ. It also affects how those who are privileged interpret and implement God's teachings along with how they relate to those who are oppressed. Vasko states, "In contexts marked by radical inequality and violence, privileged Christians need a soteriological vision that resists comfortable assurance and generates affective 'dis-ease' and 'dis-comfort'" (155).

The story of the Syro-Phoenician woman is utilized to speak to the soteriology that Vasko suggests. This story creates the opportunity to recognize the humanity of Jesus in conjunction with his divinity as exhibits the influence of structural sin. The woman that Jesus encounters is marginalized by three different counts: her gender, race, and non-Jewish status. Jesus is described as occupying a social location "between the margin and the center" whose race and gender "endowed him with privilege and authority" (165). Having privilege in any way allows for one to avoid and escape the issues that those who are oppressed must live with on a daily basis as well as the responsibility of

addressing the role one plays in continuing this oppression. This privilege and systematic oppression is something that Vasko depicts as being such a large reality of the human experience that even Jesus cannot escape its power and influence.

Vasko argues that the passage that outlines the dialogue between Jesus and the Syro-Phoenician woman “underscores the ways in which even the best of humanity (the incarnation of the Word) is not immune to ethnic prejudice and religious exclusivism” (170). An interesting dynamic of this story revolves around the analysis of historical meaning and the intention of what it is attempting to portray. The success of the woman in the story validates the argument that in order to create real change and understand God’s word one must look to those who are depicted as unclean, unworthy, and marginalized. What occurred in this narrative is a mystery to those who read it, as is the message that it aims to portray. However, it raises important questions that require us to consider the ways we understand and pursue relationship with God and the rest of creation. Vasko notes that the encounter that takes place does not happen on neutral ground and argues that the text “resists easy simplification into dualistic categories of victim/oppressor and innocent/guilty, which historically (and presently) have served the interests of those who occupy social, cultural, economic, and gender sites of dominance (190). This shows the complex relationship that privilege and marginalization play within one person and exhibits the need for the application of methods of intersectionality in order to evaluate and understand the experience of others and create effective change.

Searching for God in the Margins

Viewing God as a ruling monarch instead of a loving creator has dangerous consequences. Vasko expresses the belief that “fear of divine collective punishment fuels homophobia and misogyny in the United States” (181). When one focuses on God’s punishment of sin and not the depiction of his redemptive power through Jesus then anyone who identifies outside of the status quo and prevailing norms becomes a victim of marginalization and is often subjected to scapegoating. The real issues plaguing our society are ignored when one shifts the blame onto the victims of structural sin and uses biblical narratives to justify oppression and argue for an understanding of God that shames those who society deems unclean and sinful. This is a dangerous practice as it allows for those who are privileged to remain in their position of power and be comfortable with their participation in structural sin. In order for healing to occur it is vital for one to enter into the experience of those who are oppressed and come face to face with the realities they must face. Technology presents a barrier to this as people are often able to express sympathy for those who suffer and then simply scroll past and go about their day. Vasko expresses that “solidarity rooted in true compassion is an uncomfortable task” and is a public practice not a private one (205). Accepting and tolerating the differences of others, such as those who identify with the LGBTQ community, is different from entering into solidarity with them and taking the steps to learn from the injustices that they suffer. The foundation of structural sin must be shaken and those who are in privileged positions must be awoken to their responsibil-

ity in the suffering that marginalized people face. Vasko calls for “privileged ambush” to create “cracks and fissures” that must be nurtured in order to create a radical shift in values (211).

Privileged ambush is something that Vasko expresses should be seen as a form of divine speech and grace, arguing that we often look for God in the wrong places. God will not be found in the social settings that cater to the comfort, validation and prosperity of privileged groups. Rather, through biblical accounts it is apparent that God can be found in solidarity with marginalized groups. Vasko outlines three soteriological praxes for privileged people (221) that ultimately calls for action from those who are in position of privilege. It is imperative that they seek out solidarity with those who are marginalized, accept responsibility for the role they play in structural sin, and strive for collective redemption. The actions of a single person are not enough to change the systems that result in the suffering groups of people must face. It is, however, up to individuals to allow those who are oppressed to speak up and share their experiences and take action against oppressive forces as a whole.

Intersectionality is an important tool in reaching solidarity with others. It goes beyond marginalized groups identifying with the struggles that others face under systematic oppression and calls for all to recognize the complex dynamic between privilege and marginalized suffering that can be found in the experiences of one person. It is the responsibility of those who hold positions of privilege to stop being bystanders and recognize their role in God’s redemptive plan. Often, God’s redemptive plan is limited to the idealization of heaven as the next step. This creates a dangerous dynamic as it allows people to perform acts of charity and feel like that is enough to reach God’s redemptive goal. That fails to recognize, however, our responsibilities of contributing to the redemption of all creation here on Earth. God identifies with those who are oppressed and calls for a transformation of our own attitudes and behaviors in order to cultivate relationship with others. Dynamics of power and privilege within biblical narratives, history and one’s own experience all function together to establish an understanding of God. It is the duty of individuals to go beyond the status quo and seek out different depictions of who God is and deviate from set doctrine in order to truly develop a relationship with God and all of his people. The experiences one faces all function together to create complex balances between privilege and oppression that are crucial to recognize in order to cultivate dialogue and create lasting change that will disrupt dominant values that result in the suffering of others.

Conclusion

In *Resisting Structural Evil*, Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda states, “The heart of the [Christian] tradition is this: the God who called this world into being loves it with a love beyond human imagining that will never die, is liberating this good creation, and is calling and sustaining human creatures to share in that life-saving work” (9). She emphasizes the necessity to analyze the structural sin and evil that we face through structural and religious lenses simultaneously in order to promote change. Although many may not identify with a particular religion or any faith at all, it is important to

acknowledge the value that a theological perspective has as religion often defines much of how our culture and society operates. Moe-Lobeda also states, "Facing the structural evil in which one is implicated is dangerous and defeating unless one also explores ways to resist it and dismantle it" (3). This is an extremely important notion as recognizing one's participation in and contribution to an oppressive system is hard and often will result in denial due to guilt and shame, but if one also addresses the ways in which personal action could and awareness could influence radical change the problem becomes less of a blame game.

Intersectionality provides a valuable standpoint from which one can begin to analyze the structures of dominance that prevail and the actions that can be taken to dismantle these systems that oppress marginalized groups. The struggles of many are made possible by dominating forces of power, and the voices of a few cannot change generations of heteropatriarchal or racist views. The relationship between perpetrators, victims, and bystanders is complex and there is no clear person or group of persons to blame as a guideline for every situation. Rather, the best way to address these acts of violence, injustice and oppression is to strive for change in the way we interact with and view one another. Recognizing the struggles that others face is not easy and accepting responsibility for the part one might have in allowing those to continue is an even more difficult task. It is, however, essential to understand how multiple aspects of one's own condition can contribute to the experiences they must face. This deeper understanding could provide the necessary force to unite those who may think they could never relate to the struggles of one another, as well as those who typically act as bystanders and ignore the oppression of those around them. Viewing these issues and the roles of bystanders through an intersectional lens that aims not only to recognize the relationship among many injustices but also the systems that perpetuate them could provide the opportunity to oppose the norms at the root of these structural violences.

Vasko states "we have a propensity to avoid so-called hot button issues..." (3), and I believe it is those who recognize that they have witnessed violence towards others concerning these various issues and done nothing about it that must come together in order to influence a change in the way we relate with those who are facing injustice and hurting. One individual acting alone is not enough to create an impact large enough to change the underlying ideals that perpetuate this violence. Rather, through the use of intersectionality as a foundational concept, those who can reflect and recognize their role as a bystander when faced with violence towards various different groups should acknowledge the interconnectedness of these issues and the ways in which they must oppose them. One way that I am suggesting is to move away from scapegoating, victim blaming and the bystander mentality. An intersectional approach to these issues provides essential perspectives that highlight the dangers of structural dominance and the need to evaluate these structures from multiple interrelated angles in order to dismantle their power. In that way, we could move towards a communal understanding of salvation and redemption that benefits all instead of emphasizing individual salvation and success at the expense of others.

Merton's Approach: Theological Issues and Theological Solutions for the Catholic Church

Kayla Martin

In Thomas Merton's work, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, Merton discusses the experience of being a Catholic monk and a member of the Catholic Church as a whole. While Merton has taken an oath to be a "permanent" member of the Catholic Church as a Trappist monk, he did not shy away from pointing out major theological flaws and resulting problems within the Catholic Church. Three of the problems that Merton elaborates on are the fact that the church is not open to dialogue with others, focusing on "good versus evil" in their teachings, and still holding on to the tradition of *contemptus mundi*. Merton, however, does not just list these problems and moves on to his next topic. Merton, through his integral understanding, provides guidance and solutions for the Catholic Church on how to fix these theological problems by opening up ecumenical and interfaith dialogue, making the teachings of "good versus evil" not as important as love, and allowing the church to open up to the world, thus letting the world potentially teach the church a few things.

Perhaps one of the most significant things that Thomas Merton discussed (and practiced) was his openness to dialogue with others from various different backgrounds. Merton met with Zen masters, such as D.T. Suzuki, other religious leaders, such as the Dalai Lama, and leaders from Protestant faiths for constructive ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. Merton gets to the root of all dialogue by stating that refusing to talk to others is a "flatly unchristian refusal to love those whom we consider, for some reason or other, unworthy of love" (Merton 174). It is evident that many types of dialogue do not take place due to preconceived notions and, in some cases, hatred of the other. This is easily seen in political dialogue today in the United States, where the Senate cannot agree on anything due to being so vehemently opposed to each other's ideas since they are both on two different party scales. It is rare to see a politician want to have dialogue and meet in the middle with their perceived "enemy." In order to have dialogue, it is critical that people allow themselves to freely love.

Merton expresses a concept called the Law of Love in *Conjectures*, essentially stating that humans are built to love and that the world has a major lack of it. Merton says that the Law of Love is "the deepest law of our nature, not something extraneous and alien to our nature. Our nature itself inclines us to love, and to love freely," (120). This "law" is to be integral in the nature of a human being — unlike Thomas Hobbes' belief

that nature is constantly in a state of war, Merton argues, “the Law of Love is not a law commanding that we wallow in sentimental consolation or in condescending official benevolence,” (122). In this context, Merton is accentuating that one is not acting in love if he or she is only doing it for show, or simply trying to be “nice.” Merton is sure to frankly say that the Law of Love is “a command to commit ourselves to the use of this deep power that is in us, to choose to commit ourselves even in situations where the power does not go into action instinctively,” (122). This Law of Love is essential in fostering dialogue.

On the topic of fostering dialogue, Pope John XXIII, someone whom Merton greatly admired, opened dialogue for the Catholic Church. Pope John XXIII’s method of dialogue revolved around two major concepts: “not only the willingness to discuss, but the readiness to meet one’s adversary as an equal and as a brother” (218). Ultimately, by viewing the “other” as a brother or sister makes the “other” no longer a foreign concept – this person no longer becomes one’s adversary. By being able to view one another as equals, dialogue can truly get off the ground and be enlightening for both parties involved. It is important to keep in mind that dialogue should not be used to simply change the “opposing” party’s opinion. By having the sole goal of changing someone’s mind through dialogue, one can easily feel as if he or she has the superior opinion and will not listen to the other side’s suggestions and concerns. This concept of only having dialogue in order to change someone goes against what Merton wants the church to do, which is to understand the “other” without an ulterior motive.

Past the importance of dialogue, Merton also stresses that the Catholic Church must not emphasize that faith is found in knowing the difference between “good and evil,” and basing all Christian ethics off of that idea. The original sin, the “fall” from paradise, was Adam and Eve eating from the tree of knowledge and ultimately gaining the knowledge of good and evil. Merton takes this emphasis that the church puts on good and evil to a head when he boldly claims that “it is clear that an exclusively ethical emphasis on right and wrong, good and evil, in Christian education, breeds doubt and not faith” (167). This interpretation cuts through to the underlying issue that is affecting the Catholic Church at this time – a shrinking population. By basing all ethics on the grounds of “good versus evil” the Catholic Church comes across as having a long list of laws that its followers must follow to the exact letter. Merton criticizes these “laws” as the concept that “one is told to believe not because of a living and life-giving aspiration to know the living God,” (167). Merton explicitly discusses Catholicism’s emphasis on avoiding sin by articulating “the more we insist that Catholicism must consist in the avoidance of sin (especially in the realm of sex), in “being good” and in doing one’s duty, the more we make it difficult for men to really believe” (167).

In other words, Merton is saying that the Catholic Church, by not looking at the virtue of a life of faith but only the avoidance of sin, can lead to feelings of insecurity in the church. This leads to followers not being in the church to foster a relationship with God, but to avoid feelings of shame and fear. Merton discusses in length the idea of a benevolent and loving God throughout his various writings. Merton’s interpretation of God is a God that forgives, and when people believe that God is not benevolent,

but extremely strict and only loves those who follow the “ethical law,” many people will leave, as they have left, in droves out of the Catholic Church. Merton does provide a way to solve this issue, saying that laws should come out of love and only love, not a love that is manipulative and extremely exclusive. Ultimately, the Law of Love comes up once again in this context. These “laws” that the Catholic Church has emphasized that mainly fall on the grounds of “good versus evil” do not foster the faith since they are not grounded on love. These laws that the Catholic Church puts forth cannot be a relativism – by not fostering love and ultimately helping people to become Catholic, it is planting seeds of massive doubt. By focusing on the Law of Love that Merton had put forth, the Catholic Church can fully embrace the teachings of Jesus and allow faith to grow and doubt to not be as large of a barrier.

In addition to the problems of closed dialogue and ethical relativism that Merton has identified as theological problems to the Catholic Church, the tradition of *Contemptus Mundi* that Merton brings up is perhaps at the root of these issues. *Contemptus Mundi* translates from Latin as “contempt of the world.” This concept came about in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when freedom of religion became a favorite topic with philosophers and multiple publications, along with the new nation of America and France’s Revolution. Philosophers like Thomas Hobbes and John Locke did not focus on human relationships to God, but human relationships to their government. In both America and France’s new government, citizens no longer had to follow the same religion as their ruler, which made the Catholic Church lose power extremely quickly. The church used to be one of the most powerful institutions in the world, if not the most powerful. Through these various thinkers such as Nietzsche and the rapid changes in government, the church decided to ultimately retreat from the world and basically lick its wounds it had received from the various challenges it was suddenly faced with, such as concepts in science and politics. In reaction to these challenges and rapid changes, the church condemned the entire world and saw it as sinful, dirty, and dark. By their condemning of the world, the church basically proclaimed that the approaches of Democracy and freedom are total heresies against the Catholic Church. The church lost its wealth and power and practically pushed the blame on the world that was coming to gain more power.

Merton comes into the picture with this concept by affirming that *contemptus mundi* is embarrassingly outdated. He claims that this contempt was centered in the “assumption that theology had nothing to learn from the world and everything to teach the world,” (50). Merton ultimately argues that through *contemptus mundi*, Christians found that their ancestors “sinned against truth by their “contempt of the world” – they ignored new truths which were discovered precisely by and in the world,” (51). At this time, Merton proclaiming that the world had something to teach the church was completely revolutionary, and he suggested that the issue of *contemptus mundi* be solved by dialogue within the world. By listening to Merton’s solution of engaging in dialogue with the world that the church had condemned for so long, the Catholic Church can emerge as a church that is not “out of the loop” with archaic ideas and distaste for the world. However, certain actions in the world should be condemned, such as the obses-

sion with wealth and status – this becomes the actual *contemptus mundi* that Catholics should retain.

In conclusion, Merton's ability to be faithful to Catholicism, yet also critique it and attempt to solve its theological problems is something that should be absolutely critical to the Catholic Church. Through Merton's contemplative understanding in each of his explanations, Merton teaches a Catholicism that is more up-to-date and can ultimately allow greater populations of people to join and enjoy the faith just as he does.

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The Tale of the Leper

Laura Pierson

The skin of the leper was once calm and quiet, clean and sweet. It illuminated the soul of the body which it protected. Billions upon billions of cells ran just below its surface, writhing with activity, absent of the present pain. Each cell was surging with a passion, a mission unknown fully by their comrades, but fully respected nonetheless. They each knew at their core their calling was the same, they were serving a body, a body made up of independent cells creating an interconnected web, a beautiful masterpiece with an unknown plan. With its origins hidden, its plans in the making, the body was a breathing work of art.

Then it hit. The first contact with the infectious disease met the mouth of the body. The cells groaned as they parted, making way for the new regime. The cells ached from the introduction of the infection, but on the outside the skin held strong. Each cell still maintained their kinship, they simply made room for the new.

Months went by, years ticked on, and finally the armor began to show kinks. The sores started to grow as the once porcelain skin spotted deep red. Open and burning, the sores stuck out, highlighting the affected areas, ensuring none can look at the body without fear of contact, without fear of contraction. The lesions grew, slowly swallowing areas whole, leaving groups of cells to be left from the fray.

What was once a united front of cells protected by the skin's shield now reveals a map of the afflicted. What was once a beautiful masterpiece now shows red, bloodied and raw. What was once a whole body seems divided, a continuous fight between the scares and the skin still yearning to be seen, still fighting to tell the story of what was once perfect.

Matthew 8:1-4 tells the story of Jesus healing the leper with the ease of a touch and a call to whom he is begotten from. How simple yet powerful is that message. To know contact from the divine can heal the one who was infected, the one who wounded, the one who was marginalized. The leper, who was once ostracized from his community for a disease his body could not help but be controlled by, cannot and should not be seen as forever lost; however, without the loving touch of Christ- where would the leper have found solace? How would the wounds of the afflicted have been remedied without the divine touch?

I ask these questions because there is a leper among the cosmos today, one stronger and more diseased than the world has ever seen. The leper's sores grow more prevalent every day; yet, the rest of the body falls victim to simply accepting the wounds rather than seeking treatment. I argue the Roman Catholic Church, which should be a unified body of Christ, has fallen victim to leprosy.

Women of all racial and ethnic backgrounds, the impoverished, members of the LGBTQ+ community, divorced couples, those who have had abortions, and those affected by systemic pastoral sexual abuse are the sores on the body of the Church. The pain and the isolation from the greater body has left these groups to rot, slowly and surely becoming less connected to the Church which was once flawed, but perfect in its own divine right. This paper cannot do justice in addressing each sore's history, unique narrative, and potential treatment options. Therefore, I have chosen to narrow my focus to the most widespread and deeply rooted sore. I will address the plight of women in the Roman Catholic Church. The plight of this group symbolizes a rotting sore on the body of the Church, and if we continue to ignore the wounds there will be lasting consequences.

In 1967, Pope Paul VI released the encyclical *Populorum Progressio*. In this document he states, "Today it is important for people to understand and appreciate that the social questionties all men together, in every part of the world," (Paul VI, 1967). Essentially, the encyclical outlines the existence of social unrest and economic disparity throughout the world. He pleads for the world to see this unrest, and to noticed the marginalized and feel the sores of the body of the Church. This must be noted as a noble and necessary cause, particularly for one of the most powerful men on Earth to argue. However, I cannot help but notice the subtle implications of his speech that continue to provoke marginalization. His language does not seek treatment for the leprosy. I suggest, it simply highlights how long forgotten deeply-rooted sores live on the body as a whole.

For example, in the quote previously stated urging all men to be tied through a common bond of seeking social justice, Pope Paul VI uses gendered language. Men, he says, must be tied together. As women work tirelessly in lay positions throughout the Church he leads, men are addressed as the ones to solve the problem of social and economic inequity. I will remain ignorant to the gender status quo of the 1960s; however, I must point out that Pope Paul VI uses the words 'man' or 'men' a total of 67 times while only using the word 'women' once. This highlights the standard that men are those who should be addressed as the powerful, for they are the movers and shakers. It continues the separation of a human made hierarchy that insists men are those to address, while women will simply be implied and told to follow.

This linguistic inequity runs rampant throughout almost all Church documents, leaving the women's plight to be further ignored, and dip further into isolation as the sore grows. In 1988, Pope John Paul II wrote the *Letter of Pope John Paul II to Women*. In this letter, he directly addresses women's rights and dignity. Throughout the text he praises and thanks women for their unique biological and maternal traits that make them valued members of the lay community. He praises wives, mothers, those who work, consecrated women, and women in general (John Paul II, 1995).

Furthermore, he is forced to reconcile with misogyny within the Church, and recognizes that women have contributed to history despite, "more difficult conditions," (John Paul II, 1995). Pope John Paul II states that women should have a seat at the table when it comes to the social, economic, and political woes inside and outside of the Church. Truly, I believe, the Pope is attempting to apologize the patriarchy of

the Church and also highlight the new definitive roles he wishes to see women play as laypeople. All of which he tries to address in the letter is quite nuanced, and quite refreshing.

However, I see hidden implications in this letter. Pope John Paul II addresses women, yes, but he addresses them because of an upcoming United Nations Conference. He wishes for the conference to bring forth revelatory truths about women, and formalize those revelatory truths. Presumably, he is hoping for this conference to bring forth systemic change. Conveniently, he only independently wishes for these truths to be unveiled; however, he does not address what the Church will formally do to address the plight of women. While it is commendable to support missions which hope to empower women, more could have been done in this letter in making formal steps to treat the sore.

Later, Pope John Paul II published *Mulieris Dignitatem*. This letter is dense and covers a plethora of material in regards to the life of women all in honor of the Marian year. He establishes multiple Roman Catholic definitions of women which can become intensely problematic.

In the second chapter, he speaks on Mary's role in the birth to Jesus Christ. It is her resounding yes in response to God's call to be a vessel of his begotten son that enlightens much of Pope John Paul II's thinking on femininity because Mary is the, "most complete expression of this dignity and vocation," for both men and women (John Paul II, 1988).

Mary entrusted herself to God's call, and said yes despite the social and health implications, and Pope John Paul II wishes that all Roman Catholics of all genders see the response of yes to be at the very core of what it means to be Roman Catholic. What this letter means to establish is the devotion to the divine all persons must follow. However, it is the immediate response of yes that is expected of women, and the dialogue that reflects a women's role of being a maiden figure, that can become problematic if taken out of context. Despite Pope John Paul II's well-meaning theology, when the Body of Christ lives within a secular world, there must be a greater appreciation for historic and social realities paired with statements like these in order for them to be revealed properly. Theologically, the argument is sound, but in practice the women remains seen as a life-giving, bodily maiden, while the man reigns divine. A way to combat this sort of theology would have been for it to be mirrored next to a masculine story that follows a Marian model. For example, the book of Job, though its origins are apart of the Judaic tradition, would have been wonderful text to mirror a man who like Mary said yes despite the social implications of his actions. He, like Mary, wrestled with his societal woes, but all the while had faith in the Creator's ultimate plan. If a story such as this would have been paired with the holiness of Mary's response, it would be a far more equality-driven argument.

The language of female marginalization continues into the encyclicals of today. In Pope Francis' encyclical on the environment published in 2015, *Laudato Si'*, he makes slight changes in language to be more in tune with gender equality, but not enough. The numerical inequality between the times men versus women are addressed remains

staggering. Pope Francis utilizes masculine pronouns 42 times, while using female pronouns 12 times. I will not ignore the growth in numbers representing femininity; however, I have less sympathy for the Church given the growing gender equality throughout the world in the 21st Century.

Moreover, this simple linguistic analysis does not come close to diving into the implications of seeing the Earth as a feminine figure, as *Laudato Si'* suggests. As the encyclical describes the way humanity plunders Mother Earth it fails to suggest the potential logic humanity has historically used to justify these actions. If we see the Earth as feminine, something that should be a maiden and willing to say yes, does that lead to our present pillaging? Of course, there are theological reasons for seeing Earth as feminine, for it breeds life similar to the female mystic. However, if these potential negative implications are never addressed, and if we simply take our imagery as always complementary, we will never be able to control the consequences. In terms of the sore regarding women's role in the Church, I remain astonished by the lack of formalized treatment being sought.

I see the good each of these leaders are attempting to pursue, and while I respect the higher call they are answering, none are truly righting the sore of gender inequality by stating its presence, stating its effects, and stating how they will treat the disease. Surely there is a linguistic status quo at play, and I do not suggest historic leaders like Pope Paul VI purposely leave out half of the Roman Catholic population; however, I do suggest that following the status quo is exactly what the Church should fight against as a body of faith. I say this because the Church is meant to be a nuanced body. Similar to the leper, I see the Church as millions upon millions of cells, or people, each working harmoniously under the protection of the skin, or the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit ecumenically, socially, biologically, and theologically binds all persons at an innate and unknown level. Together, all persons can act peacefully to build a strong, beautiful and unbreakable body of believers who may not all know one another's unique mission or purpose; nevertheless, they are all interconnected by a fire that can never fully be tamed.

When thinking on the leper, and reflecting on the sore representing the plight of women in the Church, it is centuries old. There is a deeply rooted history that cannot be ignored, and if it remains to go unnoticed in today's world there are consequences similar to the consequences an untreated leper faces.

If the leper's sores go untreated they will eventually lose feeling in the affected appendages, slowly but surely deeming them useless, and as they lose all feeling each affected growth will be amputated. As graphic as this image is, the open wounds cannot be expected to remain benign if ignored for too long.

Women can and will always play a mystical role in the Roman Catholic Church. Their undeniable anatomical perfection gives way to new life each and every day, and that is truly respected by the Church. However, the overall plight of women, the roles they are forced to play, the potential for Marian like affirmation being used solely as a female standard, and the general lack of language addressing women as unique individuals with purpose is disheartening.

These realities are grounds for the sore to grow callous. I do not ask for women to be ordained overnight, I do not ask for drastic dogmatic change, I simply ask for the Roman Catholic Church to recognize centuries of inequality, address this inequality formally, and make definitive action steps to change and give women the opportunity to flourish within cathedral walls.

Following the tale of the leper, the body could eventually lose all feeling for the sore, deeming it stuck in a perpetual state of numbness or stagnation. What a fate, what a sorrowful fate for the mystical creatures so highly regarded by popes and priests old and new. What can be the divine healing touch to cure the leper when the divine's illuminating body has become the afflicted?

It is time we listen to the tale of the leper; for if not, the Body surely will perish.

2018-2019 ACADEMIC YEAR

A Latino/a Christian Response to Recent U.S. Immigration Policies Using Contextual Biblical Hermeneutics

Alexandra Just

The very nature and “DNA” of Christianity from the beginning has been that of marginalization. Marginalization lies at the core of Christianity due to Jesus Christ’s ministry involving interaction and healing with those who were ostracized in society and due to early grassroots Christian movements initially facing vehement discrimination. Those people who are marginalized in society, then, bring a perspective to Christianity that is closer to the true origin and spread of Christianity. Historically, in the United States, the marginalized persons tend to be those who are non-white. Since the last Presidential campaign and election, Latino/a immigrants and refugees have been unfairly ostracized and dehumanized by President Trump and his administration through damaging rhetoric and policies grounded in fear rather than in fact. The current administration’s Republican demographic and religious makeup is primarily white, Christian, and male. Those characteristics in particular (as they are historically associated with political and religious power in the U.S.) are affiliated with the emblematic, normative, Eurocentric perspectives in theology and in political affairs such as immigration policy. The current state of immigration policy in the U.S. is one that involves a border wall; a travel ban; eliminating Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA); “zero-tolerance” criminal prosecution of illegal immigration; and restrictions on seeking asylum. The integration of a normative, European perspective in theology and in politics can be seen in former Attorney-General Jeff Sessions’ usage of the biblical passage Romans 13 completely out of context in order to justify utter lawful obedience to the administration’s “zero-tolerance” policy which led to family separations at the border. However, if Romans 13 was approached using the theological tool of contextual biblical hermeneutics—specifically from the lens of a Latino/a Christian—the interpretation of such a passage and the treatment of immigrants and refugees would prove to be more in line with the very nature of Christianity.

In order to understand a distinctly Latino/a Christian theological perspective on recent U.S. Immigration policies, it is important to expand upon the normative and Eurocentric and perspective of the current Republican administration’s immigration policies. Additionally, to understand this administration’s perspective on immigra-

tion more fully, it is critical to explore the demographic and religious makeup of the Republican party and the implications of such a composition on the party's creation and implementation of recent U.S. immigration policies. Demographically, according to a recent religion and public life Pew Research Center survey on "Religious composition of republicans and Republican leaners" 82% of individuals who identify as Republicans and Republican-leaning also identify as Christian – with the majority prescribing to the Evangelical Protestant and Catholic religions.¹ In addition to the Republican party being comprised mainly of self-identifying Christians, the Pew Research Center's survey on "U.S. Politics and Policy" (which was released near the eve of the 2016 Presidential election) noted that the Republican Party held a sizable advantage in leaned party affiliation among white voters.² In fact, 54% of white registered voters in 2016 identified as Republican or lean toward the GOP which is in contrast to the 39% of white persons who identify or lean toward the Democratic Party. This sizeable 15-point gap of political affiliation and leanings between Republicans and Democrats has never been as wide as measured by Pew Research Center in its 24 years of research. Though white voters seem increasingly to align with or to lean toward the Republican party, trends in party affiliation with black, Hispanic, and Asian voters have veered continually in the opposite direction; that is, 87% of black voters as well as 63% of Hispanic voters and 66% of Asian voters identify or lean toward the Democratic party.³ Additionally, compared to the 2008 Presidential election, many more men now specifically identify or lean Republican – with 46% identifying as Democrat in the 2008 election versus 51% identifying as Republican in 2016. Among all white men who vote, as of 2016, 61% of them leaned or identified as Republican and approximately 47% of white women voters identified and leaned Republican.⁴ Given this statistically-backed context on the demographics and religious preferences of the Republican party in the United States, it is precise and accurate to suggest that the majority of individuals who comprise and support the Republican party (or lean towards it) are white, male, Christians. Thus, it can be inferred that it is primarily these white, male, Christian voices who create, support, and defend the normative, Eurocentric viewpoints which contribute to the unsuccessful immigration policies and immigration crisis the U.S. finds itself in currently.

Immigration policy instituted in the U.S. after the advent of the Trump administration can be described as intolerant and aggressive. The current administration's immigration policies are drastically unlike the previous administration's (which created a program as a temporary solution for persons who were born in the U.S. whose parents migrated illegally, known as DACA).⁵ The perception of immigration by this adminis-

1 "Religion in America: U.S. Religious Data, Demographics and Statistics." Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project. May 11, 2015. Accessed November 13, 2018. <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/party-affiliation/>.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Maniam, Shiva. "Party Affiliation among U.S. Voters: 1992-2016." Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. September 18, 2018. Accessed November 13, 2018. <http://www.people-press.org/2016/09/13/2-party-affiliation-among-voters-1992-2016/>.

tration, based on the extreme nature and rhetoric of their policies, appears to be that Latino/a migrants are illegally escaping to the U.S. at an ever-increasing rate seeking economic opportunity, and that these migrants are mainly comprised of criminal and gang members who will take advantage of the economic welfare opportunities that are intended solely for and paid by American citizens. However, this perspective is not grounded in fact: migrants – specifically those fleeing Central America (especially El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras) – are fleeing their native countries due to the extreme violence they have encountered or will encounter living there. Additionally, these immigrants – who should be more accurately referred to as refugees (those who have been forced to leave their country due to persecution, war, or violence) – actually offer increased rates of entrepreneurship and of international trade and investment to the economy; and because many of these migrants are undocumented, the majority of them would not have the proper identification to receive the economic benefits of welfare programs.⁶

The specific Eurocentric, intolerant, and aggressive policies released thus far by this administration include the funding of a border wall, the travel ban, eliminating DACA, instituting family separation, and mandating restrictions on those seeking asylum. First, the funding of a border wall has been a long-standing promise of the Trump administration as it was a main Presidential campaign promise. Trump has proposed that funding the construction of a border wall between the U.S. and Mexico would decrease illegal immigration, and he initially promised that Mexico would pay for that construction. Trump now maintains that this funding could occur only through Congressional legislation, which has yet to happen; however, the exacerbation of harmful rhetoric inciting fear and discord in regards to illegal immigration remains. Furthermore, in September of 2017, President Trump announced the elimination of the DACA program – a program which protected young, undocumented immigrants from being deported from the only country they have ever truly known. President Trump indicated Congress is responsible for providing legislation to replace DACA, similar to his approach on the border wall.⁷

Next, the travel ban, known more commonly as the “Muslim ban,” was recently upheld in the U.S. Supreme Court in June 2018. This ban was implemented through President Trump’s executive order that bans travelers and immigrants from seven countries – five of the seven countries being Muslim-majority – until the administration reaches a better understanding of how to vet potential terrorist threats from those countries. Additionally, in May of 2018, the Trump administration introduced its “zero-tolerance” immigration policy, which is more commonly known as the family

5 Hoban, Brennan. “The State of US Immigration Policy and How to Improve It.” Brookings.edu. August 06, 2018. Accessed November 13, 2018. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brookings-now/2018/08/06/the-state-of-us-immigration-policy-and-how-to-improve-it/>.

6 “What Is a Refugee? Definition and Meaning | USA for UNHCR.” Definition and Meaning | USA for UNHCR. Accessed November 28, 2018. <https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/what-is-a-refugee/>.

7 Shear, Michael D., and Julie H. Davis. “Trump Moves to End DACA and Calls on Congress to Act.” The New York Times. September 05, 2017. Accessed November 28, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/05/us/politics/trump-daca-dreamers-immigration.html>.

separation policy. This policy mandated that adults who illegally cross the U.S. border will be criminally prosecuted; and because it is illegal for children to join their parents in jail, over 2,000 children and parents were separated with children being sent to makeshift confinement facilities and with some children still left without contact or reconnection with their families. A Senior Brookings Editor Kathy Hirsh-Pasek suggests that the children impacted by the family separation policy have also experienced trauma and that trauma imposed on young children is destructive to their bodies (causing a chronically weakened immune system) and their minds (causing demanding neurological responses to stress and increased vulnerability to temptation).⁸ Most recently, in November of 2018, President Trump signed a proclamation that severely limited asylum-seekers' ability to claim asylum in the U.S. if they enter at points other than designated ports of entry.⁹ Moreover, it was found through video recording in mid-November that border patrol agents released tear gas on migrant parents and children who were asylum-seekers attempting to cross the U.S. border after fleeing from Central America and traveling through Mexico.¹⁰ Again, all of these policies enacted by the administration are not grounded in factual information and are instead grounded in fear-mongering and divisiveness and portrayed as major national security risks.

Additionally, in a different religion and public life Pew Research Survey about party affiliation and religious beliefs and practices, researchers found that when asked about their views on Scripture, 36% of Republicans and those who lean Republican state that Scripture is the Word of God and that it should be taken literally. For Democrats and those who lean Democratic, 43% state that Scripture is the Word of God but that not everything should be taken literally.¹¹ It should be unsurprising, then, that a main vocal supporter of one of the most abhorrent immigration policies of the current administration – that being the family separation policy – is a Republican, Christian, white male. In June of 2018, the former Attorney General of the U.S. Jeff Sessions told law enforcement officials, “Persons who violate the law of our nation are subject to prosecution. I would cite to you the Apostle Paul and his clear and wise command in Romans 13 to obey the laws of the government because God has ordained them for the purpose of order. Orderly and lawful processes are good in themselves and protect the weak and lawful.”¹² However, Jeff Sessions' reference to and application of the

8 Hoban, Brennan. “The State of US Immigration Policy and How to Improve It.” Brookings.edu. August 06, 2018. Accessed November 13, 2018. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brookings-now/2018/08/06/the-state-of-us-immigration-policy-and-how-to-improve-it/>.

9 Edelman, Adam, and Dartunorro Clark. “White House Attacks ‘activist Judges’ after Court Blocks Trump’s Asylum Ban.” NBCNews.com. November 20, 2018. Accessed November 28, 2018. <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/immigration/judge-bars-trump-administration-denying-asylum-migrants-who-enter-illegally-n938271>.

10 Vazquez, Maegan. “Trump Admin Official: Tear Gas Use ‘prevented a Dangerous Situation from Getting Worse’.” CNN. November 26, 2018. Accessed November 28, 2018. <https://www.cnn.com/2018/11/26/politics/customs-border-protection-tear-gas-san-diego-tijuana-san-ysidro/index.html>.

11 “Religion in America: U.S. Religious Data, Demographics and Statistics.” Pew Research Center’s Religion & Public Life Project. May 11, 2015. Accessed November 13, 2018. <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/party-affiliation/>.

biblical passage Romans 13 was wholly out of biblical and historical context; and, thus, its present-day application was incorrect and harmful to Latino/a migrants. Utilizing the theological concept of contextual biblical hermeneutics (the theological study of the interpretation of parts of the Bible) and the idea of a “new” literal interpretation through the lens of a Latino/a Christian can allow Christians in the U.S. to view these extreme and absolute passages – and immigration policies – as having a more malleable and relatable nature in current day and as embracing the true nature of Christianity.¹³ Nonetheless, this first must involve an acknowledgement of the normative Eurocentric interpretation of Scripture and of immigration policies in the United States and then must involve a transition into a more inclusive and accurate interpretation and application of Scripture and of immigration policies.

The biblical passage that former U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions referred to, Romans 13, is one that has had a long and troubling past of being referenced throughout United States’ (and some European) history. In each reckoning of the passage throughout American history, there are multiple interpretations on the passage in its context; however, the focus for the purposes of this essay is to present the normative, Eurocentric interpretation as well as the interpretation that aims to be consistent with the true nature of Christianity. Beginning with the Reformation period (in the 1500’s and 1600’s in England), theologians in favor of the Reformation used Romans 13 to encourage support of law and order when Martin Luther justified his suppression of a peasant revolt. The counter-argument at this time involved John Calvin’s response that all of the power on earth is ordained by God. Calvin’s response points to the idea that God ordained the power of Kings yet also ordained the power of peasants and lesser magistrates. Additionally, some American Protestant clergy and most Loyalists during the time of the American Revolution hearkened their ideas back to the Reformation theologians in terms of favoring law and order in times of apparent disorder and chaos. Conversely, then, the American Patriots who favored independence from the British Empire instead interpreted the passage to mean that unconditional obedience to authority should not be absolute and denied that “Paul gave kings the right to be tyrants.”¹⁴

Romans 13 was again evoked in a national debate during the 1850’s in reaction to the passage of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act, which stated that all American citizens and officials are required to help in returning escaped slaves back to bondage and refusal to do so would result in punishment. Those persons who advocated for slavery during this time defended the act by denying the abolitionist interpretation and by pointing to the

12 Wootson, Cleve R., Jr. “Jeff Sessions Defended Family Separation with the Bible. John Oliver Countered with Dr. Seuss.” *The Washington Post*. June 18, 2018. Accessed November 28, 2018. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2018/06/18/jeff-sessions-defended-family-separation-with-the-bible-john-oliver-countered-with-dr-seuss/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.2a4b690bd4b9.

13 Nguyen, VanThanh. “Reading the Bible in the New Christianity: A Contextual Biblical Hermeneutics.” In *World Christianity Perspectives and Insights*, 109-26. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2016.

14 Mullen, Lincoln. “The Fight to Define Romans 13.” *The Atlantic*. September 04, 2018. Accessed November 28, 2018. <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2018/06/romans-13/562916/>.

hundreds of instances in the Bible (including Romans 13) that supposedly prove slavery has divine approval. On the contrary, abolitionists and anti-slavery advocates held that the moral law of God is adhered to over any law of an ordained leader. Further, various biblical passages were used by white slave owners – such as Colossians 3 which states “Servants, obey in all things your masters” – in order to keep African Americans physically and mentally oppressed in and bound to the economically profitable system of slavery.¹⁵ As pointed out by Lincoln Mullen in his 2018 article “The Fight to Define Romans 13” for *The Atlantic*, the normative literalist interpretation of Romans 13 is in stark contrast to the fundamental, recurring themes throughout the Bible that demonstrate that the Triune God’s moral laws, choices, and judgements more closely align with the oppressed rather than the oppressor – which makes perfect theological sense considering that that is closer to the “DNA” of Christianity. Also important in Mullen’s analysis of the use and the interpretation of Romans 13 by Sessions is his scrutiny of the Trump administration’s apparent strategy to stirring up the fears and identities of American Evangelical Christians. Mullen states that the administration has been utilizing that specific passage in tandem with the “rise of law-and-order politics and the Christian Right” so as to further justify oppression and domination “in the name of law-and-order.”¹⁶

Contextual biblical hermeneutics does not invite individuals to prescribe to the “literal” interpretation of the passage without context (as Sessions did), but instead advocates for the creation of a “new” literal interpretation. This “new” literal interpretation involves acknowledging the passage’s biblical and historical contexts and also acknowledging one’s current social context because that context deeply influences the way in which humans perceive biblical passages.¹⁷ First, in terms of the passage’s biblical context, the content and placement of Romans 13 appears to be quite random. The content of the passage relates to Roman rule; and it appears random at this point in the Bible because Paul had been consecutively writing about internal Gentile and Judean community difficulties. However, the content of Romans 13 is not random in its placement: the verses have simply had their Judean context removed. Further, if the historical context is considered, Paul writes Romans 13:1-7 specifically to address Roman Gentile believers to obey the God-ordained authority of the Roman synagogue rulers and not to focus on obeying secular or pagan Roman authority. Paul at this time was very concerned with believers leaving the synagogue in Rome due to Judean non-believers and early Christians meeting inside of the Roman synagogues and because many Gentile believers at this time wished to remove themselves from their Judaism foundation and begin something new.¹⁸ Thus, the infamous passage that has been used throughout American history to justify indiscriminately observing government laws

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Nguyen, VanThanh. “Reading the Bible in the New Christianity: A Contextual Biblical Hermeneutics.” In *World Christianity Perspectives and Insights*, 109-26. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2016.

¹⁸ May, David. “Context Is Key to Interpreting Romans 13:1-7.” *EthicsDaily*. May 9, 2012. Accessed November 28, 2018. <https://www.ethicsdaily.com/context-is-key-to-interpreting-romans-13-1-7-cms-19577/>.

and preserving the powers that be is actually concerned with Judean religious – and not secular – authority entirely. Later, in verses eight through ten of the passage, Paul expands upon the importance of love in the law and states that all the commandments can be summed up as, “Love your neighbor as yourself...Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.”¹⁹

One other imperative component to utilizing biblical hermeneutics for the purposes of this analysis is to consider the passage from a particular context – specifically, a Latino/a Christian lens. Theologically, there are certain themes that are significant to the Christian Latino/a community – such as God’s revelation and the liberation social ethics of Jesus Christ. In terms of revelation, Latino/a people see God’s self-revelation as a primary theological source (more so than Scripture); and they emphasize the importance of engaging in God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ through human witness and experience, thus making human culture an imperative component of Latino/a theology. Latino/a Christians also heavily identify with the way in which Jesus Christ consistently associated with and healed marginalized persons in society and brought a message of radical love and forgiveness into the world. This theological theme is significant considering that (according to Justo L. González) reading the Bible from a Latino/a perspective is the same as reading the Bible from a marginalized, suffering, and oppressed perspective.²⁰ Additionally, viewing the Bible from a marginalized perspective allows for a clearer view of biblical stories rather than from the typical Eurocentric view – which (according to Orlando O. Espín) places value on people’s experience as a valid and good interpretation of the Bible, thus further emphasizing that revelation is a human cultural event and that culture should be incorporated into the interpretation of Scripture and religious traditions.²¹

The biblical and historical context of Romans 13 as well as the theological themes and social context for a Latino/a Christian carries vital implications for the passage and creates a “new” literal interpretation for these Christians to utilize. The “new” literal interpretation of Romans 13 involves the idea of focusing on and of obeying the law of religious authority figures because God has ordained them and is essentially working through them. Placing this interpretation in terms of the social context of the Latino/a community, these Christians could connect the idea of respecting and obeying religious authority with the idea that God reveals Himself through ordinary, everyday human experience – including with the religious leaders and edicts in one’s theological community. The passage also emphasizes the gravity of loving one’s neighbor as oneself and as love being the true fulfillment of law. This rhetoric deeply aligns with the liberation social ethics of Jesus Christ and is a direct theme in how Latino/a Christians view their theology.

As stated, recent U.S. immigration policies and rhetoric surrounding immigration

19 “BibleGateway.” Romans 13 NIV -- Bible Gateway. Accessed November 26, 2018. [https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans 13&version=NIV](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans%2013&version=NIV).

20 Rosario-Rodríguez, Rubén. “Sources and En Conjunto Methodologies of Latino/a Theologizing.” In *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Latino/a Theology*, 53-70. John Wiley & Sons, 2015.

21 Ibid.

has been intolerant and aggressive; and these policies certainly are not aligned with the “new” literal interpretation of Romans 13, which involves obedience to religious authority and loving one’s neighbor as oneself. A comprehensive Christian response to such policies would involve responding to the immigration and refugee crisis at multiple levels in order to empathize and walk with those who are suffering from these policies. That empathy and action will look like working for a more just immigration system, being open to accepting refugees while also acknowledging the proper vetting is important for safety, and directly concentrating on the injustices faced by immigrants and refugees. Focusing on injustices suffered by these vulnerable migrants must, as stated by Juan Martínez in his article for the *Journal of Latin American Theology*, involve “prophetic witness” in a system that claims validity through legality – a system that even twistingly and purposefully utilizes typical Eurocentric Biblical interpretations to further its agenda.²² This prophetic witness requires Christians to bring their beliefs and actions on immigration – namely denouncing and not justifying policies that cause suffering to migrants and refugees – to their everyday interactions in neighborhoods, churches, workplaces, and community events and also to their interactions with community leaders and elected leaders. Martínez also states that Christians might need to recall the methodologies of civil disobedience in order to protect those who are most helpless in society and to develop a more comprehensive theology for work with migrants globally.²³

The idea of civil disobedience and of developing a more complete theology for working with migrants and refugees directly connects to the perspective and response of a Latino/a Christian in this discussion. Specifically, these ideas connect with the “mujerista” or feminist Latina theological concept of doing ethics “para joder”.²⁴ Doing ethics “para joder” roughly translates to doing ethics “to mess with” or “to screw with” the current power structures in society. The thought behind this concept is that – without addressing the powerful people (for example, former Attorney general Jeff Sessions and President Trump) in society versus the powerless people (for example, migrants and refugees) in society – no social progress can be made; and the powerless people would not have their voices heard or feel empowered. Further, through the aforementioned acknowledgement of the current power structures and through attempts to “mess with” said power structures, the powerless people are able to be more clearly heard. Doing ethics “para joder” is consistent with and supports the Latino/a theological custom of identifying with Jesus’ liberation social ethics. Therefore, the Latino/a Christian response to recent U.S. immigration policies would be two-fold: faith (involving contextual biblical hermeneutics and Jesus’ liberation social ethics) and action (involving ethics “para joder”).

First, in regards to a Latino/a person’s faith, this person must utilize contextual

22 Martínez, Juan. “Immigration, President Trump, and Christian Visions of the United States.” *Journal of Latin American Theology* 12 (2017): 65-77. Accessed November 13, 2018. <http://eds.b.ebscohost.com.libproxy.bellarmino.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=4&sid=1f9a2de9-3e38-4daf-aba6-0fa88630d704@pdc-v-sessmgr05>.

23 Ibid.

24 Rosario-Rodríguez, Rubén. “Sources and En Conjunto Methodologies of Latino/a Theologizing.” In *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Latino/a Theology*, 53-70. John Wiley & Sons, 2015.

biblical hermeneutics in the interpretation of Scripture and in religious dialogue more generally so as to better recognize how biblical and religious rhetoric – especially as it relates to prevailing political leadership, legislation, and action – and so as to better recognize and engage in Jesus’ liberation social ethics. Secondly, in regards to a Latino/a person’s actions, this person must participate in doing ethics “para joder” in order to give voice to the voiceless by identifying and demanding justice for the specific wrongdoings against migrants and refugees and in order to provide a more compassionate and comprehensive dialogue surrounding immigration. Optimistically, Latino/a Christians can use the tools (of contextual biblical hermeneutics, the social ethics of Christ, and doing ethics “para joder”) accompanying their faith and action in order to evaluate their own local church structures and rhetoric in hopes of positively transforming the national and global conversations surrounding immigrants and refugees.

As stated, the origins of Christianity from its inception center around marginalization – through Jesus’ loving and welcoming approach to vulnerable persons in society and through discrimination against early Christians who were in a minority religion. Persons who are marginalized create a theological perspective that is more closely in line with the central message and spread of Christianity; and some of the most marginalized people in the United States currently include Latino/a immigrants and refugees due to the current President’s and his administration’s harsh and dehumanizing desired immigration policies – such as the border wall, travel ban, eliminating DACA, instituting family separation at the border, and restrictions on asylum-seekers. These policies have been enacted based on fear of the “other” and not based on factual evidence. These issues are further complicated by the fact that the current Republican administration is primarily comprised of white, Christian men who tend to interpret the Bible literally without context and who produce immigration policies from a normative, Eurocentric perspective. A clear example of this would be former Attorney General Jeff Sessions utilizing the biblical passage Romans 13 to justify blind following of government law and the separation of migrant families. Conversely, if this passage was received using contextual biblical hermeneutics from a distinctly Latino/a Christian perspective, the meaning of Romans 13 as well as the implications of doing ethics “para joder” would appropriately generate a more humane and comprehensive understanding of immigration policy and would be more closely aligned with the true “DNA” of Christianity – that is, gently and kindly loving and understanding other human beings (especially the most vulnerable) as Christ did. If Latino/a Christians utilize their theological tools as mentioned, they can bring these distinct actions and perspectives to their local social and religious communities and also to higher levels of government leadership. Ultimately, these local grassroots movements of Latino/a Christians help to articulate a more empathetic and complete picture of immigration and can transform the national and global dialogue on immigration; and such a local Christian grassroots effort centered on marginalization by Latino/a Christians that is focused on improving the global rhetoric surrounding immigration proves not only to support best the origins of Christianity but also to support best the complexity and the rawness of the issue and thus the humans it so immediately affects.

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2018. <https://www.cnn.com/2018/11/26/politics/customs-border-protection-tear-gas-san-diego-tijuana-san-ysidro/index.html>.

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A Vision Of Divine Light: Gregory Palamas And The Hesychast Controversy

Matthew Moore

Rising 6,670 feet above the Aegean Sea, Mount Athos has stood as the epicenter of Orthodox Christian spirituality for nearly a thousand years. Consisting today of 20 monasteries inhabited by over 1,400 monks, the “Holy Mountain”, as it has come to be known, has served as the primary center for Orthodox Christians who desire to enter monastic life since the Church’s split with the West in 1054.¹ An area known for its peace and tranquility, Mount Athos was plagued, along with the Byzantine Empire, by a crisis in the 14th century when the practices of the monks, known as Hesychasts, were criticized by western minded clergy. In the controversy that ensued, the cause of the Hesychasts would be defended by the theologian Gregory Palamas and, eventually, secured as an essential element of Eastern Orthodox spirituality.

By the 14th century, the Byzantine Empire, once the most powerful empire the world had ever seen, was slowly falling apart. “What remained were a few outposts in Asia Minor, a few islands, and a wide swath of land stretching across what is now southern Yugoslavia and northern Greece. The French were in Athens and Thebes; the Venetians ruled Crete and Euboea; the Ottoman Turks had already swallowed nine-tenths of Asia Minor; and the Serbs were threatening to pour through the mountains defiles on all the European territories of the Empire.”² Still reeling from the destruction brought on by the Crusades a century before, “the politically and economically restored Byzantine Empire was in a precarious state, and found itself more and more helpless in the face of the Turkish armies which pressed upon it from the east.”³ At the same time, any hope of aid from their fellow Christians in the West was unlikely due to nearly two centuries of theological schism. Beginning officially with the East-West split in 1054, the “east and west continued to grow further apart in theology and in their whole manner of understanding Christian life. Byzantium continued to live in a Patristic atmosphere, using the ideas and language of the Greek Fathers of the fourth century. But in western Europe the tradition of the Fathers was replaced by Scholasticism - that great synthesis of philosophy and theology worked out in the twelfth and thirteenth centu-

1 Centre, UNESCO World Heritage. “Mount Athos.” UNESCO World Heritage Centre. Accessed November 25, 2018. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/454>.

2 Robert Payne, *The Fathers of the Eastern Church*. (New York: Dorset, 1989.) 274.

3 Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Church*. (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1997.) 61.

ries. Western theologians now came to employ new categories of thought, a new theological method, and a new terminology which the east did not understand. To an ever-increasing extent the two sides were losing a common 'universe of discourse'.⁴ At the same time, the Eastern Church "had been passing for a long time through an internal crises, sometimes concealed by the rigid framework of the Byzantine way of life and by exterior fidelity to the dogmas of the 'seven ecumenical councils' which willy-nilly the intellectual was forced to accept. But behind the facade of seeming agreement, from the ninth century on, a constant conflict was waged between the advocates of a secular Hellenism that sought to restore the Neoplatonic tradition of philosophy to the greatest possible autonomy in relation to the Christian dogma, and the defenders of spiritual and theological teaching that sought to be purely Christian and independent of the ancient philosophers".⁵ The conflict between the two opposing theological approaches of the East and West finally boiled over in the fourteenth century when the western trained Italian Orthodox priest Barlaam of Calabria wrote several scathing treatises against the hesychasts after visiting monasteries on Mt. Athos.

The Hesychast of Mount Athos and the methods of prayer and devotion they employed were not, by any means, new inventions in the fourteenth century. As Vladimir Lossky has noted, the Hesychast practice "is part of the ascetic tradition of the Eastern Church and is undoubtedly of great antiquity. Transmitted from master to disciple by word of mouth, by example and spiritual direction, this discipline of interior prayer was only committed to paper at the beginning of the eleventh century in a treatise contributed to St. Symeon the New Theologian."⁶ Deriving its name "from the Greek word *hesychia*, meaning inner stillness...the Hesychast is one who devotes himself to the prayer of silence - to prayer that is stripped, so far as possible, of all images, words and discursive thinking...Breathing was carefully regulated in time with the [Jesus] Prayer, and a particular bodily posture was recommended: head bowed, chin resting on the chest, eyes fixed on the place of the heart."⁷ Through this practice of silent, contemplative prayer the hesychast claimed to be able to see the "divine light" of God, the same uncreated light experienced by the apostles Peter, James and John during Christ's transfiguration on Mount Tabor. Such talk of experiencing God scandalized the scholastically trained priest and "Barlaam ridiculed the Hesychasts as people who were trying to get the essence of the intellect into the body, while, according to him the two are not separate. He argued that the mind, being that part of man most characteristically made in the image of God, was bodiless...Barlaam, scandalized by the idea that the human body could be transfixed by the mind, dismissed Hesychast bows, prostrations, incense, and breathing techniques. He had a negative view of both the emotions and the body, which played an important role in the Hesychast experience, and accused

⁴ Ibid 62.

⁵ John Meyendorff, *St. Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality*. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998.) 92.

⁶ Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimirs Seminary Press, 1991.) 210.

⁷ Ware, *Orthodox Church*, 65.

the Hesychasts of believing the essence of God to be a perceivable light. Barlaam believed that human beings must first awaken their dormant rationality through exposing their analytical and logical faculties to all kinds of knowledge before they can transcend the purely human level and ascend to God.”⁸ Basing his opinions on the scholasticism of western theologians such as Thomas Aquinas, in which the way to knowledge of God is primarily through the rational faculties, Barlaam “believed that the Hesychast experience was essentially emotional and irrational; it did not lead to knowledge but to mental and physical states about which theologically confused conclusions were formed.”⁹

The man who would rise to defend the Hesychast of Mount Athos, Gregory Palamas, was born to a noble family in Constantinople in 1296. “His father, Constantine Palamas, was a senator, that is to say a very high official in the Byzantine court of Constantinople; he was also the preceptor of the emperor’s grandson...So the young Gregory was brought up in the Emperor Andronicus II Palaeologus court”.¹⁰ This connection with the imperial family allowed Palamas the best education available and exposure to the writings of the classical Greek philosophers Aristotle and Plato. However, coming from a devout Christian family, “around 1316 when he was about twenty, Gregory suddenly renounced his profane studies, decided to become a monk, and prepared to leave for Mount Athos, which was already the epicenter of mystical life for Orthodoxy”.¹¹ Gregory would spend three years on Mount Athos, near the monastery of Vatopedi, and then three years as cantor at the Great Lavra of Saint Athanasius. When in 1325 Turkish forces began invading areas near the holy mountain, Gregory fled to Thessalonica where, one year later, at the age of thirty, he was ordained a priest. For five years he lived a strict ascetical life until, due to the threat of Serbian invaders, Gregory was forced to flee once again, this time choosing to return to Mount Athos. It was at this point that the practices of the hesychasts of Mount Athos began to be criticized by Barlaam of Calabria and, when requested by his fellow monks, Gregory Palamas wrote the work for which he is best known.

The *Triads in Defense of Those Who Practice Quietude*, commonly known simply as *The Triads*, serves not only as Gregory Palamas’ defense of his fellow Hesychasts but also a comprehensive summary of Eastern Orthodox theology. Written partly in the style of a dialogue between Palamas and Barlaam, the nine treatises that make up the *Triads* were composed in three different stages as the debate over the Hesychasts intensified. While Palamas’ *Triads* covers numerous topics within Christian theology and spirituality, there are three key themes addressed that established the work as a centerpiece of Eastern Christian thought.

One of the themes that Palamas addresses in his work is the role of the human body within Christian spirituality. In the third section of Palamas’ *Triads*, the author

8 Anita Strezova, “Doctrinal Positions of Barlaam of Calabria and Gregory Palamas during the Byzantine Hesychast Controversy,” *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 58, no. 2, 2014: 196.

9 Ibid, 181.

10 Emmanuel Cazabonne, “Gregory Palamas (1296-1359): Monk, Theologian, and Pastor,” *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 37, no. 3, 2002: 304.

11 Ibid, 305.

defends the Hesychast method of prayer and contemplation against Barlaam's claim that it unjustly emphasized the human body. While Barlaam and other scholastics of the time considered the human body to be an impediment to the spiritual quest, Palamas explains how the body and mind are naturally connected and, therefore, complementary to each other. Barlaam and his followers, Palamas explains, follow views that "befit the heretics, who claim that the body is an evil thing, a fabrication of the Wicked One."¹² Using scripture to defend his beliefs, Palamas raises the question to his enemies "if, as the Lord of the prophets and apostles teaches 'The kingdom of God is within us', does it not follow that a man will be excluded from the Kingdom if he devoted his energies to making his mind go out from within himself?"¹³ He continues by claiming that rejection of the body is not based on Christian teachings, but on the pagan beliefs of the ancient Greek philosophers: "to make the mind 'go out', not only from fleshly thoughts, but out of the body itself, with the aim of contemplating intelligible visions - that is the greatest of the Hellenic errors, the root and source of all heresies, an invention of demons, a doctrine which engenders folly and is itself the product of madness".¹⁴ For the hesychast, Palamas states, "the mind becomes evil through dwelling on fleshly thoughts, but that there is nothing bad in the body, since the body is not evil in itself".¹⁵ The goal, Palamas states, should not be to transcend the human body, which is given to us by God as a means through which to perform His will, but to bring it into union with Him: "For this body which is united to us has been attached to us as a fellow-worker by God, or rather placed under our control. Thus we will repress it, if it is in revolt, and accept it, if it conducts itself as it should".¹⁶ Therefore, for Palamas, the Hesychast practices of breath control and focusing one's sight on the navel is a means by which the believer subdues their physical desires and makes one available to come into union with God: "Far from nailing the soul to terrestrial and corporeal thoughts and filling it with darkness, as the philosopher alleges, such a common experience constitutes and ineffable bond and union with God. It elevates the body itself in a marvelous way, and sets it far apart from evil and earthly passions".¹⁷

Through deification the Hesychasts are capable, according to Palamas, of seeing God's divine light. This concept, of experiencing God's divine light, serves as the second key theme in Palamas' *Triads*. To the claim that the "divine light" the Hesychasts said they experienced was simply a hallucination, Palamas responds that such an opinion is the result of Barlaam and his followers' over reliance on philosophy and rationalism. The vision of divine light, Palamas explains, comes through deification - union with God - which can only be achieved through receiving God's grace, not through any amount of human knowledge or learning. "Deification thus transcends nature, virtue and knowledge and (as St. Maximus says) 'all these things are inferior to it'".¹⁸ Barlaam

12 Gregory Palamas and John Meyendorff, *The Triads*. (New York: Paulist Press, 1983) 43

13 Ibid, 43.

14 Ibid, 44.

15 Ibid, 41.

16 Ibid 48

17 Ibid, 52.

18 Ibid, 83.

and other scholastics were, according to Palamas, incapable of ever experiencing this “divine light” since “this union takes place by virtue of cessation of all intellectual activity; it is something that goes beyond abstraction...the uncreated light was not sensible or intelligible, but spiritual and divine, and far away from all created cognitive faculties in its transcendence”.¹⁹ The Hesychasts, however, due to their practice of rejecting physical and mental distractions, were capable of seeing this light, “for such a time man truly sees neither by the intellect nor by the body, but by the Spirit, and he knows he sees supernaturally a light which surpasses light...He sees by going out of himself”.²⁰ The scholastic inability to comprehend how one achieves deification and experiences God’s light is, to Palamas, understandable since “he alone knows the energies of the Spirit who has learnt of them through experience...deification remains ineffable, and (as the Fathers teach us) can be given a name only by those who have received it”.²¹ The divine light experienced by the Hesychast, according to Palamas, is the same light experienced by the apostles on Mount Tabor during Christ’s transfiguration and by Paul on the road to Damascus. To deny the vision of the divine light is, according to Palamas, comparable to denying God’s interaction with mankind (and, therefore, Christ’s incarnation).

The interaction between God and man is further developed by Palamas through what the most famous and important concept is developed within his *Triads*: the distinction between God’s essence and His energies. As Strezova points out, “to maintain the basic antinomy of Eastern Christian understanding of the God-man relationship,” Palamas “developed at length the patristic doctrines of “deification” or communion with God as representing the only acceptable context for a Christian epistemology, and he developed a distinction between ‘essence’ and ‘energies.’ Palamas made this distinction to reconcile the reality of mystical experience with traditional theology, which stressed the inaccessibility of God and rejected all claims to vision of God’s being”.²² Following the apophatic theology of earlier Orthodox teachers, including Gregory of Nyssa, Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus the Confessor, Palamas agrees that the essence of “God is not only beyond knowledge, but also beyond unknowing...the divine manifestations, even if symbolic, remain unknowable by reason of their transcendence”.²³ However, for Palamas, God allows man to experience his glory through what he defines as “energies”. “By the essence of God is meant his otherness, by the energies his nearness. But, while God’s inner essence is for ever beyond our comprehension, his energies, grace, life and power fill the whole universe, and are directly accessible to us”.²⁴ The light experienced by the apostles at Mount Tabor, the burning bush and voice spoken to Moses, and the numerous other experiences man had of God throughout scripture all serve as examples of these energies. While man can experience and participate with

19 Strezova, *Doctrinal Positions*, 192-193.

20 Palamas, *Triads*, 38.

21 *Ibid*, 87.

22 Strezova, *Doctrinal Positions*, 208.

23 Palamas, *Triads*, 32.

24 Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way*. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimirs Seminary Press, 1995) 22.

God's energies, His essence, or transcendent nature, remains beyond man's accessibility, for "none of these things is the essence of God - neither the uncreated goodness, nor the unoriginate eternal life; all these things exist not in Him, but around Him...it is an error to identify the eternal glory of God with the imparticipable essence of God".²⁵ While these energies of God are distinct from His essence, Palamas insists that the experience of the light at the transfiguration or that seen by the Hesychasts brings one into total communion with God, even if they, as created beings, cannot fully comprehend the creator. For, as Kallistos Ware notes, "the energies are God himself in his activity and self-manifestation. When a man knows or participates in the divine energies, he truly knows or participates in God himself, so far as this is possible for a created being. But God is God, and we are human; and so, while he possesses us, we cannot in the same way possess him".²⁶ Therefore, for Palamas "deification" or "union" with God is available, through grace, by interaction with God's divine energies. "Hence, to be in communion with the divine energies means to be united with God in his totality, though one can never know his essence...the energies of God, Palamas claimed, are active in the world and manifested in many different ways, one of them being the light seen on Tabor. Hesychasm, by providing a means to see the light, was therefore a means to bridge the gulf between man and God."²⁷

Basing his argument on accepted Fathers of the Christian Church, Palamas' views expressed in the *Triads* were eventually accepted as doctrine for the Orthodox Church and "two councils called successively in June and August 1341 in the galleries of Santa Sophia at Constantinople condemned the Calabrian philosopher".²⁸ Barlaam would soon be expelled from Constantinople and, after being embraced by the Latin Church who adhered to similar scholastic beliefs, made Bishop of Gerace. Palamas' career, ever entwined with Byzantine politics, would continue to sway between popular support and exile. Finally, he was appointed as archbishop of Thessaloniki, where he served until his death in 1359. With his success in the Hesychast controversy, however, Gregory Palamas established what would become Eastern Orthodox doctrine that continues to this day. As John Meyendorff has concluded, "the victory of Palamas was the victory of Christian humanism over the pagan humanism of the Renaissance".²⁹ At the same time, and arguably more importantly, Palamas' victory reestablished the centrality of monasticism to Eastern Christian spirituality. By establishing that mankind could "see" the divine light of God, Palamas prevented Eastern Orthodox Christianity from descending into the scholastic rationalism of the western church which, for nearly five hundred years, completely isolated human beings from their creator and led to an emphasis on clericalism. Palamas' writings allowed for human beings, both the laity and monastics, to continue to strive for and feel God's presence within their own lives. Palamas' influence can be seen through the spread of Hesychasm into Russia and other nations,

²⁵ Palamas, *Triads*, 97-99.

²⁶ Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, 22.

²⁷ Strezova, *Doctrinal Positions*, 210.

²⁸ Meyendorff, *St. Gregory Palamas*, 90.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 171.

as well as in the rise of interest in Christian spirituality in the twentieth century. By establishing that God is something that can be experienced and not just rationalized, Palamas and the Hesychast tradition protected Christian spirituality from being restricted to strict, unapproachable dogmatism. And although the East's rejection of scholasticism cemented its divide with the Western church, interests in Palamas' teachings have risen recently among Roman Catholics. Such reverence for Eastern thought led Pope John Paul II to proclaim that "in the East are to be found the riches of those spiritual traditions which are given expression in monastic life especially. From the glorious times of the holy Fathers that monastic spirituality flourished in the East which later flowed over into the Western world, and there provided a source from which Latin monastic life took its rise and has often drawn fresh vigor ever since. Therefore, it is earnestly recommended that Catholics avail themselves more often of the spiritual riches of the Eastern Fathers which lift up the whole man to the contemplation of the divine mysteries."³⁰

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2019-2020 ACADEMIC YEAR

FIRST-YEAR WRITING PRIZES

The M. Celeste Nichols and the Bellarmine Learning Communities Essay Contests recognize exceptional first-year writing completed in *Expository Writing* or the *Freshman Seminar*. First-year writing faculty submit for consideration student essays written in either the fall or spring semesters. Essays are blind-reviewed by a faculty writing committee, and the most outstanding are selected.

The Rhetoric Surrounding the Palestinian Right of Return

Jasmina Harambasic

The conflict between Israel and Palestine has been focused in the international spotlight since 1948 and has to this day failed to be resolved. Due to the situation's prominence on an international level, the discourse surrounding the issue has become part of the world's public memory and has global consequences. The discourse surrounding the possibility of a return or the establishment of a separate Palestinian state and individual positions regarding the topic are heavily influenced by the key points debaters focus on to persuade others to agree with their stance. How influencers choose to talk about their claims establishes how effective their argument is to their audience.

To illustrate the importance of an author's rhetorical performance in composing an argumentative narrative surrounding a certain issue, the articles "At Issue: The Palestinian Refugee Issue: Rhetoric vs. Reality" by Sidney Zabłudoff and "Palestinian Refugees and Peace" by Elia Zureik, can be instrumental. The two articles focus on the Palestinian right of return which, according to article 13-2 in "The Universal Declaration of Human Rights" from the United Nations, is "Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country." The conflict between Israel and Palestine is regarding the Palestinian refugees of the 1948 and 1967 wars and if they should be able to return to their homeland and whether they should be rewarded compensation and to what extent. The article by Zabłudoff focuses on an Israeli perspective whereas Zureik focuses on a Palestinian position. Although each author offers a contradictory viewpoint with stark differences, both deliver a similar, effective performance of persuasive tools and rhetorical decisions to convince their audience to further polarize toward their position.

Before delving into each author's argumentative performance and drawing similarities and differences, each author's piece must be evaluated and addressed on an individual basis. The article "At Issue: The Palestinian Refugee Issue: Rhetoric vs. Reality" by Sidney Zabłudoff addresses the sixty-year-old Palestinian refugee issue and argues that there is a gap between the rhetoric surrounding the issue and its reality. Zabłudoff suggests that the circumstances of the situation are fueled by political hopes and have little relevance in reality. The article argues that the prolongation of the decades old dilemma amplifies a non-issue and distracts from legitimate boundary and terrorism issues. Zabłudoff's main claim is that the refugee status shouldn't surpass generations and draws attention to the lack of discourse surrounding a much larger issue in his eyes, Jewish refugees expelled from Arab nations. He views the politicization of the issue as

a threat to the Jewish state and promotes his own proposal of how to resolve the issue in a productive way. The article is therefore fueled by purposeful declarations favoring his viewpoint and quick, abrupt dismissals of the Palestinian situation and opposing viewpoints.

Zureik's article "Palestinian Refugees and Peace" also focuses on Palestinian refugees and their debated right of return and proposes her own solution in a similar way to Zabludoff. She also is quick to use charged language attacking the Israeli effort and clearly dismisses the validity of the opposing argument, although with more detailed elaboration instead of mere declaration and dismissal as Zabludoff does. Zureik's article focuses on the peace talks between Palestine and Israel through the United Nations and the glossing over of the issue of right of return and instead replaced with a more directed focus in ameliorating the conditions of the refugees in their dispersed communities. She addresses the different approaches of the United States, Palestine and Israel, and the Arab nations to the Palestine question and the different policy models that go into making informed decisions of the topic. She ultimately accentuates Israeli hypocrisy in Israeli law by identifying their use of a collective-communitarian criterion for one group (Jewish immigrants) and individualist-liberal criteria on a selective basis for another group (Arabs).

The two articles are ultimately very similar in their opening structure and their addressing of foundational points for their main argument. Zabludoff begins with a short introduction to the dissonance between reality and the political motivations as well as introduced the little discussion surrounding Jews forced out of their homelands. He then focuses an entire subheading with two sections to the facts about statistics on the number of refugees and value of assets lost by refugees. Once that is established, he moves into his other subheadings regarding the conflict between reality and the perceptions of Jewish and Palestinian issues. This factual foundation establishes credibility, but the execution isn't as effective as Zureik's addressal of statistics to support her argument. Instead of introducing facts into paragraphs and long sentences like Zabludoff, Zureik organizes her statistical evidence into tables that come across with much more clarity and doesn't detract from her argument but enhances it. Then Zureik also utilizes subheadings referencing definitions of key terms in order to proceed with her argument. The rest of her article addresses several countries' perspectives, their particular approach to the issue, and the different factors that influence each stance while highlighting the things she disagrees with. Both papers then end with a proposal of future steps to take to restore a better reality, although Zabludoff's method is more effective. He separates his own strategy from the rest of his paper and uses bullet points to emphasize his solution. Zureik instead hides her own proposition in a subheading labeled "Israeli and Palestinian Approaches." This almost concealed recommendation doesn't exude confidence and seems weaker than the portion of her paper that refutes opposing arguments.

The key to both papers that better highlights the effects of the linguistic tools the authors use in their rhetorical performance is their audience in regard to their purpose. Zabludoff's article supports Israel in the conflict, negates Palestinian concerns, and was

published in the "Jewish Political Studies Review," whereas Zureik's article in favor of the return of Palestinians to their homeland was published in the "Journal of Palestine Studies." Each article is not geared toward convincing the opposing viewpoint to change their mind so much as they serve as a sort of confirmation bias meant to support a premise instead of looking for information that would refute one's ideas (King 250). Each author approaches the paper with their main tools being charged language that induces a group polarization effect. Group polarization effect is "the solidification and further strengthening of an individual's position as a consequence of a group discussion or interaction" (King 427). Essentially the goal of each paper is to polarize initially held views by helping the audience hear new, more persuasive arguments that strengthen an original position, and this encourages a more extreme opinion against an opposing advocate.

Each author fuels this division of group stances by using language in their articles that dismiss their opposers by attacking them or invalidating their claims. For instance, Zabłudoff is quick to excuse the actions of his own country as an aggressor but emphasize its victimization in a separate unrelated situation; "Instances did occur in which Jewish forces drove the Palestinians out of their homes and Palestinian civilians were killed. But these occurrences were comparatively rare and take place in all wars" (Zabłudoff 48). His approach is to recognize the Palestinians were forced out of their homes but still dismiss the argument by belittling the cases that did occur by referring to them as "comparatively rare" outliers. He is also quick to practically insinuate that Palestinian turmoil is more deserved than Jewish struggles; "Unquestionably, the prime responsibility lies with those who started the war--in this case the Arab states. By contrast, the expulsion of the Jews from Arab states was purely vindictive" (Zabłudoff 48). In the Palestinian instance the expulsion of a few people is considered a guarantee in war, but when the same thing happens to Jews instead of the Palestinians it becomes "purely vindictive." In this selective case, their strife isn't a casualty of war and is instead cruel and unusual. The language here is clearly polarizing and dismissive of concerns, and yet contradictory when roles are reversed. Zabłudoff also almost insults the definition of these Palestinians by implying that they are acting like leeches; "Calling these people refugees makes no sense. Few if any live in tent camps or temporary residences. Most own their homes and live in areas of towns that can be classified as working class neighborhoods. Rather than refugees, they are simply the recipients of assistance, mainly for education and health" (48-49). By using phrases like "makes no sense" or insinuating that the refugees are only invalid "so-called refugees" (Zabłudoff 52), is very charged and depreciating. However, similar moves are also applied by Zureik in her writing. In regard to the popular, past Israeli claim that the Palestinian exodus was voluntary, she writes; "There is no point in rehearsing the debate surrounding this discredited view" (Zureik 10). This is pure rejection of a converse opinion without exploration on the author's part and it introduces a bitter tone into the piece. This negative portrayal of the opposition is continued with phrases such as "find themselves at the mercy of Israeli dictates" (Zureik 14), which implies that the Israeli people are ruthless, and "overladen with the symmetry of culpability and will likely not impress those who have languished

for generations in camps,” (Zureik 12). The language is rich with distaste toward the Israeli and their superficial efforts to resolving the conflict. Both authors make moves toward vilifying their adversaries and illegitimizing their positions in their writings to convince their audience that their particular stance is superior.

The rhetoric surrounding this public conflict between Israel and Palestine is evidently very deliberate and the authors made calculated decisions to impact the effectiveness of their literary performance. They help contribute to the narrative by acknowledging their audience and using polarizing language to help further solidify existing stances and draw a sense of self-righteousness out of their arguments. This, however, only widens and extends the rifts created by the conflict and ensures that real progress cannot ensue in any foreseeable future due to the lack of an appeal to convince those who think contrary to individual previously established beliefs.

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Small-town Coffee Culture at LaGrange Coffee Roasters

Joy Board



As you approach Downtown Mainstreet in LaGrange, KY, you will either experience two things: getting stuck behind a train or, if you're lucky, immediately being greeted by a strong scent of coffee coming from the local's favorite: LaGrange Coffee Roasters. Getting there sometimes proves challenging—you will have to go through at least one four-way-stop depending on what direction you're coming from, take your chances dodging the train that runs down the middle of the street, or have to circle around the block until you find a parking spot. But it is all worth it for the superb cup of coffee you are guaranteed. From the moment you open your car door after you park on main street, the thick, awakening smell of the freshly roasted coffee immediately surrounds you. When you walk through LaGrange Coffee Roasters' doors, you feel welcomed by the warm glow of the lighting that covers the many friendly faces of those there for the same reason as you—stellar coffee. You walk up to the register where you will be welcomed by one of the regular baristas, who more often than not already know your order. You don't feel rushed by the crowd but rather welcomed as the baristas converse with you as they make your drink. As your drink is completed, you grab it and make your way towards your seat where you can enjoy your surroundings, listen to music, work on homework, catch up with your friends, or conduct a meeting—all activities familiar to the coffee shop.

The Cockrells began to brew their signature coffee, or at least what would eventually

become their signature coffee after years of trial and tribulation, in their home's kitchen. Chris Cockrell, the owner and founder of LaGrange Coffee Roasters, had read an article on social media about a new-at-the-time trend of roasting your own coffee at home, which inspired him to begin roasting his own coffee beans in a popcorn maker in his own home kitchen. The art of brewing and roasting their own coffee began as a hobby but the product was one Cockrell, his wife,



Chris Cockrell sells his coffee at LaGrange Farmer's Market in 2010

and his two children could not keep for themselves for long. He began to share his new hobby of roasting with his friends and family who yearned for more and more samples from him and began to build his clientele as people began requesting for him to roast their coffee for them. The couple and their two children decided to share their coffee with their community by selling it at the local Farmer's Market where it became an instant hit and the locals go-to for coffee.



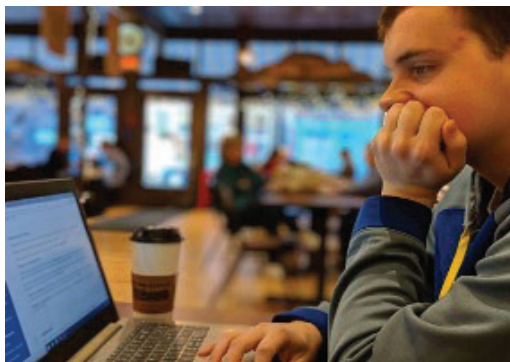
LaGrange Coffee Roasters' first location, located just East of Mainstreet

The Cockrells decided to leave their day jobs to focus primarily on expanding their enterprise. They did this by renting a small building near LaGrange's Mainstreet in hopes to expand their clientele and become more known in the community— an effort that was extremely successful. This location became LaGrange Coffee Roasters' first official establishment where Cockrell's roasting became more intricate and a huge success. Their success in their first building allowed the Cockrells to rent a storefront on Mainstreet in LaGrange where they currently reside.

"[LaGrange Coffee Roasters] is amazing! Best coffee in Louisville. Great atmosphere. The workers are accommodating & friendly! The only flaw is that there [aren't] more locations!"-Lizzie Adkins

Although LaGrange remains only about 20 miles from Downtown Louisville, many Louisvillians remain unaware of its hidden quaintness. However, LaGrange has increasingly become more well-known, largely due to LaGrange Coffee Roasters. Prior to the establishment moving to Main Street, the entertainment and leisure opportunities in LaGrange were extremely limited. Main street was increasingly becoming deserted as many businesses failed. Landen Cockrell, Chris' son, declared that a definite market for

coffee exists in LaGrange and believes that the other businesses on Main Street have received more business because of LaGrange Coffee Roasters. I can contest that myself, for I was born in Oldham County but never frequented LaGrange until the coffee shop was established. There has definitely been an influx in not only business within LaGrange since the Roasters' establishment but also an increase in a sense of community, as LaGrange Coffee Roasters has become a leisurely place for all to enjoy. What was once a vacant building merely sitting on Mainstreet has become a meeting place open to all for a plethora of purposes- to relax, get work done, meet with friends, conduct meetings, work on crafts, read, or write- all thanks to the Cockrells pursuing their ambition.



From teenagers visiting the shop after school lets out with their friends to the group of regular elderly men who meet every Monday for Monday Night's Bluegrass Jams, the coffee shop welcomes all people of different ages. LaGrange Coffee Roasters provides the perfect place to conduct informal meetings, catch up with friends, get schoolwork done, knit or crochet, or simply sip coffee while you observe. If you frequent Roaster's as much as I do, you will know the regulars and what they like to do. Bill, Gordon, and their crew enjoy meeting to discuss everything

from politics to their own city of Lagrange. Day, Lea, Darby, and Lauren, a pair of daughters and their moms, enjoy knitting together over coffee. My sister Jalynn and I enjoy working on schoolwork and planning her wedding together. LaGrange Coffee Roasters is a place open to all from different backgrounds and purposes of coming but unites all who come through their coffee.

The baristas who help to make the magic happen consist of teenagers and young adults who share a strong bond and have cultivated a unique friendship. Most of the employees met as childhood friends whose parents have known each other long before they were born. Growing up together cultivated a unique bond and working together daily



at the coffee shop has continued to strengthen their relationships among each other even more. In fact, Landen Cockrell's favorite thing about working at the coffee shop remains the strong relationships he has built not only among his fellow baristas but also among the loyal customers he has gotten to know so well over the years of them frequenting the shop. The baristas and the owners, eager to get to know their customers and make regulars out



A Monday Night Bluegrass Jam session at LaGrange Coffee Roasters

of them, share their interests and converse with all who visit the shop. The Cockrells, being huge motorcycle enthusiasts, decorate the coffee shop walls with motorcycle-themed art featuring local motorcyclists and enjoy sharing their hobby with their customers. Lea Cockrell shares her passion for music with the shop's patrons by performing with her band on Monday Night Bluegrass Jams—

open to all who wish to play or just listen. It's the hints of the owner's life embedded throughout the establishment and their eagerness to form relationships with their patrons that makes LaGrange Coffee Roasters feel so personal.

What makes LaGrange Coffee Roasters so unparalleled to the other coffee shops in the Louisville area is the strong connection they have to their community and their patrons. Coffee Roasters has been a huge catalyst in the rebirth of LaGrange that has occurred over the last few years. The establishment has helped the economy of LaGrange's Historic District by bringing more business and movement to their neighboring small businesses, brought a new leisurely meeting-place



for all to benefit from, and has overall strengthened the small-town, community-oriented feel that enhances LaGrange's reputation. LaGrange Coffee Roasters exemplifies not only coffee house culture but more specifically, small-town life. On any given day you go, you can enjoy the company of the numerous regulars, and on occasion, a movie star. Downtown LaGrange has been the set of a variety of Hallmark movie productions over the years which features its small-town uniqueness. After filming in LaGrange, actor

Jon Voight became so fond of the small city that he bought a farm just miles away from LaGrange Coffee Roasters. The daily life of most LaGrange citizens consists of either attending work or school, which can be observed even in the coffee shop, as you can see people either studying or making business calls at any given time. Even though the lives of those who make up the small town are extremely busy and full of hard work, the locals still make time to fit coffee in—a comfort that reminds those of the importance of slowing down and taking life one sip at a time.



JB Rail Photos

How We Ought to Die

Logan Funderburg

As humans we are obsessed with death. However, as a species, we view this part of life in the wrong light. Death should not be something we ignore; that only worsens the wound that it makes within the body of society. There seems to be a preference amongst most individuals to somehow find a way to escape the grasp of death. One must come to understand that death is inevitable. In doing so, one may find themselves able to die a moral death. This begs the question then, what constitutes a moral death? Some may believe this means to die a good death. Many have made their opinion clear on this subject; it has even made its way into medical dictionaries. McGraw Hill's *Concise Dictionary of Modern Medicine* defines "good death" as, "any death that others view as a comforting and 'smooth' transition from a living to nonliving state." This may be acceptable from a medical perspective; however, I find that from a philosophical point of view, I would argue that there is a difference in a medicine's "good death", and what an ethicist would call a moral death. Primarily from the view of a virtue ethicist, a moral death should be defined as any death which takes place after the obtainment of some level of virtuous characteristics. A moral death therefore, consists of first developing one's personal virtue, or character, and then accepting death's inevitability within one's life. Dying in such a fashion, would inherently cause less strife to be put upon other autonomous beings, as one's actions will simply follow in the footsteps of one's virtuous character. Death is not something to be afraid of, it is something that one must learn to accept as inevitable, and in doing so, build upon the virtues one has already worked to obtain in life.

To understand death we first must understand life itself. Things that are alive have a distinctive capacity to develop or maintain themselves by engaging in various processes including chemosynthesis, photosynthesis, cellular respiration, cell generation, and maintenance of homeostasis. These functions can be known as vital processes. The event by which the capacity to employ these vital processes is lost is one thing and the condition of having lost it is another. "Death" can refer to either. (Luper). There are also different ways to interpret death. First, it can be viewed as the ending of the process of death. Second, the process of extinction. Finally, death can be interpreted as when physiological systems of the body have lost the capacity to function as an integrated whole, or when this loss becomes irreversible (DeGrazia 2014).

Humans are obsessed with death, but for the wrong reasons. It seems as though people all throughout their lives find death to be fascinating, however when confronted with it head on, we cower in fear. The obsession of death is a result of this fear, because a small part of us wants to believe there is a way out of dying, and we

understand in reality there is no way out. Since we are unaware of what exactly goes on when the soul leaves the physical body, it is irrational to believe anything bad happens after we die, and therefore we should not be afraid of death. There are many things that could happen but we will never be able to know until we actually experience it. Instead, we should focus on how life is beautiful, and should be celebrated just as death can be as well. A distinction must be made between death and dying. Dying we can be afraid of. Without a doubt the process of death can be horrific, painful, and degrading. Death, however, may be a sort of peace at the end of a battle well fought. I believe it relates to how one looks at the situation. If one believes in the afterlife then death can be looked at just as a transitional period and that is merely it. If one believes we just die, well they can focus on their life and understand how beautiful it was. They can also find relief in the final moments. Teaching people to change their perspective on death is the key. The first thing to get across is the difference between death and dying. Once this is understood one can find a way to encounter death virtuously. The first step towards this understanding of death is an explanation of our obsession with it.

In his book, *The Death By Denial*, Ernest Becker asserts how humans confront the nature of death. The book's main argument is that all of human civilization is a defense mechanism against the knowledge that we will die. Becker goes on to argue that our lives take place in two different kinds of worlds. The first world our body inhabits is the physical world. This is very straightforward. The "physical world" is made up of our physical bodies. The second world our bodies find themselves within is the symbolic world of meaning. Becker calls the symbolic half of life, "immortality projects." People devote their lives to causes that they find will have a lasting impact after the death of their physical half. Examples of the symbolic part of life and the "immortality projects" include art, music, literature, religion, nation-states, and social and political movements. These creations, people believe, cultivate meaning within their lives. Becker also believed that mental illness, especially depression, results when we do not believe we are connected to some meaningful project. Furthermore, lacking such a project reminds us of our mortality.

Becker, then goes on to argue that conflicts such as wars, bigotry, and racism result from conflicting "immortality projects." Being that our personal immortality projects are so closely entwined with our identity, we cannot begin to tolerate the suggestions of others that beg the question of whether our beliefs are misguided. In a response to the problem of "immortality projects," Becker suggests as a society we need to create new comforting "illusions." These "illusions" will help give life an overarching meaning. He doesn't state what these illusions could possibly be, only that along with obtaining them we could create a better world. As Becker once stated, "This is the terror: to have emerged from nothing, to have a name, consciousness of self, deep inner feelings, an excruciating inner yearning for life and self-expression—and with all this yet to die." (Becker, 1973, pg. 87).

This seeking of "immortality projects" is what I find wrong with the way society views death. Death should not be something we try to escape. Death, from one of the greatest philosopher's perspective, should not be feared in any way. Socrates, known to

be one of the first great western philosophers, stated something similar to this when he was sentenced to death at the end of his trial in 399 B.C.E. To sum up his argument, Socrates briefly states in a speech to those jurors who voted to acquit him that death is either one of two things: a deep sleep or a change of place. A deep sleep is quite peaceful, more so than most of our waking days. This deep sleep would also cause no physical harm. If he were to enter Hades, on the other hand, he would have the opportunity to meet all of the great Greek thinkers and heroes. There he could ask them the same questions that he asked the men of Athens. Both of these outcomes he views in light of his imminent death. He says this not only to calm himself, but to allow those who voted to acquit him of his charges to feel at ease about his death.

As he states this, I find Socrates embodying a virtue ethics ideal on the perspective of death. Virtue theory was part of Socrates' time, but was further developed by Aristotle, who was a student of Socrates' pupil, Plato. The basis behind virtue theory is its focus on moral character, rather than consequences of our actions, or following a set of rules. This sets it apart from other normative ethical systems such as consequentialism, and deontology. A virtue is an excellent trait of character. It is a disposition, well entrenched in its possessor; something that, as we say, goes all the way down, unlike a habit. To possess a virtue is to be a certain sort of person with a certain complex mindset. For example, let's take the virtue of honesty. An honest person cannot be identified simply as one who, for example, practices honest dealing and does not cheat. If such actions are done merely because the agent thinks that honesty is the best policy, or because they fear being caught out, rather than through recognizing "to do otherwise would be dishonest" as the relevant reason, they are not the actions of an honest person.

Virtue deals with a matter of degree then, and the whole idea is to actively better our moral state through obtaining more virtues. A virtue ethicist isn't concerned with actions at all per say. Instead they would rather focus on one's soul or mindset towards certain situations. A virtue ethicist believes once you have started to obtain a virtuous mindset, your actions will simply follow and then one can be labeled as having virtuous characteristics. A comparison and thought experiment to the other major forms of normative ethics may help this point get across. For instance, consider an individual who is the bank manager, and his own son has been caught in the act of robbing the bank. Virtue ethics state that the man must be ideal and righteous and moral, and have the criminal punished despite the fact that he is his son. In this scenario, he failed in his duty as a father, and the consequences of his act would affect his entire family. Yet, those in favor of virtue ethics would state his act to be correct and honorable.

The way virtue theory plays into the world of ethics has to do with Aristotle's teachings of "the golden mean." In the *Eudemean Ethics*, Aristotle writes on the virtues. His constant phrase is, "... is the Middle state between ..." His psychology of the soul and its virtues is based on the golden mean between the extremes. In the *Politics*, Aristotle criticizes the Spartan Polity by criticizing the disproportionate elements of the constitution. For example, they trained the men and not the women, and they trained for war but not peace. This disharmony produced difficulties which he elaborates on in

his work.

To put it more simply, a virtue takes place between two vices, one of excess and one of deficiency. If we take the honesty example again, one can see that honesty is the virtue between the vice of boastfulness, which would be excess, and the vice of self deprecation, which would be a deficiency of truthfulness or honesty. Another example from the *Nicomachean Ethics*, is someone who runs away becomes a coward, while someone who fears nothing is rash. In this way the virtue “bravery” can be seen as depending upon a “mean” between two extremes. This “golden mean” can be found for a number of virtues. The full list Aristotle summed up included such virtues as courage, temperance, liberality, magnificence, pride, honor, good temper, friendliness, truthfulness, wit, friendship, and justice. Each possessing their own vices of excess and deficiency.

The reasoning behind why we should work towards obtaining these virtues, in Aristotle’s opinion, is to reach a state of Eudaimonia. This word is roughly translated to “flourishing”, or “happiness.” However, both translations seem to have their downfalls. For example, plants and animals are capable of flourishing, however, eudaimonia is only obtained by rational beings. The fault of happiness relates to its subjectivity. What happiness means to me may not be the same as what happiness means to you. However, eudaimonia is described as a moralized or value-laden concept of happiness, something like “true” or “real” happiness or “the sort of happiness worth seeking or having.” Eudaimonia is, within virtue ethics, already conceived of as something of which virtuous activity is at least partially constitutive. (Kraut 1989). Therefore, virtue ethicists claim that a human life devoted to physical pleasure or the acquisition of wealth is not eudaimon (adjective of eudaimonia), but a wasted life. Finally, according to eudaimonistic virtue ethics, the good life is the *eudaimon* life, and the virtues are what enable a human being to be *eudaimon* because the virtues just are those character traits that benefit their possessor in that way, barring bad luck.

A group of ancient Greek philosophers who followed eudaimonistic virtue ethics were known as the Stoics. The Stoics practiced a few disciplines that were derived from virtues, and virtue theory. I will present only a few in order for an understanding to be made about Stoic virtue ethics. The first regards desire, and is known as stoic acceptance. This discipline was derived from the virtues of courage and temperance. A quote to sum up its teachings would be “Don’t hope that events will turn out the way you want, welcome in events whichever way they happen: This is the path to peace.” (Epictetus, *Enchiridion*, 8). The second discipline practiced by Stoics has to do with action and is called stoic philanthropy. Derived from the virtue of justice, Marcus Aurelius once asserted, “Men exist for the sake of one another. Teach them then, or bear with them.” (*Mediations*, VIII, 59). The final discipline practiced by stoics is that of assent or stoic mindfulness. This discipline was derived from the virtue of wisdom, and can be summed up by, “What decides whether a sum of money is good? The money is not going to tell you; it must be the faculties that make use of such impressions, reason.” (Epictetus, *Discourses*, 1, 5).

An embodiment of Stoic principles is not to allow your emotions to influence your actions. I find this premise to be how we ought to view death. Both healthcare pro-

professionals and patients should develop a sense of Stoic principles in order to ethically perish. The fact that we are naturally social beings, meaning in a state of nature we thrive and interact with other humans/animals, means that we have moral obligations whether we like it or not. Patients need to develop the mindset of stoic acceptance. They need to fundamentally understand their position in the world and that their life is ending its cycle. Doctors and other healthcare professionals have to understand when to stop treatment that will lead to no further escape of imminent death. They need to embody the stoic discipline of action, otherwise known as, stoic philanthropy. Both doctors and patients can benefit from the development of stoic mindfulness, as it would increase their practical wisdom. This increase in practical wisdom will give them both the wherewithal to discern when it is time to let go and allow nature to take its inevitable course.

This inevitably comes with a problem of defining what a good death entails. First we need to define what death really is. The United States, have adopted criteria for death modeled on the Uniform Determination of Death Act (developed by the President's Commission, 1981), which says that "an individual who has sustained either (1) irreversible cessation of circulatory and respiratory functions, or (2) irreversible cessation of all functions of the entire brain, including the brain stem, is dead. A determination of death must be made in accordance with accepted medical standards." In the United Kingdom, the accepted criterion is brain stem death, or the "permanent functional death of the brain stem" (Pallis 1982). A good death when defined by patients is described as "dying in my sleep," "dying quietly," "dying without pain," and "dying suddenly". A description of this kind of death would be quick, painless, and peaceful. (Hughes, T., Shumacker, M., Jacobs-Lawson, J. M., Arnold, S.) (2007). When described by healthcare professionals a good death is seen as "pain free," "peaceful," "anxiety free," and "comfortable." (Payne, S.A., Langley-Evans, A., and Hiller, R.) (1996). The patients' descriptions of a "good" death were diverse and included: dying in one's sleep, dying quietly, with dignity, being pain free, and dying suddenly. In comparison, staff characterized a "good" death in terms of adequate symptom control, family involvement, peacefulness, and lack of distress, while a "bad" death was described as involving uncontrolled symptoms, lack of acceptance, and being young. This differing of opinions leads there to be conflict among patients, their healthcare providers, and the families of the patients. The modernist ideal within contemporary medicine of the body or illness always being something to fix is the root cause of this conflict. If doctors and their patients came to an understanding more often, that they have tried what they could and should no longer waste valuable resources on a dying patient, this conflict could be resolved. One way of achieving this sense of honesty, or magnificence within the self, is through practicing virtue. At the end of the day, the power is now mostly in the hands of the patient, with a few exceptions. At any point, the patient can deny treatment, and in doing so can act virtuously. However, for the times when the patient may be in a coma, or the fate of the patient lies in the hands of the medical proxy, it is on them to act virtuously.

The worst thing a medical proxy can do is to ignore the event at hand. Ignoring

death leaves ourselves, as well as, the patient with a false sense of life's permanence and perhaps encourages us to lose ourselves in the triviality of daily life. Obsessive reflection on death, on the other hand, can lead us away from life. Honestly coming to terms with one's death involves reflection on its significance in one's life, and thinking about the larger values that give life its meaning. In the end, it is useful to think about death only to the point that it frees us to live fully immersed in the life we have yet to live

This also means however, that we are not just responsible for the impact that our choices have upon ourselves, but also for their impact on the whole of mankind. This matters because whether one likes it or not, their death is a social event that impacts several others. This quality gives it moral value, and therefore should be dealt with an ethical system in mind. Finally, it is also our moral obligation to make the most of our hand, however unfair it may have been dealt.

The Stoic philosopher Epictetus once stated,

"It's something like going on a voyage. What can I do? Pick the captain, the boat, the date, and the best time to sail. But then a storm hits... What are my options? I do the only thing I am in a position to do, drown, but fearlessly, without bawling or crying out to God, because I know that what is born must also die" (Epictetus, *Discourses*).

This quote sums up my argument on how I believe we ought to die. To come to terms with death, understanding its inevitability, and allowing it to happen when it is time. When we die we should take it as virtuously as possible. Just as any action has both a vice of excess and a vice of deficiency, dying must have them as well. This would also mean there is a "golden mean" between both vices and a virtuous way to die.

I find that adopting a Stoic mindset allows people to have the best chance at dying a virtuous death. This is due to its teachings of acceptance more than anything else. Of course I do not believe one should want to die, but if they change their attitude towards an acceptance of death then dying would be more virtuous. Dying, and accepting the fact that you are dying, would be more virtuous than clinging to all your earthly possessions, and trying to frantically finish a will. It would also be more virtuous than if one were to completely disregard everyone that has cared about them over the years because they see their actions as though they do not matter or have worth anymore. A virtuous death is one where the person in question dies in a way that causes an ease among the community that surrounds them. Not that people would be happy that they have died, but to make it known that they have accepted death, and are not afraid to look it in its face. Giving people the ability to also accept that this person will perish and no longer inhabit an earthly experience. A virtuous death does not force the healthcare professionals to try unrelentingly to save the patient through any procedure necessary. It gives the healthcare providers an ease of mind in understanding that they tried what they could in the moment and no longer should waste valuable resources to protect a life that may not survive any longer than if it were healthy in the first place. That is a virtuous death, and is the way we ought to die.

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‘Disability’ Does Not Mean ‘Inhibitor’

Megan Burger

For a nation that proclaims liberty for all, a vulnerable group in the United States lacks the liberty that is promised. The United States has never had a clean record with treating people who are not white, able bodied, Anglo-Saxon, and Christian like humans, and this foul treatment extends toward a specific group of people: people who are born with a disability. The history of how society treats people with disabilities has been poor and continues to need improvement today. Terms to degrade this group still flutter out of the mouths of people who do not understand the insult that comes with the term. People who have a certain part of them that does not function like a “normal” person are often seen as a burden or a curse and potentially abandoned because there is something “wrong” with them. The discussion of how society has treated people with disabilities has never made a true, influential impact, as most discussions today feel like walking on eggshells. This semester, I had the opportunity to volunteer at a local organization that is aimed towards treating people with disabilities the same as anyone else. Pillar is not just an organization, but a community that works to give people with disabilities the support needed to live a life full of liberty and freedom, escaping society’s grasp that pulls them down.

People born with a disability, whether it is a mental disability or a physical disability, have been ostracized from society for as long as the United States has been a country and even longer throughout history. Harmful theories, such as social Darwinism, have supported and condoned the mistreatment of people who are born with attributes that are different from the “typical” baby. Society has been obsessed with idolizing the perfect body and shunning those that do not meet the arbitrary requirements. The United States was formed on the premises of a country that would offer equal opportunity but, “individuals with disabilities were often excluded from immigrating into the original colonies,” (Wohl). The country that promised freedom for all has a catch to it: if you do not look like the people running the country, you will face extreme discrimination. The foundation that was laid made it clear that people with disabilities were not welcomed in the United States. The feeling of animosity towards people with disabilities continues to prevail throughout history and can still be found today. One of the most outrageous acts this country has done towards this group of people was decided in a Supreme Court case in the twentieth century. In *Buck v. Bell*, it was ruled that, “compulsory sterilization of the “unfit”, including the mentally retarded, “for the protection and health of the state,” (Wohl) was a practice that was legally allowed. Not only were people with disabilities ostracized from society, but they were also deemed to be dangerous if they were to carry child because our society did not want to have to deal with

more children being born with disabilities. The treatment of people with disabilities has been an ongoing problem since the earliest civilizations and this injustice has only made minimal improvement within the United States alone in the past century. The work of activism is vital to improve the livelihood of this targeted population.

Norah Fry was a wealthy woman from Bristol, England. Fry attended Cambridge and was a well-educated woman. Coming from a wealthy background the young women used this privilege to help others in need. Learning about the treatment of people with disabilities in Great Britain inspired her to become the champion activist that she is known for. In Great Britain, people with learning and mental disabilities were subjected to workhouses. Fry stated that, “the workhouses were completely unsuited to meet the needs of either children or adults with learning disabilities,” (Russell). What she witnessed in the workhouses was horrifying enough for her to begin advocating for the immediate shutdown of these institutions. Similar to the work done at Pillar, Fry created a ‘colony’ that would provide living spaces for people with disabilities and have the resources needed to properly educate this vulnerable portion of the population. The colony that was established was described as, “a residential college, where young people with learning disabilities would be taught basic farming and horticultural skills appropriate for a rural environment,” (Russell). Fry was focused on not treating these people differently, but instead providing them with the skills they need to have careers of their own.

Strides in the right direction for bettering the lives of people with disabilities have only continued to grow since Fry’s successful advocacy. People with disabilities are able to receive special education catered to the needs required for them to prosper. While there has been great improvement for this group of people in society, there are still pressing issues to be discussed. One issue that has not been adequately discussed is how people with disabilities will live after high school. For twelve years, the education system in the United States provides learning opportunities and a structured life for people with disabilities. Once graduating from high school many people with disabilities do not continue on to a higher education. The parents of these young adults are not always able to devote their entire days helping their children but can no longer rely on a school to provide their children with a productive, learning environment. A unique approach to providing the essential resources for people with disabilities has its roots in Louisville, Kentucky. Pillar is an organization dedicated to providing the structured environment that people with disabilities need. This organization realizes that people with disabilities deserve to live a prosperous life in which their disabilities do not hold them back. A universal goal in today’s society is to live a long, happy life and this “important social goal is to have as many adults as possible be economically and socially productive for as long as possible...more recently, our society has made significant efforts to tear down barriers facing individuals with disabilities,” (Hogan et al.). For a long period of U.S. history, people with disabilities have been excluded from the hopes of living a fulfilling life. Pillar is one organization that has worked towards including people with disabilities into this universal goal.

Pillar contributes to the social change needed in society to properly help people

with disabilities by providing ‘community and economic development’. The Minnesota Campus Compact has developed a social change wheel that illustrates the numerous ways one can be involved. ‘Community and economic development’ are defined by this organization as, “acting to provide economic opportunities and improve social conditions in a sustainable way,” (Minnesota Campus Compact). Pillar offers multiple locations in the Louisville area, as well as in Oldham County. At these locations, a variety of services are offered to help people with disabilities live a life that anyone else in the United States can live. The day programs offer different classes throughout the day that focus on learning different skill sets such as cleaning, laundry, art, and recreational activities. The clients are held responsible and help clean the facility after lunch is served. The day programs also offer day trips to the local Dollar General or even Bath and Body Works. There are no restrictions on how long clients are required to stay, which gives them independence that any other adult would have. Pillar also offers housing for clients to live full-time and share the housing with other clients. The housing provides an even more independent way of living for people with disabilities. Many clients at Pillar even have part-time to full-time jobs that the organization has helped them find. These different aspects of the organization provide economic opportunities for clients as they are able to make their own income. Pillar greatly improves the social conditions that people with disabilities can suffer from by providing a community at every location for clients to make life-long friendships.

While volunteering at Pillar I was able to directly interact with the clients, as well as help with the more administrative side of the daily operation. My volunteer time was either Wednesday or Friday from 12-3 P.M. At Pillar I was under the supervision of Hannah Mylor. Hannah made the decisions as to where I would volunteer and what help I would provide to make sure my volunteer hours were productive for the organization. During this time, I would either help in the office by logging attendance for the billing information, or if the office did not need any additional help, I would help lead activities for the clients or do more mundane tasks such as replace toilet paper in the bathrooms. When comparing my volunteer work at Pillar to the Minnesota Campus Compact, my work consisted of charitable volunteerism, defined as, “addressing immediate needs, most often through social service agencies, churches, or schools,” (Minnesota Campus Compact). While I was not out in the community making direct impacts on the needs of people with disabilities, I was able to help relieve some of the workers from the many tasks they are responsible for while at work. Allowing the main workers who are constantly making a direct impact on the clients at Pillar to have a little less on their plates during a day directly allows the clients to have a more fulfilling experience and receive the resources needed for success.

People with disabilities have suffered from a history of discrimination and constant disadvantages from society because they are deemed not worthy of participating in the average life. Society looks at people with disabilities and judges them by what their bodies can and cannot do. The flaw in this logic is that we fail to realize that just because someone’s body functions differently than what is seen to be normal does not make that person unworthy of the life everyone else is promised. People with disabili-

ties require different services than the typical person, but this does not make them faulty. Instead, people with disabilities should be seen as just as capable as anyone else. Pillar is a vital organization in achieving a more welcoming place in society for people with disabilities. This organization sees through the disability one may have and instead sees the potential and dreams in each client. While there is still more to be accomplished towards improving the lives of people with disabilities, it is never the wrong time to volunteer and have a real impact on communities that need the extra help.

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The Most Dangerous Thing You Can Do In Prison: A Moral Argument For Justice, Not Vengeance

Jillian Sauer

Mass incarceration¹ in the United States has resulted in a prison industrial complex² which houses 2.3 million people in state prisons, federal prisons, juvenile correctional facilities, local jails, and Indian Country jails as well as in military prisons, immigration detention facilities, civil commitment centers, state psychiatric hospitals, and prisons in the U.S. territories.³ Each of these facilities is run differently, has different policies, reports statistics differently, and is managed by a different jurisdiction. Therefore, it would take a much more advanced project undertaken over many years to perform a thorough analysis of the treatment of the aging population of each of these facilities. For purposes of this project, I will instead focus on publicly owned state prisons, specifically in Kentucky. I will not discriminate between male and female prisons, though I will note that there may be differences in the nature of the care needed for each of these subgroups of the population. I will also address issues of race and socio-economic status as they pertain to this issue.

The Bluegrass State is home to 13 state prisons operating under the Commonwealth's Department of Corrections (KDOC). These 13 facilities alone are home to 2,521 individuals over the age of 50.⁴ Of the 13 facilities, the Kentucky State Reformatory in Oldham County houses both the most elderly persons (719) *and* has the greatest percentage of individuals over 50 (43.5%). The Eastern Kentucky Correctional Complex (295) and Luther Luckett Correctional Complex (254) house the second and third

1 Mass incarceration refers to the staggering number of incarcerated persons in the United States compared to other countries. One of the most commonly cited statistics is that the US represents only five percent of the world population but incarcerates twenty five percent of the world's prisoners. This phenomenon is largely due to campaigns such as the war on drugs, and has been related to racism in the United States by theorists such as Michelle Alexander in her book *The New Jim Crow*.

2 Prison Industrial Complex refers to the industrialization of incarceration in the United States. In other words, it criticizes the privatization of prisons and the political influence of the companies that run them.

3 Sawyer, Wendy and Wagner, Peter. "Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2019." PrisonPolicy.org. The Prison Policy Initiative, March 19, 2019. <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/pie2019.html>.

4 Erwin, James et. al., "2017 Annual Report: Kentucky Department of Corrections," Government Report, Kentucky, 2017, <https://corrections.ky.gov/About/researchandstats/Documents/Annual%20Reports/2017%20Annual%20Report.pdf>.

GROWTH IN STATE AND FEDERAL PRISON POPULATION, BY AGE, 1995-2010



Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Prisoner Series, 1995-2010

Note: Based on number of sentenced prisoners under jurisdiction of federal and state correctional authorities with sentences of more than one year.

Figure 1 Graph Provided by Human Rights Watch

most incarcerated elderly, and the Kentucky State Penitentiary (21.79%) and Luther Luckett Correctional Complex (21.18%) house the second and third greatest percentages of incarcerated elderly. Oldham County houses two of the four institutions named above. Overall, individuals over 50 comprise roughly 15% of the population of these 13 KDOC facilities. However, this phenomenon is not limited to prisons in the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

Martina Cartwright writes that “between 1999 and 2012, the number of state and federal prisoners aged 55⁷ or older increased 204%, from 43,300 to 131,500. However, during the same time the number of inmates younger than 55 years of age increased much more slowly, from 1.26 to 1.38 million—an uptick of only 9%.”⁸ Cartwright attributes this to longer sentences, noting that among people age 51 and older who are incarcerated in state facilities, 40.6% are serving sentences of 20 years to life.⁹

The continued imprisonment of elderly incarcerated persons without reason or redemption is a systemic injustice at its core. Prisons are understaffed, underfunded, and unable to properly care for these individuals. In *Estelle v. Gamble* the Supreme Court found that incarcerated persons have a constitutional right to healthcare that is not “deliberately indifferent” to serious medical needs.¹⁰ The facts that led to this case were

5 “Old Behind Bars: The Aging Prison Population in the United States.” NGO Report, Human Rights Watch. United States, 2012, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/usprisons0112webwcover_0.pdf.

6 While Cartwright’s figure (see 9) represents 1999-2012 this graph represents 1995-2010.

7 Federal statistics utilize an age of 55 as the benchmark for an “elderly prisoner”.

8 Cartwright 70.

9 Ibid., 70.

10 *Estelle v. Gamble*, 429 U.S. 97, 104 (1976).

more similar to a workers' compensation claim than to an elder abuse claim, but they laid forth an important precedent nonetheless. While the Courts have not addressed care of elderly persons in prison using the Estelle Standard it is clear that the care being provided to these people is not enough. Some prisons do their best with the resources they have, but this is not always the case. In fact, Cartwright reveals that "[t]he majority of physicians hired to provide care in prison systems generally have restrictions on their medical licenses and practice medicine only in prisons, due in part to prior findings of medical negligence or malpractice in non-prison settings."¹¹ As previously stated, these circumstances cry out for moral action.

The Experience of Elderly Incarcerated Persons

The experience of an incarcerated person is certainly different from the experience of a non-incarcerated person. However, the experience of an elderly incarcerated person is particularly distinct because of the effects of aging on mental and physical health. While on the tour of Kentucky State Reformatory discussed in the introduction of this project, KSR staff members informed us that elderly persons incarcerated in the facility were more susceptible to manipulation, violence, and other dangers than their younger counterparts. Stephen Ginn does an excellent job of outlining the problems faced by elderly incarcerated persons.¹² He writes about how their needs often go unnoticed because they do not pose a significant threat to prison security. However, the physical incapacitation and disability of elderly incarcerated persons means they themselves are at risk for bullying and violence inflicted by younger incarcerated persons. Ginn also notes that because many elderly incarcerated persons have been convicted of sexually violent crimes, other incarcerated persons may generalize this to all elderly incarcerated persons, leading to their being targeted and ostracized based on this stereotype.¹³ For elderly incarcerated persons who also suffer from illnesses such as dementia these problems are magnified.

In 2002 a group of psychologists lead by Dr. Seena Fazel conducted a study of two men incarcerated in the United Kingdom.¹⁴ Both men were over the age of 65, and both had a high likelihood of dementia. Shortened summaries of the interviews conducted by Fazel's team follow:

Case 1: Alex B.¹⁵ is a 69-year-old man who was given a six-year sentence at the age of 66 for incest. Three years after entering prison, he suffered a stroke. The interview with Fazel's team took place four months later. Alex tested with a high likelihood of dementia at the time of the interview and was later diagnosed with vascular dementia. He is completely dependent on others to complete daily tasks and is no longer aware

¹¹ Cartwright 73.

¹² Ginn discusses the incarceration of elderly persons in England and Wales, but many of the problems apply to U.S. prisons as well.

¹³ Ginn, Stephen, "Elderly Prisoners," *British Medical Journal* 345, No. 7879 (2012): 24-27. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41724025>.

¹⁴ Fazel, S., McMillan, J., and O'Donnell, I., "Dementia in Prison: Ethical and Legal Implications," *Journal of Medical Ethics*, 28, No. 3 (2002): 156-159. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27718883>.

¹⁵ Names have been changed for anonymity's sake.

of why he is in prison, or even that he is incarcerated. At the time of his interview, his dementia had progressed to a point where he was unable to answer any of the interviewer's questions.

Case 2: Chris D. is a 78-year-old man serving a life sentence for the rape and murder of a child. He has been either in jail or in prison for more than ten years. In 1999 he was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. At the time of his interview, he had limited mobility and was living on the ground floor due to his inability to use stairs. Chris is able to recall his crime and express remorse.¹⁶

These case studies give example of one individual who is no longer mentally capable of committing a crime and one who is no longer physically capable of committing a crime. Both men have been convicted of truly horrible crimes, and of course there is a great deal of sympathy owed to the victims and their families. However, Fazel and his team go on to explain why they believe the continued incarceration of these two men to be unethical.

Fazel begins by giving background on each of the schools of thought discussed in the introduction to this paper but make an interesting point when discussing rehabilitation. Fazel writes "[r]ehabilitation through offender treatment programmes [sic], education, and work are of little relevance as they require cognitive abilities incommensurate with dementia."¹⁷ I will address this criticism more in depth later in this paper, but here I would like to note that there is a difference between a rehabilitative approach and a redemptive approach. Redemption is a theological approach which seeks to validate the dignity of the person and to restore them to God's path, while rehabilitation is a sociological approach which ultimately seeks to return a person to society. Fazel utilizes the political philosopher Robert Nozick to explain that the societal goal for punishment is for the incarcerated person "to know that others disagree and that this is why they are being punished..."¹⁸ This alone makes the incarceration of the individual described in case one unethical, as AB is unable to understand where he is, why he is there, or what is being asked of him. However, Fazel notes that Nozick's understanding is not the sole purpose of punishment. When it comes to the individual in case two, Fazel utilizes the Human Rights Act of 1998 to ask whether it is ethical to incarcerate a person with severe physical chronic illness. Fazel writes "Article 3 forbids inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment of those in detention."¹⁹ The European Court found that governments owe high levels of medical care to chronically sick incarcerated individuals under this article.²⁰

The Human Rights Watch offers a less clinical collection of experiences. The first is that of Cedric McDonald²¹, who is incarcerated in a Mississippi facility. Cedric is a 65 year old man who worked as a truck driver before being sentenced to 20 years in

16 Fazel 156.

17 *Ibid.*, 157.

18 *Ibid.*, 158.

19 *Ibid.*, 158.

20 *Ibid.*, 158.

21 Names have again been changed for the sake of anonymity.

prison in 1998 for the second degree manslaughter of his wife. Cedric has had a kidney transplant and receives dialysis three times a week. At the time of his interview, Cedric did not have any teeth. Though he has dentures he is unable to afford denture cream from the commissary so he does not use them. The dialysis has rendered him unable to work, so he relies on his sister to send him money. The building where Cedric is housed is without air conditioning. Like many elderly persons, Cedric has difficulty coping with extremes in temperature. Despite this, Cedric reports that not much is done to help elderly incarcerated persons cope with extreme Mississippi temperatures. "It's so hot in the building. I want to cool off. Fans don't do much. It cools in the evening. You get one cup of ice after 12, none in the morning, and two cups in the evening."²²

The Human Rights Watch also shares the story of Wilma Collins, a woman incarcerated in a Colorado facility. Wilma is 82 years old and was sentenced to thirty years in prison for a violent crime. Wilma herself refused to be interviewed, but other inmates and staff confessed that Wilma is ornery and difficult. She resides in the prison infirmary where the facility attempts to provide care similar to that of a nursing home. Staff report that Wilma is often confused, for instance claiming that she keeps a pet rabbit in her bed. One correctional officer says she is "erratic, demented, and sometimes so abusive she puts aides to tears." Still, considering her condition he asks, "what would be the point of writing her up for verbal abuse?"²³

Finally, the Human Rights Watch chronicles the experience of Bonnie Frampton, who is incarcerated in a Colorado facility. Bonnie's incarceration began at the age of 65. She was given a 100 year sentence for conspiracy for murder. She describes life behind bars as a "culture shock". She reports that most of the staff leave her alone because they "know she'll stand up for her rights," but that she still "risks retaliation because staff get even." Some examples of abuse and mistreatment undergone by Bonnie include: being written up for assault when she put her hands up to block a mammogram due to tender breasts, being forced to stand outside in the pill line despite the weather, and being denied extra blankets in the winter despite the extreme cold.²⁴

In its conclusion, the Human Rights Watch found that prison approaches to the difficulties faced by elderly incarcerated persons range from transfer to a hospital to housing in a special unit (which is the solution utilized by the KDOC). The Human Rights Watch does not mince words when it says "Housing the elderly is a daily game of musical chairs that can shortchange individual elderly persons while it bedevils corrections officers."²⁵ This game is unconscionable and demonstrates a larger willingness to ignore the abuse and neglect of society's most vulnerable.

²² "Old Behind Bars", Human Rights Watch, 49.

²³ *Ibid.*, 62.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 65.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 51.

CHAPTER ONE

An Argument from Catholic Social Teaching

Catholic social teaching (or “CST”) provides a vital theological lens to the incarceration of elderly persons and the basic principles needed to develop a redemptive approach. According to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB):

Catholic social teaching is a central and essential element of our faith... It is a teaching founded on the life and words of Jesus Christ, who came ‘to bring glad tidings to the poor . . . liberty to captives . . . recovery of sight to the blind’ (Lk 4:18-19), and who identified himself with ‘the least of these,’ the hungry and the stranger (cf. Mt 25:45).²⁶

God actively aligns with the marginalized over the privileged. Throughout Scripture God advocates for the widows, orphans, and strangers, and condemns those who would do them harm. CST aims to serve the needs of these three groups through a combination of scriptural interpretation and Church doctrine. Further, as the USCCB states, CST is rooted in the prophetic tradition found in the Hebrew scriptures. CST is at the core of the Catholic faith. As such, it is integral to develop a well-rounded understanding of this tradition before attempting to understand a theological argument for moral action in response to the circumstances addressed in the introduction of this project.

Prophetic Tradition

Prophetic tradition stems from the writings of prophets in the Hebrew Bible such as Isaiah and Jeremiah. The prophetic books act as God’s voice on earth, and often work to course-correct earthly societies that have fallen into patterns of sin and evil. The prophetic works often make references to imprisonment, whether it be the prophets themselves or incarceration in general. One well-known passage that discusses imprisonment is Isaiah 42. In the first part of Isaiah (chapters 1-35) God warns Israel that if they do not reform their ways God will punish them through an Assyrian invasion.²⁷ However, in Isaiah 40-55 God changes God’s tone, adopting a more restorative and comforting message.²⁸ Isaiah 42 is one such comforting passage. Isaiah 42:6-7 reads:

I am the Lord, I have called You in righteousness, I will also hold You by the hand and watch over You, And I will appoint You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the nations, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the dungeon and those who dwell in darkness from the prison.²⁹

Isaiah 42:6-7 are particularly relevant when discussing the plight of elderly incarcerated persons for two reasons. First, because they refer to “open[ing] blind eyes”. In

26 “Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions,” Church Publication, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1998, <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/sharing-catholic-social-teaching-challenges-and-directions.cfm>.

27 Jones, Edward Allen, III, and Alan Scharn. “Prison and the Bible: Current Practices and Reflections from Isaiah.” *International Journal of Public Theology* 10, no. 2 (2016): 211–31. doi:10.1163/15697320-12341443.

28 Jones Ibid, 223.

29 Isaiah 42:6-7, New American Standard Version.

order to understand what is being done here, it is important to understand the language of the Hebrew Bible word by word. This is because the original language was not English but rather Hebrew. Because of this, reading the Hebrew Bible and relying solely on the English meaning misses what is at the heart of what the prophet is calling for. For example, the word “blind”, or “*iw·ro·wt*” in the original Hebrew, is used figuratively. In other words, the author is not referring to individuals who are literally blind. The word “open”, or “*lip·qo·ah*” in the original Hebrew, is used in the same sense as when you open your eyes after sleeping. Based on the original Hebrew, this passage can be understood to mean figuratively waking those who have been asleep to the problems of the marginalized. Contemporary society is familiar with this concept (see: “woke culture”). In essence, this means educating those who are unaware about the pleas and plights of the marginalized. The second reason this passage is relevant for this project is that it is a direct call from God. This is not unique to the prophets—they do, after all, act as God’s voice on earth—but it is important because it is a call from the Creator to free those in prison. It is debated whether this means a literal freeing of the incarcerated or a more spiritual freeing through penance and rehabilitation, but regardless of the specific meaning this passage makes it clear that justice for incarcerated persons involves some kind of liberation. When dealing with the population of elderly incarcerated persons this means raising the question of whether incarceration while mentally and/or physically ill meets this call for just liberation. If it does not, that means the act of incarcerating those persons goes directly against what God asks. Therefore, in order to apply the prophetic tradition to a moral response for elderly incarcerated persons, you must utilize a response which focuses on both educating the unaware and liberating the incarcerated.

CST seeks to continue the prophetic tradition within the life of the church by speaking out against evils, especially systemic injustices such as racism and wealth inequality. Though the Church remains controversial on some political issues, there is a long history of both lay persons and clergy speaking out against other injustices, not only in their own parishes or to their own traditions, but in a larger societal context. For example, Sister Helen Prejean, a member of the Congregation of Saint Joseph, has become an incredibly vocal and well-known advocate for individuals who have been placed on death row. Because CST is so integral to the Catholic tradition, and because the plight of elderly individuals who are incarcerated certainly qualifies as the plight of the Biblical “least of these”, it is vital that you explore arguments from CST which call on us to develop a theological lens and response to the incarceration of elderly persons. You can do this by looking at existing Church publications on incarcerated and elderly individuals and on compassionate healthcare.

Existing Church Publications

Incarceration

In November of 2000, the USCCB released a statement on incarceration titled “Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice”.³⁰ This statement was the bishops’ attempt to tackle growing concern over the effect of crime on both the Church and society. The statement begins “our response to crime in the United States is a moral test for our nation and a challenge for our Church.”³¹ The USCCB’s statement revolves around seeking a redemptive model of justice, which recognizes “that both victims and offenders are children of god”.³² In other words, it calls for a response focusing on “the fundamental starting point for all Catholic social teaching... the defense of human life and dignity”.³³ To encapsulate, the dignity of the person is primary even when that person has violated the dignity of another; God loves all of us unconditionally regardless of sentence.

The USCCB does recognize the paradoxical nature of this call. Specifically, they recognize the need to “establish and enforce laws to protect people and to advance the common good.”³⁴ However, the Bishops do not use this paradox as a free pass to ignore the suffering of incarcerated individuals. They write “[a]t the same time, a Catholic approach does not give up on those who violate those laws. You believe that both victims and offenders are children of God. ... **You seek justice, not vengeance.**”³⁵ (emphasis added). In this approach, the USCCB does not require a complete dismissal of the retributive and utilitarian schools. In fact, they appear to deem both schools necessary for protecting society. However, they also emphasize rehabilitation and do not explicitly give either purpose more weight. Instead, what they do is establish these purposes as being *simultaneously* necessary. Wherever continued incarceration fails to meet one or both of these purposes, it can be deemed unnecessary and even sinful. While I understand the merits of the Bishops’ argument, I disagree with this approach when it comes to elderly incarcerated persons. As discussed above, many of the individuals housed in KSR’s dementia ward were not even aware of why or even that they were in prison. I would argue that when dealing with a terminally ill or mentally incapacitated individual there is no place for the retributive or utilitarian schools. Punishment does serve a purpose, but not when the person being “punished” is dying or unable to process the world around them. At that point, punishment serves no purpose beyond appeasing the punitive desires of society.

The Bishops go on to address the question of what rehabilitation looks like from a Catholic approach. They turn to Catholicism’s rich tradition of forgiveness, redemp-

30 “Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice,” Church Publication, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2000, <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/criminal-justice-restorative-justice/crime-and-criminal-justice.cfm>.

31 USCCB (2000), *Ibid*.

32 *Ibid*.

33 *Ibid*.

34 *Ibid*.

35 *Ibid*.

tion, and restoration through the sacrament of Penance. According to the Bishops, “the four traditional elements of Penance have much to teach us about taking responsibility, making amends, and reintegrating into community.”³⁶ These four elements are contrition, confession, satisfaction, and absolution.³⁷ First, the sinner must truly and fully regret their wrongdoing (contrition). Next, they must acknowledge this wrongdoing and take full responsibility (confession). They must then show some sort of external effort to make amends (satisfaction). Finally, the sinner is forgiven by Jesus with the help of the clergy and the community (absolution). All four elements can also be applied to the rehabilitative process behind bars. It is vital to note that all four of these elements require a certain level of mental awareness and cognitive ability on the part of the “sinner”. The USCCB demands that “[p]unishment must have a constructive and redemptive purpose.”³⁸ Where this is true, the incarceration of elderly persons is simply punishment for punishment’s sake, and there is no question that punishment without greater purpose is a sin.

Elderly Persons

CST also has a tradition of calling for care and respect of the elderly. In 1999 Pope John Paul II wrote a Letter to the Elderly.³⁹ In this letter, Pope John Paul II writes that “[m]an remains for ever made ‘in the image of God’ (cf. *Gen* 1:26), and each stage of life has its own beauty and its own tasks.”⁴⁰ He goes on to give several examples in which advanced age is revered and honored throughout scripture, citing both Old and New Testament examples. He seeks to empower these individuals through scripture and through their role as “[g]uardians of shared memory.”⁴¹ Of course, he acknowledges societal failure to assign the appropriate reverence to these guardians, writing:

[i]f you stop to consider the current situation, you see that among some peoples old age is esteemed and valued, while among others this is much less the case, due to a mentality which gives priority to immediate human usefulness and productivity. Such an attitude frequently leads to contempt for the later years of life, while older people themselves are led to wonder whether their lives are still worthwhile.⁴²

Pope John Paul II sought a solution to this problem. He wrote,

There is an urgent need to recover a correct perspective on life as a whole. The correct perspective is that of eternity, for which life at every phase is a meaningful preparation.⁴³

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

39 Pope John Paul II. “Letter of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to the Elderly,” Letter. From the Vatican. 1999. http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1999/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_01101999_elderly.html. (Accessed: November 1, 2019).

40 Pope John Paul II (1999), Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

This new perspective focuses on the respect demanded by the inherent dignity of the person. Pope John Paul II does not leave much room for interpretation: both scripture and the Catholic requirement that human dignity be recognized and valued mean that you must view aging individuals not as a burden to be ignored but as valued and revered members of society.

Health Care

In addition to teachings on incarcerated and elderly individuals, CST also calls for recognition of healthcare as a human right, including healthcare for the terminally ill. In 2018, the Catholic Health Association of the United States sent a letter to the US Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, & Pensions.⁴⁴ In this letter, the CHA urged both the chair and the ranking member of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, & Pensions to consider supporting a bill, which sought improved palliative care⁴⁵ and hospice resources. The CHA wrote “[a]ll persons, regardless of their medical condition, possess inherent dignity and are worthy of respect, protection, and care.”⁴⁶ Compassionate healthcare cannot be denied because a person is terminally ill, incarcerated or elderly. Once again, the dignity of the person requires that each and every individual be given the proper care and attention they need in order to fully recognize their worth.

As mentioned above, this call to healthcare is not unique to CST. The Supreme Court has deemed adequate healthcare for incarcerated persons a right. However, the Supreme Court has not yet addressed the issue of adequate healthcare for elderly individuals. Further, there is little doubt in my mind that the criminal justice system sees adequate and compassionate healthcare as being dually necessary. Martina Cartwright reveals the troubling fact that some doctors found guilty of medical malpractice are allowed to practice on a limited license that limits them to working in prisons. The United Nations has also spoken up about the necessity of health care. In the UN’s *Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners*, published in 1990, the UN states that “prisoners shall have access to the health services available in the country without discrimination on the grounds of their legal situation.”⁴⁷ The use of limited medical licenses acts as a form of discrimination based on legal situation. This practice is a perfect example of the lack of compassionate healthcare in the American prison system. CST demands health care that recognizes the dignity of the person, and it is clear that this demand is

44 Archbishop Timothy Michael Cardinal Dolan, Most Rev. Frank J. Dewane, and Sister Carol Keehan, DC. “USCCB-Catholic Health Association Letter to Senate on Palliative Care and Hospice Education Training Act,” Letter. From USCCB. August 6, 2018. <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/health-care/usccb-cha-letter-to-senate-on-palliative-care-2018-08-06.cfm>. (Accessed: November 1, 2019).

45 From Dolan et. al., Ibid, (2018): “[p]alliative care is focused on providing patients with relief from the symptoms, pain and stress of a serious illness- whatever the diagnosis- with the goal of improving quality of life for both the patient and the family.”

46 Ibid.

47 United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, “Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners,” General Assembly Resolution 45/111, United Nations, December 14 1990. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/basicprinciplestreatmentofprisoners.aspx>.

not being met in the current system.

An Argument from Theologians

While the USCCB represents the official stance of the American Catholic Church on this issue there is also a well of academic publications to draw from. In 2011, Amy Levad, a theology professor from the University of Saint Thomas, published an article entitled “I Was in Prison and You Visited Me: a Sacramental Approach to Rehabilitative and Restorative Justice.”⁴⁸ This article provides an academic analysis of *Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration*⁴⁹ and Andrew Skotnicki’s critique of the work. Levad begins by acknowledging the lack of Catholic Church and theologian publications at the time addressing the crisis of mass incarceration. In fact, she points out that there were only two in existence at the time she published her article: the USCCB publication discussed above and an article written by Andrew Skotnicki in response to the bishops. Levad chooses to bolster the bishop’s argument over Skotnicki’s.

I have already provided my own analysis of the USCCB publication above. However, before going into Levad’s argument, it is important to understand Skotnicki’s article. Andrew Skotnicki is a theology professor at Manhattan College in the Bronx, New York. This article, titled: Foundations Once Destroyed: The Catholic Church and Criminal Justice⁵⁰, tackles the issue of criminal justice and the church using a two-pronged approach. First, Skotnicki uses historical analysis to analyze the Church’s position on incarceration. Second, he applies this analysis to a critique of contemporary Church teachings on criminal justice, specifically the USCCB publication discussed above. Before going into his argument, Skotnicki explains that he commends the attempt by the USCCB to address the problem of mass incarceration while noting that the attempt is “not always sufficiently informed about the beast it is attempting to tame.”⁵¹ Skotnicki’s stance here mirrors my response to the USCCB’s publication. Their 2000 attempt to address the issue of mass incarceration is, as Skotnicki puts it, commendable, if flawed. Two, I think it is important to understand where Skotnicki’s critiques come from. From the beginning, he makes it clear that his criticisms come more from a methodological standpoint than from an ideological one. After all, Skotnicki himself is Catholic. That is not where his problem with the USCCB publication comes from. His problem comes from what he sees as “interpretive problems” in the USCCB publication. Skotnicki “guide[s] his] own analysis with the insight that the response to crime and the treatment of the criminal in each age are, at the deepest level,

48 Levad, Amy. “‘I Was in Prison and You Visited Me’: A Sacramental Approach to Rehabilitative and Restorative Criminal Justice.” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 31, no. 2 (2011): 93–112. <https://search-ebscohostcom.libproxy.bellarmino.edu>.

49 For the sake of brevity, throughout this section *Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice* shall be referred to as “the USCCB publication”.

50 Skotnicki, Andrew. “Foundations Once Destroyed: The Catholic Church and Criminal Justice.” *Theological Studies* 65, no. 4 (2004): 792–816. <https://search-ebscohostcom.libproxy.bellarmino.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=ATLA0001429671&login.asp&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

51 Skotnicki, *Ibid*, 793.

driven by metaphors or social portraits of the offender.”⁵² Skotnicki’s main criticism of the USCCB publication is that it relies on an incorrect image of prison and of the imprisoned person.

Skotnicki goes on to explore the Catholic tradition regarding crime and punishment, from Augustine to the USCCB publication. He draws several main themes from historical trends, namely order, justice, and atonement.⁵³ He points out that both St. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas emphasized these three concepts in a retributive fashion. Augustine favored them in pursuit of earthly peace, while Aquinas saw punishment as “medicinal”, as intended to allow those who have committed acts of wrongdoing to find virtue. Skotnicki argues that “both Augustine and Aquinas lend decisive foundational support to the Catholic justification for punishment: the violation of responsibility owed to one another, to the social peace, and to God.”⁵⁴ In other words, the Catholic approach to criminal justice and incarceration has always relied on elements of both the retributive and utilitarian schools. However, Skotnicki also makes it clear that “[t]he historical teaching is also remarkably consistent: the rehabilitation of the offender and his or her eventual reincorporation into the ecclesial and social body is the goal of punishment.”⁵⁵ Catholic social teaching has always demanded a redemptive approach, even as it emphasizes elements of the retributive and utilitarian schools.

After offering this analysis of historical theologians’ approach to punishment Skotnicki moves to address two contemporary areas of concern: the foundational image of both the prison and Christ as prisoner, and the Church’s interpretation of contemporary penal policy. In order to address the issue of the foundational images, Skotnicki relies on an exploration of monastic prisons. The monastic prison was used as a method to guide those who had committed wrongdoings towards redemption. This tradition is derived from practices in the Gospel of Matthew where it falls on the community to confront evildoers by either encouraging repentance and reform or shunning them. According to Skotnicki, “This does not seem to be a repudiation of the willingness to forgive, but a reminder to the wayward that they must admit their fault, do penance, and seek to be reconciled to a community that desires their reincorporation.”⁵⁶ The monastic prison, then, emphasizes redemption, but also emphasizes personal responsibility in redemption. Monastic prisons were not without their harsh elements, but Skotnicki makes it clear that their goal of redemption was more in line with the mission of Christ than the retributive and utilitarian approaches. Further, Skotnicki ties this back to the USCCB publication by arguing that this balance of the “compensatory and restorative ends of punishment... [has] been weakened”⁵⁷ by the USCCB publication. Specifically, Skotnicki criticizes the bishops by saying that they “cannot help but adopt a shallow

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid, 796.

54 Ibid, 797.

55 Ibid, 799.

56 Ibid, 802.

57 Ibid, 809.

reading of the role of retribution.”⁵⁸ This is where Levad’s criticism of Skotnicki begins.

Levad’s essay “challenges Skotnicki... by proposing that the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Penance, provide a stronger basis in Catholicism... in ways that foster rehabilitation and restore justice while also reforming broken systems and promoting social justice.”⁵⁹ In other words, Levad argues that the Bishops’ emphasis on the sacraments does not ignore the role of retribution but rather offers an alternative. She breaks Skotnicki’s argument down into four questions: (1) who are the offenders, (2) what is the justification for punishing criminal offenders, (3) what is the end at which forcible intervention aims, and (4) by what means will the end of punishment be accomplished?⁶⁰ Skotnicki’s disagreement with the Bishops, and Levad’s disagreement with Skotnicki, lies in the fourth question. Levad recognizes several problems with the use of a sacramental approach, namely “the privatization and industrialization of Christian worship practices”.⁶¹

However, Levad also encourages a full consideration of the importance of the sacraments in rehabilitation and redemption. She argues that the Eucharist and Penance can help guide those convicted of criminal offenses towards redemption, thus fulfilling both the Bishops’ and Skotnicki’s proposed goal. Levad calls on Catholics to make the Eucharist central in their response, arguing that the Eucharist and Penance are intrinsically intertwined and that “[e]mphasizing the centrality of the Eucharist in Catholic tradition may help provide stronger support for the US bishops’ insistence ... the enduring potential within all people, including victims and offenders.”⁶² The Eucharist is key in Levad’s response to the existing criminal justice system, and in her approach to redemption for incarcerated persons.

Having reviewed the responses of the USCCB, Andrew Skotnicki, and Amy Levad, I tend to agree with Levad’s approach. Hers is more in depth than the USCCB’s and more forgiving than Andrew Skotnicki. Further, Levad’s approach fits best with the redemption of elderly incarcerated persons in particular. Skotnicki’s emphasis on retribution does not apply where the person incarcerated is no longer physically or mentally capable of committing acts of wrongdoing, and the Bishops begin on the right track but still rely too heavily on the retributive factor. Retribution is important when discussing the general prison population, particularly those found guilty of violent or deadly offenses.⁶³ However, where the incarcerated person has a debilitating illness a sacramental approach is best to meet the goal of redemption. Further, this sacramental approach could be enacted through a guardianship or early release program, without

58 Ibid, 810.

59 Levad 93.

60 Levad, Ibid, 98.

61 Ibid, 101.

62 Ibid., 103.

63 It is important to note here that the conversation of retribution for non-violent crimes is an entirely different matter, and that an examination of the goal of incarceration for non-violent offences is also necessary. After all, when a crime is only a crime as a result of intense lobbying by certain political groups or because of a need to appear “tough on [X issue]” it could be argued that retribution only serves to meet a political end and not to encourage the health and welfare of the public.

requiring further incarceration and denial of adequate health care.

Language in CST

Because it places such a prominent emphasis on the dignity of the person, CST requires a careful use of language, especially when discussing marginalized groups. Even outside the tradition of CST the language we use carries a tremendous impact. For example, though the term “African-American” is typically considered politically correct some organizations have voiced that it is not always an accurate descriptor. For instance, some black people may not be American citizens. The National Association of Black Journalists advises asking the individual person their preference but suggests using “black” if you are unsure. However, it also advises against using “black” as a noun, suggesting instead that you use it as an adjective (for example, “black person”).⁶⁴ This is just one example of how the language used to refer to marginalized groups has taken a front seat in contemporary social justice. Therefore, it is impossible to continue a discourse surrounding elderly incarcerated persons without including a discussion of the language used to do so.

Both Martina Cartwright and the USCCB use the word “offender” to describe an incarcerated person. Cartwright takes it one step further and uses the phrase “elderly offender” throughout her article to refer to elderly incarcerated persons. My issue with these terms is two-fold. First, much like the retributive model, the use of the word “offender” is problematic because it implies intrinsic guilt and because it reduces the individual to their worst moment. When I say intrinsic guilt, I mean it implies that the person not only committed this act, but that they are at their core a criminal person. However, I would argue that no person is inherently criminal, nor are human beings capable of being evil at their core. Criminal acts typically come about as a result of some combination of two things: societal and economic factors or an imbalance of brain chemistry that suggests neurodivergence rather than intrinsic criminality. My goal is to argue for a term that encompasses who these individuals are as victims of a carceral system. In order to develop a proper theological lens through which to examine the plight of elderly incarcerated individuals it is critical to use a term which does just that.

Even the term “Silver Tsunami” has the potential to be problematic as mentioned in the introduction to this project. While it is certainly a catchy way to describe the growing population of elderly incarcerated individuals, it should be noted that when discussing marginalized groups, the focus should not be on finding the catchiest phrase. I understand that the population of elderly incarcerated individuals is growing rather quickly, and that there are certainly logistical issues associated with this growth. My main criticism of the term is the implication that elderly incarcerated persons are a destructive force rather than people to be treated with compassion. Tsunamis swell from the sea floor and demolish entire coastal towns and cities. They create devastating economic damages and are emotionally traumatizing. To refer to elderly incarcerated

64 “NABJ Style Guide A.” NABJ.org. National Association of Black Journalists, Accessed: November 19, 2019. <https://www.nabj.org/page/styleguideA>.

individuals as a tsunami is to imply that their existence is a threat. It is to reduce them to an economic burden, and to suggest that they are a force working against society that has the potential to destroy it. This term completely rejects the principle of human dignity in favor of economic and societal fear. While the continued incarceration of these people is problematic in its own way, as this thesis discusses at length, it is the act of incarceration and not the individuals themselves that is destructive. In other words, I take issue with referring to the individuals as a tsunami. It is possible to criticize the conditions which these individuals are subjugated to without implying that the individuals themselves are a destructive force. Even though “Silver Tsunami” has been widely used in the academic discourse surrounding elderly incarcerated individuals, I reject the notion that this means it can and should be used in a theological response to the needs of these individuals. In order to respond with compassion, it is necessary to develop a more careful and precise phrase, one which recognizes that it is the incarceration and not the people which poses a threat.

Throughout this project, I have used some form of the term “elderly incarcerated individuals” to describe the group whose position I seek to address. I chose this term because I believe it mirrors the recommendation of the NABJ mentioned above. Specifically, it uses “elderly” and “incarcerated” as an adjective. I use the words “elderly” and “aging” interchangeably but made every effort to avoid the term “older”. My goal was to find a term that accurately describes the group I am addressing without being reductive or simplistic. In doing this, I hope to achieve the CST mission of recognizing the inherent dignity of the individual.

Conclusion

CST requires that you recognize the dignity of individuals who are elderly and incarcerated at every turn. You cannot deem them unworthy based on age, sentence, or diagnosis. Our theological lens cannot be one of vengeance or punishment for punishment’s sake. Rather, it must be rooted in empathy and compassion, and must consistently seek to uphold the worth and dignity of each and every individual. You cannot ignore these individuals because they are “invisible” in our society. CST demands our moral action in response to these circumstances, and it demands that this moral action pursue justice, dignity, and redemption in equal parts. This demand is not new. It is found in the Hebrew Bible through the works of the prophets. Further, CST contains calls for the distinct groups of elderly persons and incarcerated persons, though it does so separately. For these reasons, there exists an argument from Scripture and from CST for the use of a theological lens to address the plight of elderly incarcerated persons.

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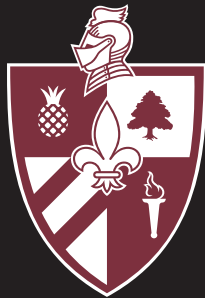
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