



# **DARE**

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# SCOPE

DARE is a theological journal of Holy Trinity College, an elite school of theology for both laity and religious. It belongs to the Catholic University of Zimbabwe Faculty of theology Harare, Zimbabwe.

The word DARE is a Shona term, which refers to a meeting place for discussion and to some extent, a tribunal of ideas. Let the spelling not confuse you, the reader, with the English ‘dare’, which means to have courage to do something, or with the Latin verb ‘dare’ meaning to give.

As a pavilion for discussion, the journal’s primary objective is to ensure dialogue by:

- Stimulating artistic, religious, cultural and social talents in writing.
- Promoting theological reflection.
- Providing an effective channel of communication between Holy Trinity College and the People of God.

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## **Editorial**

The previous issue of Dare, ‘**Faith Seeking Understanding**’, provided a collection of theological reflections which served the purpose of deepening faith, via a clear comprehension of the Christian faith. Nevertheless, while deliberating and reflecting the direction this edition should take, the Editorial Board of Dare would not be indifferent to the impact and effects of the novel COVID-19 pandemic and natural disasters in our midst. In his encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti* – a letter on Fraternity and Social Friendship, the Holy Father, Pope Francis begins by stating that Saint Francis of Assis “felt himself a brother to the sun, the sea and the wind, yet he knew that he was even closer to those of his own flesh” (2). The worldwide tragedy, COVID-19 pandemic has by showing no exclusivity momentarily revived the fundamental value that we are really a global community (32). Likewise, other disasters like Cyclones Idai and Kenneth, floods, landslides, among other calamities awakened us from slumber to realise our need and concern for the other and the environment. Thus, the pandemic and calamities broke all racial, tribal, cultural, economic, social, and religious barriers and demarcations. They revealed once more the ineluctable and critical awareness to live in harmony with each other and our environment. As such, inspired by the awareness that we are a global community, this year’s edition, **Continuity and Novelty Amidst Challenges: COVID-19 and Natural Disasters** seeks to reflect deeper on the impact and effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and natural disasters on human lives, faith and evangelisation as Christians. Hence, different contributors to this present edition confirm that the presence of the pandemic in our midst has indubitably taught and still call humanity to adopt new styles of life and new means of evangelisation.

The articles in this issue take various theological dimensions and so they are divided into five parts: Sacred Scriptures, Ecclesiology and Missiology, Fundamental Moral Theology, Christian Anthropology and Environmental issues. The first section of the journal offers topics on Sacred Scriptures. From this section we encounter how Sacred Scriptures would chiefly assist us in understanding humanity in the midst of COVID-19. Essentially, from a scriptural viewpoint, one would wonder if parallels can be drawn between Covid-19 pandemic and epidemics found

in the Hebrew Bible. **Pat Mullins** explores **what the Bible might have to Say about Covid-19**. As such, he begins by asserting that Covid-19 is a recently identified virus and there was no exact equivalent in Biblical times. He highlights that epidemics of different kinds were known in those times, however, and parallels can be drawn between some of the symptoms, effects and short-term or long-term consequences of those epidemics and the current situation resulting from Covid-19. Accordingly, he shows such parallels.

From another scriptural perspective, the Book of Job deals with various questions such as theodicy, the justice of the Lord, suffering of just persons and retribution. As a result, this book is very relevant in today's world as it touches on contemporary problems. It is in this light that **Underson Musina** discusses the possible contribution of the Book of Job to the pastoral care of the sick, particularly the Covid-19 patients. Ultimately, the author highlights that the most important suggestion from the book is that sickness (Covid-19 included) comes not as a punishment from God and that God heals and restores his people at his appointed time in his own way. In the article, **COVID-19 and the Mark of the Beast in the Book of Revelation**, **Tadios Mandava** tries to find out whether or not there is a link between the 'mark of the beast' mentioned in the Book of Revelation 13:16-18 and the Coronavirus vaccine. He argues that recently, some people would want to believe that there is a fulfilment of the vision of John at Patmos. Arguing further, he states that there are several interpretations given so far to the meaning of the beast represented by the number '666'. Some of the interpretations pursue their own agendas which are far from the context from which this biblical text was written. Against this backdrop, he aims at providing a detailed exegesis as to the meaning of the "mark of the beast". In this piece of work, he proves how the number '666' came to be. **Lefani Francis Mwanza** explores the various meanings of **wound in The Spiritual Canticle of St. John of the Cross**, noting that John uses a number of images as symbols to communicate the realities of the Spiritual Journey. Wound as a symbol in The Spiritual Canticle has a plurality of meanings and this project only concentrated on four of these meanings. The author shows how John transforms complicated and complex concepts of the Spiritual Life into

beautiful, comprehensible and applicable themes through poetry rich in symbolism.

The second section deals with issues to do with Ecclesiology and Missiology. The articles reflect on the responsibility of the Church in the midst of the current challenges and offer some recommendations with regard to how humanity can continue practicing their faith in moments of different challenges. As it is the Church's mandate to read the signs of the times, there is a need for adopting new ways of evangelising. Subsequently, one of the roles of the Church in this current Covid-19 pandemic is being the **physician of the soul**. The medical practitioners are glorified during this period but spiritual physicians are rarely recognised. Using the writing of St Gregory De Fuga, **Dr. Sigurd Lefsrud** points out that there is a need to strike a balance between the safety of the body and spiritual matters. He states that during this Covid-19 era caring of the body is vital; however, the caring of the soul should not be overlooked. He acknowledges the physical harm that has been brought by Covid-19 pandemic and goes further to question the spiritual harm it has caused also. He then asserts that the Church has a role of being a witness of hope, courage, trust in God and it should continue being the physician of the souls through her ministers.

Discussing on the effects of Covid-19 pandemic the authors, **Shumba Sibiziwe (Dr)**, **Mswazie Jonathan ((Dr)**, and **Mpofu Molyn (Dr)**, note that on the one hand, negatively Covid-19 has affected religious belief and practices institutionally together with their ritual aspects such as worship, sacramental life, birth and marriage rites in Matabeleland South Province of Zimbabwe. They argue further that Covid-19 has also affected religious beliefs and practices in a doctrinal, spiritual, emotional and psychological way. On the other hand, positively, the pandemic has led some religions to draw closer to the Supreme Being as their members are praying and fasting for the end of the catastrophe. The authors concluded by giving some recommendations and encouraging Christians and African Traditional Religion members to continue trusting in God as he is omnipotence. **Lovemore Gutu** explores the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Church's vocation to evangelize. He recognises the importance of social media in carrying out the pastoral care of the people of God, and

also points out some of the difficulties some local Churches are facing in that regard. The author, therefore, suggests that **Small Christian Communities** should become more operational now than ever before. In her article, **Dr. Annah Shamiso Mandeya** points out the trauma the Covid-19 has brought into the lives of people, both socially and spiritually. She also highlights the problem of stigmatization the victims of the pandemic are facing in their families. She, therefore, suggests that humanity should learn from the remarkable resilience of HIV, by way of living with the Covid-19, and embracing the various challenges that come along with it. In order to mitigate such challenges, the Church has to find a way to be close to her members. History has it that the Church as an institute has been viewed as a hub of love, unity and harmony, among other aspects. **Dr. Doreen Mashava** holds this same idea as she discusses **the relevance of the Church as an institution in the modern world**. She asserts that the Church is a family which is an important cell of society since it is there to promote harmony. The Church as mother is there to nurture her children, give them counsel and strength on how to deal with various contemporary challenges such as the Covid-19 pandemic.

Over the years, several Popes expounded the Catholic Social Teaching through various encyclicals. One such encyclical is the *Mater et Magistra* by Pope John XXIII (1961). As such, **Annah Kembo** in her article **the role of the Church's Magisterium in the development of social thought** discusses the role of the Magisterium in the development of the social thought, in light of *Mater et Magistra*. She reflects mainly about social justice and the Church's role, as Mother and Teacher, in safeguarding human dignity in the society. Also, many families in Zimbabwe have been affected by a number of challenges, and these include, unity, love and respect, to mention but a few. According to **Gift B Chinyadza**, these challenges impacted immensely on some foundational values of family life. Hence, understanding the doctrine of the Most Holy Trinity according to Augustine would help one to know how God relates to humanity and how in turn humanity relates to God and to others who were created by the same Triune God. As such, the author explores Augustine's theological understanding of the Holy Trinity focusing on the unity and distinction of the Three Persons of the Trinity and applies it to family life

in Zimbabwe. Furthermore, the perfect unity understood as modelled on the unity that exists in the Blessed Trinity, according to **Tichafa Enias Shara**, is critical in the **understanding of pluralism, ecumenism and religious dialogue**. The author states that the Blessed Trinity is not only united, but promotes the same unity, communion, communication, collaboration, coexistence, diversity and functional differences. In fact, the unity of the Godhead is demonstrated in every aspect of life.

**Precious Nihorowa** discusses how synodality can be regarded as a model of the Church today. He affirms that the Synod of bishops plays an important role in ecclesiastical life as it is there to deliberate on vital issues of either faith, morals or discipline in the Church. He argues that **Synodality** allows members of the Church to participate fully in her life and allows the Church to listen and continue learning. He then states that there are, however, also challenges to Synodality as it is regarded as a ‘threat’ to the magisterium. Peace and harmony are critical aspects for humanity. **Shelton Sylvester Zimondi** in the article, **Principles of Interreligious Dialogue: Bridging a Relations Gap Between the Roman Catholic Church and the Zimbabwean State** discusses how the principles of interreligious dialogue (IRD) can actually help bridge a relations gap that exists between the Catholic Church and the Zimbabwean state. He argues that all that the parties have to do is to ensure that they enter into dialogue ready to learn, committed, without preconceptions and prejudices. Trust, self-critical, honesty and sincerity are also critical elements in authentic dialogue. Unequivocally, through the educative, informative and personal aspects of the principles of IRD the relations gap between the Catholic Church and the state would be resolved or narrowed down. Moreover, **Sheasby Gondo** argues that African Traditional Religion (ATR) has not been studied *sui generis* considering the deliberate and systematic efforts of missionaries to wipe it out as they consider it incompatible with Christianity. He argues that missionaries judged ATR based on Christianity’s standards of interpretation, focusing on rudimentary aspects of ATR. As such, he proposes that IRD can assist in forming an informed and better understanding of ATR and change the perception and attitude towards it. Nevertheless, **Simbarashe Shepherd Marundu** in his paper, **Mandela a Modern Christian Father** deciphered that with

the development of the Church, Martyrdom was redefined to go beyond the shedding of blood as the single criterion of identifying martyrs in the Church. Henceforth, he identifies the late former President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela as a modern Christian martyr because of being an icon of forgiveness and reconciliation, his love for the poor and the ability to engage the international community for peace's sake. For the author, these qualities merit Mandela a fitting modern Christian father.

The third section of the articles in this issue, tackles in various ways issues relating to Fundamental Moral Theology. **Swithern Chinhema** argues that **Ethical Medical Research is an Imperative for African Countries** such that Africa must wake up and make it a priority. He argues that there are serious health needs in Africa which need effective health solutions but without compromising the morality and human dignity. He suggests that operations and considerations in health systems are, however, to be informed by the UBUNTU ethics. In conclusion, he asserts that if African countries invest in medical research, Africa will be better prepared to tackle national, regional, and global disasters and pandemics such as the COVID-19 and reduce their human cost. Another, is the aspect of online abuse. Due to COVID-19, physical learning in schools has ceased forcing almost all the education systems to carry out their learning on the internet. This has since been introduced to online exposure even to children as young as four years old. It is in this light that **Theresa P. Sanyatwe** argues that online learning has become a new revolution in the teaching and learning field with increased chances of children to be abused online. Hence, she discusses possible online abuses and recommends that in order to safeguard children from online predators and to know the course of action to take when an abuse has happened, parents, caregivers and educators need to be educated in digital literacy.

**Adam Mukabva** in his paper, **Evaluates the morality of Sex Education in School Curriculum**. He discusses the merits and dangers of sex education in school. In his discussion he states that given that sex education is offered to the right group at the right time it can reduce all problems that have to do with immoral issues. Nonetheless, there have always been critiques to sex education that it arouses the desire in students to experiment what they learn and thus, promoting sexual

immorality which it seeks to end. He, therefore, concludes that there are both positives and negatives to this issue. Still on sexual moral issues, **Jean Benjamin Yavo Doffou** commented on **Pope John Paul II's statement that "contraception and abortion are fruits of the same tree, and are hallmarks of a culture of death"**. He comments that science and medicine established the use of contraceptives as well as promoting abortion, with some even going to an extreme that the use of contraceptives reduces the occurrences of abortion. To substantiate his view, he cites Pope Paul VI in his *Humanae Vitae*. In conclusion, he affirms both contraceptives and abortion to be evil for they are against the propagation of life. **Guidance Mungazi** takes a comprehensive look at how social Christian morality is the most effective way to realize **social progress**. He puts much emphasis on the importance of Christian morality, its values, objectives and how they shape social progress. He notes, however, that there is global evidence to show that when there are no Christian values, worse moral decadence prevails. For instance, the Nazi, USSR and the Venezuela who ended up slaughtering millions of innocent souls. Ultimately, he looks at how Christian social morality have been beneficial to the world in many ways including reducing slavery, human trafficking, ethnic and national strife, among other aspects. **Mark Tawengwa Chandavengerwa** in his article shows that business is inextricably tied to environmental issues. Citing pollution as one dilemma. He further reveals that environmental ethics presents us with a variety of views with regard to our moral responsibility. As such, he analyses some moral dilemmas in environmental responsibility by forwarding three distinct moral theories concerning the environment. He shows, however, that these theories have their strengths and weaknesses. Hence, he proposes a fourth "theory," **Shona ecology**, and highlights that this "theory" may provide a viable alternative if it is modified to suit the current environment. He argues that it is mostly valuable for its notion that "nature is sacred."

The fourth section of the articles herein reflect on Christian Anthropological issues. **Jean Gaëtan Nyurahayo** in his article, **God, Science, and Covid-19: A Threesome at Work from a Nietzschean Perspective** argues that in the face of global pandemics such as Covid-19 and other calamities people often question the existence of God. Where

is God in the face of these difficult times? Is not Nietzsche right in Thus Spoke Zarathustra when he argues that God is dead? The writer asserts that death of God proposed by Nietzsche is not synonymous to death of a human person but it symbolises science taking over as a solution to human problems. The writer argues that the advancement of science does neither prove death nor silence of God during challenges because science is arguably a language of God. In fact, science has its origins in God the creator of the universe. Next, COVID-19 like most pandemics cannot be divorced from human action. It is from this understanding that **Blazio Mahaso Manobo** cautions readers that his article, **Theodicy and Anthropogenic: A Theology of Disasters in the wake of COVID-19 Pandemic** does not suggest that all-natural evils are man-made. However, it only acknowledges the God-given role of co-creation bestowed on human beings which in most cases has been abused. Accordingly, he states that as free agents, human beings have the capacity to build a better world where justice, reconciliation and respect for the environment can flourish. He also argues that all disasters have an anthropogenic character and that man as God's co-creator has a responsibility to maintain creation in order. Furthermore, he argues that the view that disasters are punishments for sins committed, portrays God as a tyrant rather than a loving Father. Finally, based on this observation, the author leaves room for further theological research in the theology of disasters from an anthropocentric position.

Who causes human suffering? What can humanity do in suffering? **Alex Tatenda Dakamire** tries to respond to these questions. He discovered that the human inflicted pain on others is causing suffering in the world. In this regard, he presents a case study of Zimbabwe where some unjust structures are noted. Eventually, the author gives possible solutions that can be incorporated to alleviate human suffering through a wide range of scholars. Nonetheless, modernity in the lenses of a culture by way of confrontation of a plethora of other indigenous cultures has led to adoption of its ideology and its ethical imperatives which are somehow at loggerheads with what was upheld in some societies. It is with this in mind that **Marvellous T Murungu** argues that homosexuality though it can be traced from time immemorial, it has also crept in hiding

behind modernity culture to the extent that some societies are legalizing the once held taboos of society. As such, he reflects on this arisen problem of homosexuality vis-a-vis the theological understanding of the relational facet of the human person as created in the image and likeness of God.

It is plausible to assert that the Covid-19 has caused a plethora of challenges to humanity, specifically to family, spiritual and social life. **Paul T Tivenga** reflects on how the Covid-19 Pandemic has affected human structures. He shows how its impacts have both positive and negative effects on family life, spiritual and social dimensions. Importantly, more often than not, when Covid 19 related issues are discussed, issues to do with the adults and the elderly seem to gain more attention vis-a-vis that to do with the children between 0 and 5 years of age. Hence, **Ednella Muchingamwa** discusses the current pandemic of Covid-19 in relation to children who are under the age of five. She argues that these children are at risk in various ways as they move with their mothers in various places. She queries whether there is anything that can be done in order to minimize the effects of Covid-19 that probably affect children. Furthermore, she explores how children might be falling behind in their psychological and social development and questions what kind of generation will come out of this pandemic period. Ultimately, how can we go forward amidst the agony perpetrated by the Covid-19 pandemic? **Lloyd H. Champiruka** believes that even in the midst of our affliction there is always something that motivates us to keep going. Again, he appreciates suffering and death as realities that one has to meet and embrace in order to move forward.

The fifth grouping of the articles focuses on the environmental issues. Notably, climate change has immensely impacted on ecology, and some of its effects include, global warming, floods, rising sea levels, cyclones and acid rain. **Ashley Salima** traces the development of the anthropocentric view of the environment. He asserts that philosophy and religion contributed to the development and wide acceptance and dominance of anthropocentrism. Basing his argument on *Laudato Si*, he then explores the need for a paradigm shift from anthropocentric narratives, ideologies and worldviews to a new cosmological ethos of integral ecology, fraternity, humility and global governance. Penultimate, **Michael Kyalo**, in his article argues that the influx of migrants within the Horn

of Africa or crossing international boundaries in search of stability and asylum seeking is largely propelled by climate change. For him, climate change is responsible for migration of people, conflict and palpable lack of economic stability, among other things. As such, millions of people in the Horn of Africa are faced with severe food shortage. Therefore, he views climate change and human life as being the same in extent; coextensive in range or scope. Finally, according to **Charles Tochukwu Ugwuonah**, environmental education is important to both urban and rural settlers. For that reason, it is critical to focus on bringing about a responsive awareness of climate change to rural settlers in many African countries, through the engagement of an educational process. He affirms that there is an increased risk of famine if a responsive awareness to climate change is not championed as soon as possible through the education of the people.

I hope and trust that this present edition will help readers to continue reflecting on the fundamental value that we are a global community in which we share challenges and support each other. At this point, it is my pleasure to express my profound gratitude to all those who worked tirelessly to make this work reach this level. First the various contributors, all the Editorial Board members of Dare Journal, the Holy Trinity College community, and the Carmelite Friars both in Zimbabwe and Ireland for contributing in various ways, direct and indirect. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Gabriel Detigame, ofm, the former editor of Dare for his continued and unwavering support. Finally, I acknowledge the support I enjoyed from the college administration, and the staff advisor and Dean, Fr. Mark Chikuni for providing the Dare with a Google Classroom account with a **Turnitin**/plagiarism check facility.

Thank you all. Enjoy the reading.

*Shelton Sylvester Zimondi, O. Carm.*

*Editor-in-Chief*

## **What Might the Bible Have to Say about Covid-19?**

*Patrick Mullins O. Carm.*

An outbreak of a new form of coronavirus, initially called SARS-CoV-2, but later renamed ‘coronavirus disease 2019’ (Covid<sup>1</sup> 19 for short) was identified in Wuhan, China, in December 2019 and, on January 30th 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the outbreak to be a public health emergency of international concern. By March 11th, the WHO had formally recognised Covid 19 as a pandemic. By May 2nd 2020, more than 3.38 million cases had been reported in 187 countries and territories, more than 239,000 people had died as a consequence and more than 1.06 million had recovered. By January 8th 2021, a little over eight months later, by which time a number of effective vaccines had been developed and mass vaccinations had been begun, these figures had seen a dramatic rise, with more than 88.2 million cases reported in 218 countries and territories, more than 1.9 million people having died as a consequence and more than 49.2 million having recovered.<sup>2</sup>

The virus is most contagious during the first three days after the onset of symptoms but the disease can also be spread in the typically five-day, but ranging from two- to fourteen-day, period between infection and the onset of such common symptoms of fever, cough, fatigue, shortness of breath and loss of smell. Analysis indicates that this virus is primarily spread during close contact between people, often by the small droplets of saliva that are produced during coughing, sneezing, or talking. The principal recommended preventative measures are hand-washing, covering one’s mouth when coughing, maintaining distance from other people and wearing a face-mask in public settings. Many countries worldwide have enforced travel restrictions, quarantines, curfews and stay-at-home orders as well as the closure of facilities of various kinds and controls on workplace situations that might contribute to the spread of the disease. The Covid 19 pandemic has caused severe global socio-economic disruption and is now recognised as the largest economic recession since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Many sporting, religious, political and cultural events have been cancelled. In response to the pandemic, many

churches and Religious communities have broadcast their Masses, Prayer of the Church or other special services on the worldwide web, while ensuring that all those participating maintain appropriate social distancing and the other norms that apply in the limited group activity permitted in the present circumstances.

Covid 19 is a recently identified virus and there was no exact equivalent in Biblical times. Epidemics of different kinds were known in those times, however, and parallels can be drawn between some of the symptoms, effects and short- or long-term consequences of those epidemics and the current situation resulting from Covid 19. In the Hebrew Bible, the word of an infectious disease, or affliction, is *nega'*, which was translated into Latin as '*plaga*', plague (see 1 Kings 8:37), and the best-known of these infectious diseases was the group of contagious diseases of the skin (including fungal infections, scabies<sup>3</sup> and eczema) associated with leukoderma, which constituted such a threat to the community of the people of Israel that those affected were formally excluded from the liturgical life of the community by being designated '*ritually unclean*', *tsara'at* in Hebrew or '*lepra*' in Latin, which became '*leprous*' in the early English translations of the Hebrew texts. The highly-contagious and rapidly-developing disease of the skin that is involved should not be confused with '*leprosy*' in the technical sense, now known as Hansen's disease, which is caused by slow-growing bacteria called *Mycobacterium leprae* that are normally spread from person to person only after prolonged and extensive contact between them. Over the course of one to twenty years, Hansen's disease<sup>4</sup> leads to serious nerve damage and insensitivity to pain in 5% of those infected. The protective '*social distancing*' that was imposed on those who had become '*ritually impure*' because of the various forms of the highly-contagious leukoderma is described in the Book of Leviticus, 13:2-3:

A person for whom there is a swelling, whether a scab or a white patch, on the skin of his flesh, when it becomes according to the affliction of leprosy on the skin of his flesh, shall then be brought to Aaron the priest, or to one of his sons, the priests, and the priest shall look on the affliction on the skin of the flesh and, if the hair in

the affliction be turned white and the appearance of the affliction be deeper than the skin of the flesh, it is the affliction of lepra, and the priest shall look on him and pronounce him [ritually] unclean.

Being formally recognised as ‘unclean’ by the priest meant that the individual concerned was deemed unfit to attend the religious ceremonies of the community because the highly contagious nature of leukoderma made it likely that they would infect the other members of the community. Those deemed ritually unclean in this sense were expected to protect the community by socially isolating themselves and calling out ‘unclean, unclean’ should somebody approach them. Prolonged leukoderma was commonly regarded as medically incurable but those recognised as the prophets of the Lord were regarded as being able to mediate the healing power of God in such cases. Chapter five of the second book of Kings describes the healing of the Assyrian, Naaman, after he had washed himself seven times in the river Jordan as instructed by the prophet Elisha. Recognising that the word ‘lepra’ implied ritual uncleanness, St Augustine pointed out that those who were healed from that disease were described as having been ‘cleansed (mundati)’ from their ritual uncleanness, and from the resulting imposition of social isolation, rather than as having been ‘healed (sanati)’ in the sense of having recovered from the condition, which was the required pre-condition for being cleansed.<sup>5</sup>

In the New Testament, Jesus is described as ‘cleansing’ – the verb is *katharizo* - those suffering from social and ritual uncleanness because of leukoderma (see Mk 1:40-46; Mt. 8:1-4; Lk. 5:12-16) and, in doing so, he recognised the role of the Jewish priests of that time in determining whether or not somebody suffering from leukoderma had been ‘cleansed’ or not (see Mk 1:44; Mt. 8:4; Lk. 5:14). When he commissioned the Twelve Apostles to continue his own healing ministry, Jesus also told them that they were to ‘cleanse’, or to overcome the ritually ‘unclean’ social status, of the ‘leprous’ (*lepros*), those suffering from leukoderma (see Mt. 10:8):

Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the ‘leprous’, cast out demons. You received as a free gift, give as a free gift.

St Gregory the Great interprets these signs as no longer normative, ‘The Holy Church daily does spiritually, what it then did materially by the Apostles ... inasmuch as she raises and cures souls and not bodies’.<sup>6</sup> St Hilary of Poitiers, on the other hand, interprets such signs as implying the power to heal and cleanse as, in some sense, normative for the Apostles and, implicitly, for their successors:

The exercise of the Lord’s power is wholly entrusted to the Apostles, that they who were formed in the image of Adam, and the likeness of God, should now obtain the perfect image of Christ; and whatever evil Satan had introduced into the body of Adam, this they should now repair by communion with the Lord’s power.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to leukoderma, the Bible also refers to a more sudden and short-term affliction or plague affecting human beings that is described as a pestilence or epidemic,<sup>8</sup> *deber* in Hebrew (see Exod. 9:15; Lev. 26:25; Num. 14:12; Deut. 28:21; 2 Sam. 24:13; 1 Kings 8:37). It may be that Psalm 91:6 describes pestilence as walking or stalking in darkness because of its sudden onset, without warning, like the attack of an enemy whose approach is hidden by darkness. Epidemics seem to be linked to famine in some cases (see 1 Kings 8:37; Ezek. 6:11; 7:15) and, in the New Testament, ‘famines and pestilences’ are among the signs of the coming fall of the Temple in Jerusalem (see Lk 21:11). Although the threat posed by pestilences or epidemics of this kind is real, indeed, the promise of Psalm 91, verse 6, that we who regard the Lord God as our refuge and fortress do not need to fear ‘the pestilence that stalks in darkness’, the cleansing of leprosy by the prophet Elisha and the later demonstration by Jesus that he is willing to do the same, and the command to the Twelve to do the same in Matthew 10:8, all reassure us that God is both able, and willing, to deliver us from every ‘deadly pestilence’ (Ps 91:3), including Covid 19.

Despite the popular misconception, the Bible does not refer explicitly to ten infectious diseases when it describes the strange events by which God persuaded the Egyptian Pharaoh to release the Israelites. Although ten distinguishable events are described in chapters seven to

eleven of Exodus, the book of Deuteronomy indicates no number when it refers to the events concerned as the ‘diseases of Egypt’ (see Deut. 7:15; 28:60). The word translated as ‘disease’ is *madveh* in Hebrew, meaning sickness or disease, translated into Latin as *infirmittates*, weaknesses or sicknesses, in the Vulgate text of Deut. 7:15, and as *afflictiones*, sufferings or torments, in the Vulgate text of Deut. 28:60. Only two of these ‘diseases’ affected human beings directly, the festering boils described in Exodus 9:8-12, which may, or may not, have been transmitted by human to human contact, and the death of the first born described in Exodus 11:4-5, which is unlikely to have been something that had been transmitted by human to human contact. The other eight ‘diseases’ with which the land was struck affected the Egyptians only indirectly: the water turning to blood making it undrinkable (see Exod. 7:18), the infestations of frogs (see Exod. 8:2) and of lice or gnats (see Exod. 8:16-17), the ‘swarms’ of horseflies (see Exod. 8:17), the severe pestilence, *deber*, affecting the livestock (see Exod. 9:3), the thunderstorms of hail and fire that killed the people and livestock that could not find shelter (see Exod. 9:19), the swarms of locusts that destroyed whatever was growing in the fields (see Exod. 10:15) and the three days of darkness during which the people could not see anyone else or move about (see Exod. 10:22).

The sequential nature of the ‘diseases of Egypt’ in what was, presumably, a relatively short space of time, and the apparent immediacy with which their effects followed on the actions that the Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, had commanded Moses to do, suggest that these were supernatural wonders that God had brought about. As such, therefore, and, given that they were to happen, or not, depending on what Pharaoh would, or would not, do, they invite reflection on how we are to understand God’s power in relation to diseases of these kinds. Since the Lord is also described as punishing the sins of Miriam (see Num. 12:9), and of King Uzziah (see 2 Chron. 26:20), with leukoderma and as punishing the whole nation of Israel with pestilence because of its complicity in David’s sin of relying too much on human resources by undertaking a census of the people (see 2 Sam 24:10-17), similar theological questions arise in relation to epidemics and other illnesses that

can be transmitted from person to person. The account of the origins of the Samaritans in 2 Kings 17:24-40 describes the ‘Most High God’ as sending an incurable pestilence on the Assyrian migrants who had settled in the Northern Kingdom but who worshipped other gods. Having been told by an oracle that the only remedy was to worship the true God of Judaism, and having received the permission of the King of Assyria to do so, the pestilence ended when the settlers worshipped as Jews did.<sup>9</sup> The apparent use of pestilence to defend the exclusive worship of the Lord in the land that the true God had bestowed on the descendants of those brought there following the exodus from Egypt suggests that the ‘diseases of Egypt’ and the punishment of Miriam, King Uzziah and the people, mentioned earlier, should be interpreted in the same light. The book of Genesis recognises that everything God has created is, not only ‘good’, but ‘very good’ (see Gen. 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31), with the consequence that all that is not good, but evil, derives ultimately from human sin (see Gen. 3), but not, apparently, in the sense that each one suffers as the consequence of their own personal, or their ancestors’, sins (see Jn 9:3). This same text (Jn 9:3) also implies that even what is not good can, in some mysterious manner, contribute to the revelation of the works of God. God’s plan, as the Catechism (no. 310) puts it, involves ... the existence of the more perfect alongside the less perfect, both constructive and destructive forces of nature. With physical good there exists also physical evil as long as creation has not reached perfection.

Noting that, although ‘evil never becomes a good’, the Catechism (no. 311-312) reminds us that ‘We know that in everything God works for good for those who love him’ (Rom. 8:28), and it quotes St Augustine of Hippo, who pointed out that: almighty God, because he is supremely good, would never allow any evil whatsoever to exist in his works if he were not so all-powerful and good as to cause good to emerge from evil itself.

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<sup>1</sup> CoV and COVID are abbreviations of the Latin word ‘coronaviridae’, translated as coronavirus disease in English.

<sup>2</sup> See “Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID 19),” issued by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on February 11th 2020, accessed on December 4th 2020: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html>

<sup>3</sup> See St Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies* 4:8 n. 10 in PL 82:191.

<sup>4</sup> The causative agent of leprosy, *M. leprae*, was discovered by Gerhard Henrik Armauer Hansen, working in Norway in 1873, and, as a result, the disease is now formally known as Hansen's disease, and the first effective treatment, called promin, became available in the 1940s.

<sup>5</sup> See St Augustine of Hippo, *Quaestiones evangeliorum*, 2, n. 40 in PL 35:1354.

<sup>6</sup> See St Gregory the Great, *Homilias XL in Evangelia*, 29, 4 in PL 76:1216.

<sup>7</sup> See St Hilary of Poitiers, *Commentarius in Evangelium Matthaei*, 10,4 in PL 9:967.

<sup>8</sup> The word 'epidemic' (the word comes from the Greek words *epi*, upon or over, and *demos*, people) is used to describe the rapid spread of a disease to a large number of people in a given population within a short space of time. If an epidemic spreads to other countries or continents and affects a substantial number of people, it may be termed a 'pandemic' (the word comes from the Greek *pan*, all, and *demos*, people).

<sup>9</sup> See also Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, 9:288-290.

## **The Book of Job and the Pastoral Care of Covid 19 Patients**

*Underson Musina, O.Carm.*

### **Introduction**

The book of Job is one of the books of wisdom literature. This book deals with various questions such as theodicy, the justice of the Lord, suffering of just person and retribution. The book of Job is very relevant in today's world as it touches on contemporary problems. It is in light with this regard that this article intends to discuss the possible contributions of the book of Job to the pastoral care of the sick for Covid -19 patients. The first part will give a summary of the major themes which are found in the book of Job. The second part will expose what is found in the book of Job which is useful in the pastoral care of those infected by Coronavirus. Finally, a conclusion will be given.

### **Synopsis of Major Ideas in the Book of Job**

The book of Job focuses mainly about the importance of God who is always loving even when one is in pain and is suffering. The story in this book explains how people experience suffering and the most important thing the book exposes is how people should respond to suffering and how God remains supreme in the midst of suffering.<sup>1</sup> This idea is supported by Hartley; who acknowledges that as the book of Job discusses human suffering there are six prominent themes which are noted about suffering.<sup>2</sup> First, a person even if he is righteous, he may suffer; second, the dimension of human suffering; third, even a righteous person struggles to overcome suffering; fourth, qualifications to the doctrine of double retribution; fifth, the question of theodicy and finally an encounter with God.<sup>3</sup>

The book of Job shows that a righteous person can terribly suffer even though he did not sin (Job 1:8). As noted by Neiman, 'calamity is not necessarily a hostile witness against a righteous person's integrity'.<sup>4</sup> Job greatly suffered in his life. He lost his family and property in one day (1:13-20), he also suffered because of a great disease (2:7-10). Socially, Job was affected as he was isolated from the rest of the community.<sup>5</sup> Job said, "my family has withdrawn from me, my friends are wholly

estranged” (19:13).

The writer of the book of Job intends to challenge directly a simplistic understanding of the doctrine of double retribution.<sup>6</sup> This doctrine teaches that those who are righteous before the Lord are blessed (cf Job 29) and rewarded while and the wicked are punished and they suffer. The three friends of Job clearly exposed this doctrine in the book (4:1-27). They encouraged Job to repent so that God would restore his fortunes (22:21). Eliphaz has the view that people are responsible for their suffering (4:1-5). Zophar urges Job to repent so that God will bless him again (11:1-14). Jobs’ friends encouraged him to repent so that he will enjoy God’s favour. If Job had followed the advice of his friends, “he would confirm Satan’s proposition that human beings are totally self-serving in their worship of God”.<sup>7</sup> The main point of the audiences of Job and his friends was to defend the righteousness of God and uphold the doctrine of retribution (13:1ff).

Theodicy is clearly exposed in the book of Job. The book aimed at answering the question which is very prominent in human experience. The question of suffering. Theodicy is focused on why good and gracious God permits evil. Elihu in his speech shows that God is always merciful in his dealings and God does not benefit anything from acting unjustly (Job 34-35). The Book of Job clearly confirms that the world was created by God and is the one who sustains it (Job 38). The question is why then suffering exists.

### **Suggestions of the Book of Job to the Pastoral Care of Covid-19 Patients**

In the pastoral care of Covid -19 patients there is a problem of how a pastor could talk about God who is all loving and gracious in a situation that is featured by sickness. Gutierrez notes that it is also problematic to talk about God of life to people who die prematurely and unjustly.<sup>8</sup> The major themes found in the Book of Job are useful in the pastoral care of the sick as presented in this section. As noted by Beguerie, “historically, pastoral care of the sick has been in the form of four special functions; namely, healing, sustaining, guiding and reconciling.”<sup>9</sup> These four

features are also deduced in the Book of Job and applied in the pastoral care of those infected with Coronavirus.

### **The Pastoral Care of Patients with Coronavirus and the Community**

The book of Job helps in pastoral care of those infected with Coronavirus as it points to the importance of one as a minister to visit the sick in order to comfort, pray and anoint them. In his time of suffering, Job was visited by his friends who intended to support and comfort him. When the sick people are visited there is a need to use proper theological language which will not make people feel that they are sick because they have sinned. Although social distance is maintained, the community should ensure that the sick person is supported. The book of Job helps us to realise that pastoral care of the sick is the responsibility of the whole community. According to Klein and Wolfe, family members, friends, doctors and priests have a responsibility in the ministry of comfort; through encouragement and prayer.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, the book of Job helps one to understand that pastoral care of the Covid -19 patients is not a private affair between the priest and the sick person, but it is a communal act of care and worship.<sup>11</sup> Like what Job's friends did, there is a need for the community to show solidarity with those who will be infected by the virus. St Paul warns that, if one member suffers, all the members suffer together (1 Cor 12:26). The community and family take care of the sick by praying with them, providing all their necessities.

After all the challenges Job faced, he was not isolated from his community because he was able to be visited by his friends (Job 4) although at one point because of his severe suffering he also felt as being isolated by his community. This is a vital point which shows that in the pastoral care of those infected with Coronavirus, those infected should be integrated into the community. Although Covid -19 patients are being quarantined, the book of Job suggests that the community have a task of being close to those who are sick spiritually and if possible, physically, visiting them and praying with them. In this digital period the community can continue being united with the sick person through social media such

as Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram.

### **Sickness as Part of Human Life**

The Book of Job suggests that sickness is part of human life. There are various theories which have emerged regarding the origins of the Coronavirus. There is a school of thought which argues that the virus is a punishment which came from God. The book of Job suggests that Christians should teach others to embrace the challenges which are faced in life such as being affected or infected by the Coronavirus. For one to be tested positive does not mean that one has sinned. In the Zimbabwean community others believe that sickness comes because one has offended the ancestors or God. This view is the same with one which the friends of Job had concerning his problems (4:1-27). Consequently, this clearly shows that the doctrine of divine retribution which is exposed in the book of Job is very useful in the pastoral care of the sick and it points that a Covid -19 is not caused by the fact that one has sinned or God has turned against one.<sup>12</sup>

Even in times of sickness human dignity is to be promoted. Although God allowed Job to be tempted, he cautioned Satan that he should not lay his hand on Job (1:12). It is the duty of the community to ensure that the dignity of those who are sick with Covid -19 is upheld. This can be achieved through catechesis, preaching and disseminating authentic information about Covid -19. The faithful should be aware that true meaning of human suffering is found in Jesus Christ. As noted by Buguerie, the cross of Christ is God's answer to human suffering.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Language of Contemplation**

The book of Job assists those who take care of Covid -19 patients to have proper language to speak with them. The sick people should be encouraged to have complete trust in the Lord and they should bless God even in times of sufferings. Job said when he suffered after his loss, "naked I came forth from my mother's womb and naked shall I go back there.... blessed be the name of the Lord" (1:21). As noted by Gutierrez, this verse has made Job to be referred to as a person who was patient.<sup>14</sup>

The sick people ought to be encouraged to realise that everything comes from God and in times of sickness they should practise patience. It is the role of the minister to make sick people to have sense of the sovereignty of the Lord.

The sick people should be encouraged to hold on their faith the way Job did (1:21). Job did not follow the bad counsel of his wife who told him that he should “curse God and die” (2:9). In pastoral care to the sick there is need to encourage them to follow wise counsel from others. In times of sickness, medical practitioners and family members can advise things which are contrary to gospel values. For instance, a doctor can advise one to have euthanasia which is against the teaching of the Church. Hence, the sick person should be bold enough in his belief like Job who did not sin in his suffering (2:10).

### **Prayer and Hope**

The Book of Job suggests the importance of prayer in the pastoral care of those infected, and Coronavirus is not an exception. In prayer, the sick people will be strengthened to be honest in prayer. Job gives a vital example of how to approach God in prayer. Job says that when he appears before God he spoke from the bitterness of his soul (10:1). Job felt that the Lord had abandoned him (13:24) and perhaps this is the experience of most people when they are tested positive for the virus. Even in such cases the sick will be encouraged to hold firm despite the challenges and suffering they will be facing. The sick members of the Church will be encouraged to proclaim with Job that their vindicator lives (19:25). Hartley attests that the story of Job can be used by one especially a minister to teach and encourage people to realise that even a righteous person can feel sick and continue hoping in God.<sup>15</sup> The sick people should be encouraged to say what they think about their suffering like what Job did (10: 1-22). Many times, Job wished to die (3:11). He also talked about his distress when all people turned against him (19:13). Modern psychology talks about the importance of openness even in prayer as helpful to troubled people.

The book of Job is useful in the ministry of Covid -19 patients as

it helps those who are suffering to always keep the faith and hope even when understanding fails.<sup>16</sup> In the midst of all the challenges that Job faced and his complaints he kept hope in the Lord. Job's hope was not in vain as the Lord at last vindicated him. A person with Covid -19 should be encouraged to have such hope that God will heal him in his own way and time. The sick people should be made aware that God can do all things and no purpose of his can be hindered (cf 42:1).

Furthermore, the Book of Job stresses the idea that even righteous people also struggle with suffering (Job 1). Using this book, the ministers and all members of the Church can inspire the sick to embrace their suffering with patience the way Job did and also to be aware that sickness is part of human life. The book of Job points out that human beings should not limit God. Although Job lost everything at the beginning but at the end everything was restored (42:6). Sick people should be helped to make sure that they continue having faith in God. However, they should not expect that God will heal where there is faith because like in the case of Job faith is not the issue at all.

### **Job 38 and the Pastoral Care Covid -19 Patients**

God responded to Job in Chapter 38 and there are insights which are found in this chapter which are very useful in the pastoral care of the sick. The Lord asked Job if he was there when he created the universe and if Job was the one who determined the size of it (38:4-7). Job is also asked if he is the one who commands the light to shine (12-14). For Murphy, these questions raised Job's sight from his own troubles to the wonder of the order that braces up the world.<sup>17</sup> Using the book of Job, a person with Coronavirus may be reminded that the Lord is the one who is all powerful and he rules the world in righteousness. The Lord who is able to bring light to shine is capable of containing suffering, sickness and wickedness. Hartley attests that, "although God grants a measure of freedom to people, the wicked never move outside his control."<sup>18</sup> Hence, at the end God has the final say about people's lives.

In addition, in chapter 38, the Lord made Job to realise that his knowledge was limited. Job is asked if he had entered the sources of the

sea (16), if he had ever seen the gates of death (17), if he had ever seen the heights of heaven and if he knew how to part winds (22). If Job was able to answer such questions of the Lord this could mean that he had comprehensive knowledge about the world and understood the way it was governed.<sup>19</sup> Chapter 38 may be used to make the sick people realise that sometimes it is difficult to have knowledge of why they are suffering. Chapter 38, as argued by Neiman, teaches that suffering is useful as it brings the mystery of life.<sup>20</sup> “In case of Job it is a mystery of the positive and negative forces that affects humanity, society and health”.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, Chapter 38 is fundamental in pastoral ministry as the sick will be inspired in their lack of knowledge that they should continue trusting in the one who knows everything.

### **‘My eye has seen you’**

In pastoral ministry to those infected with Covid 19 there are other people who will be healed by God. After receiving such a gift, the Book of Job suggests that it is the duty of a minister or community to make those healed realise that the “Lord has opened their eyes” (42:1). The minister and the community are to make people meet God so that they might overcome the dark night of the soul which St John of the Cross talks about. At the end Job’s fortunes were restored (42:7) and through other members of the community God will use them to restore the sick person to his friendship.

### **Conclusion**

The Book of Job is very relevant in the pastoral care of those infected with Covid -19 as it gives an example of faith and trust in God in overcoming suffering such as sickness. The themes such as theodicy and retribution are useful suggestions provided by the Book of Job in the pastoral care of the sick. It suggests that a righteous person can suffer and even righteous people struggle with suffering. The most important suggestion from the book is that sickness, Covid -19 included, comes not as a punishment from God and that God heals and restores his people at his appointed time in his own way.

- <sup>1</sup> Murphy, Roland. *The Book of Job*. (New York: Paulist Press, 1999.), 5
- <sup>2</sup> Hartley, John. *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament. 'The Book of Job.'* (Michigan: Ferdmas Publishing Company, 1988.), 47.
- <sup>3</sup> Hartley, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament. 'The Book of Job.'* 47
- <sup>4</sup> Neiman, *The Book of Job*, (Givatayim, Peli Printing, 1972.)3.
- <sup>5</sup> Hartley, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament. 'The Book of Job.'* 48
- <sup>6</sup> Hartley, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament. 'The Book of Job.'* 48
- <sup>7</sup> Hartley, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament. 'The Book of Job.'* 48
- <sup>8</sup> Gutierrez, Gustavo. *On Job. God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*. (New York: Orbis Books, 1987.), xvi
- <sup>9</sup> Beguerie, Philippe. *How to Understand the Sacraments*. (London: SCM Press, 1997.), 147
- <sup>10</sup> Klein, Gregory, *Pastoral Foundations of the Sacraments*. (New York: Paulist Press, 1998.), 120.
- <sup>11</sup> Klein, Gregory *Pastoral Foundations of the Sacraments*, 120.
- <sup>12</sup> Murphy, *The Book of Job*, 108
- <sup>13</sup> Beguerie, *How to Understand the Sacraments*, 80.
- <sup>14</sup> Gutierrez, *On Job. God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*, 53.
- <sup>15</sup> Hartley, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament. 'The Book of Job.'*, vii.
- <sup>16</sup> *The African Bible*. (Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 2001.), 83.
- <sup>17</sup> Murphy, *The Book of Job*, 108.
- <sup>18</sup> Hartley, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament. 'The Book of Job.'*, 497.
- <sup>19</sup> Hartley, John. *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament. 'The Book of Job.'* (Michigan: Ferdmas Publishing Company, 1988.), 488.
- <sup>20</sup> Neiman, *The Book of Job*,3.
- <sup>21</sup> *The African Bible*, 830.

## **COVID-19 AND THE MARK OF THE BEAST IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION**

*Fr Tadios Mandava*

### **Introduction**

Is the coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccine the mark of the beast? This is one of the frequently asked questions that this writer has met many times. The reason for this question is that there are claims on social media platforms that indeed the COVID-19 vaccine does fulfil the prophecy of John in the Book of Revelation concerning the ‘mark of the beast’ introduced in Rev 13:16-18. However, such interpretations tend to flow from conspiracy theories rather than from the biblical text or tradition. Therefore, this article seeks to provide a meaningful exegetical interpretation of the ‘mark of the beast’ relating to the time of the first century A.D. itself when the Book of Revelation was written. The intention is to help the Christian reader to have a better grasp of what John intended to communicate to his primary audience so as to set aside some out-of-context speculations of the 21st century readers of the book.

### **Summary of John’s vision of the beast and its mark in Revelation 13**

The whole chapter of Rev 13 recounts John’s vision about two beasts that he saw. The first beast described in vv. 1-8 emerged from the sea. Power was given to it by the dragon. It was wounded, but was healed, and people worshipped it in utter amazement. The beast uttered blasphemous statements against God and against his dwelling place. It had authority to fight those believed in God and bring them under its dominion. All non-believers worshipped it.

The second beast is described in Rev 13:11-18. Unlike the first, the second beast emerged from the earth, not from the sea. Yet it had power and authority just like the first beast and spoke like the dragon. Its mission was to ensure that all the inhabitants of the world should worship the first dragon; make a portrait of the first dragon. Those who refused to worship the portrait would face death.

Then comes the cryptic verse: “It causes all, both small and great,

both rich and poor, both free and slaves to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, so that none can buy or sell who does not have the mark; that is, the image of the beast or the number of its name. This calls for wisdom, let anyone with understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man. Its number is six hundred and sixty-six” (Rev 13:16-18, NRSV).

From chapter 13 onwards, the phrase ‘mark of the beast’ continues to recur in the book in subsequent chapters. The texts are: Rev 14:9-11; 16:2; 19:20-21; 20:4. In all these references, John presumes that his readers have calculated and know what the mark of the beast in Rev 13:18 means. However, for the modern reader, meaning remains mysterious, giving room to numerous interpretations done in light of current experiences like the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Some Current Interpretations of the Mark of the Beast in Relation to COVID-19**

One popular interpretation, trending on social media platforms is that the ‘mark of the beast’ is a prophecy that is being or will be fulfilled in the current pandemic of coronavirus. The argument is as follows. A COVID-19 vaccine is being or will be produced and everyone will be forced to take it by their governments. Everyone will be injected. Then there will also be some type of electronic chip or computer device (in connection with 5G technology) inserted into people’s bodies so as to track who has who has received the vaccine and who has not. Or a type of certificate will be issued.<sup>1</sup> And this electronic chip or certificate is the mark of the beast which the Book of Revelation prophesied. One writer who subscribes to this interpretation is Femi Fani-Kayode of Nigeria. In one of his Facebook posts, he writes:

They want to compel everyone to take a microchip in their body which will allow them to trade, work, go to hospital, buy food, travel, live and function and without which none of these things can be done. That microchip is what the Holy Bible describes as the ‘mark of the Beast’ in the Book of Revelation and once you take it, you are finished.”<sup>2</sup>

By ‘they’, Fani-Kayode is referring to the worldly powerful political

and economic leaders who are said to be behind the ‘manufacturing’ of coronavirus so as to control the people under one world government. He is arguing that, just as the second beast in Revelation, put a condition that no one buys or sells without the mark of the beast, so also these powerful leaders will do regarding the COVID-19 vaccine thereby perfectly fulfilling Rev 13:16-18. Perhaps, this is one of the interpretations that are adding to the suspicions surrounding the COVID-19 vaccines being introduced in different parts of the world.

### **The meaning of mark of the beast from an exegetical standpoint**

From an exegetical point of view, the above sensationalist interpretations prove to be erroneous and unconvincing. Exegetically, it is not so difficult to figure out what the mark of the beast is and who is being represented by the number 666. What is the mark of the beast being referred to in Revelations? The text actually specifies that the mark of the beast is “the name of the beast or the number of its name... Its number is six hundred and sixty-six” (vv. 17-18). Therefore, the number 666 denotes the mark of the beast, which the second beast advocates to be marked on every member of the society regardless of their social status, in order to participate in the economic life of the state. It is marked on the forehead and on the right hand.

What is the meaning of the number 666? In spite of the many speculations that some commentators give to this number, from Hitler to the Pope (using Latin calculations), the meaning is not as evasive as it may appear. Some critical initial observations should be made in order to interpret the number correctly. First, the mark pertains to the first beast and not the second one. It is a mark that is caused to be marked on people by the second beast, but it represents the first beast in whose interest the second beast is acting. Second, the mark of the beast is meant to represent the name (to onoma) of the first beast. Third, most verbs in this passage in Greek as well as in English translations (e.g., in NRSV) are in the present tense not future. The text says the (second) beast causes (poiei) (v. 16) all people to be marked so that no one can (dunētai) buy or sell who does not have (mē echōn) that mark (v. 17). Fourth, the meaning of the mark of the beast should be arrived at by means of calculating (psēphizō). These

observations should guide our interpretation.

Most, if not all, New Testament critical exegesis are unanimous that what is at play in this text is the literary technique that was very common in the first century A.D. called gematria<sup>1</sup>. It was a way of communicating a message using numbers as secret codes. In many ancient languages, the letters of the alphabet have numerical values. For example, in Greek, the letters had the following numeral values: A = 1; B = 2; E = 5; I = 10; N = 50; R = 100, etc. With regards to Latin, the numerical values of the letters were: I = 1; V = 5; X = 10; L = 50; C = 100, etc. Similarly, Hebrew followed the same practice: B = 2; W = 6; N = 50; Q = 100, etc.<sup>3</sup>

It was possible then to represent a person's name using a number. It is hardly questionable that the writer of the Book of Revelation wanted his readers to decipher the meaning of the number 666 by using this system of gematria since he mentions explicitly that the number represents a name that has to be calculated. It can also be taken for granted that the name that John's readers would arrive at, should have been a familiar name of a figure they knew very well. And that figure should have been reputed for his cruelty and blasphemy against God. He must have been persecuting the holy ones (i.e., the Christians) and must have been known for being worshipped by other people as a god. These are all the qualities of the first beast in Rev 13:1-8, whose name is represented by the number 666 (the mark of the beast) in v.18. It would be extremely awkward if John referred to a distant future figure unknown to his readers and yet instructing them to make a calculation of his name!

Using Hebrew gematria, it can be satisfactorily established that the number 666 which is the mark of the (first) beast, represents the name of Emperor Caesar Nero – the first Roman emperor to unleash severe persecution of Christians between 64 and 68 AD. His full name in Hebrew has a numerical value of 666. He is called Qsr Nrwn (i.e., Caesar Neron, written without vowels as was and is common in Hebrew language).

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<sup>1</sup>See for example, Williamson, p. 235; John C. Thomas & Frank, D. Macchia. Revelation (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), pp. 244-247; Barclay, William. The Revelation of John: Volume 2 Chapters 6–22 (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1983), 100-102.

Let us calculate with wisdom as John has instructed:

Q = 100

S = 60

R = 200

N = 50

R = 200

W = 6

N = 50.

Total = 666.

This should have been the original meaning of 666 in the context of the early Christians of the first century AD when John wrote his book. A confirmation of this interpretation comes from the fact that some early manuscripts state the number of the name of the beast as 616 not 666. The reason is that the name 'Neron' was pronounced at times without the final 'n' as 'Nero'. Now if we remove the final 'n' it means we subtract 50 from 666. We will produce 616 standing for 'Qsr Nrw' (Caesar Nero). This interpretation is very satisfactory because 'Caesar Neron' is the name (to onoma) of a man as the text states. And it can also be smartly and wisely calculated as John has recommended.

The reason for calculating this name using Hebrew, even if John wrote his book in Greek, is that it was Hebrew which would serve better his purpose than Greek gematria in this context. In Greek the name would be written as 'Kaisar Nerōn' and would be represented by the number 1, 336 following the Greek numerical values of the letters. This would have complicated John's symbolism. The number 666 is carefully chosen to symbolize 'perfect evil'<sup>4</sup> or what one might call 'perfect imperfection' (i.e., absolute evil) as it is the number of a man and not a divine number. However, it must be observed that the Greek version of Caesar's name is exactly the one transliterated into Hebrew as Qsr Nrwn (with the vowels: a, i, a, e, having been excluded – typical of this language), giving us 666! In addition, the word 'beast' itself in Greek is thērion and gives the numerical value of 666 if transliterated to Hebrew letters.<sup>5</sup>

Admittedly, Latin gematria cannot be used to calculate the meaning of the number of the beast for a couple of reasons.<sup>6</sup> One: the audience of John were mostly Jewish Christians who were conversant with Hebrew

and Greek but not with Latin. They could not have deciphered the meaning of 666 with a language they did not know. Two: John himself was a Jew and very unlikely that he was fluent in Latin to have used it to communicate his cryptic message. Three: “Latin language did not have the comprehensive numbering code that the Greek and Hebrew language made use of.”<sup>7</sup> Four: 666 was meant to be secret code language that would not be understood by Roman powers of the time. If John were to use Latin, the language of the Romans, then he would have betrayed himself. Thus, Hebrew remained the best option that would work well for John and his audience in the first century A. D. context.

If the original referent of the number 666 was Nero’s name, then there are two possibilities regarding who literally was the first beast mentioned in Rev 13:1-8. The first possibility is that the beast should be identified exactly with Emperor Nero who persecuted Christians between 64 and 68 A.D. This is very possible because he indeed was known for promoting emperor worship in his empire even if he did not pronounce himself to be divine. He indeed blasphemed against God and his name. He indeed waged horrendous war against the saints (i.e., the Christians). It is on record that he had pitch poured on the Christians and used them as living torches.<sup>8</sup> And most interestingly, Nero was once stabbed, but survived the stab. This could be what John was recalling when he writes that the first beast was wounded and got healed.

The other possibility, considering that John wrote his book around 95 A.D. when Nero was already dead twenty-five years earlier, is that the first beast for John might not have been Nero per se, but a Nero-like figure of his own day. In that case, the first beast could be referring to Emperor Domitian who also launched a severe persecution of Christians between 81 and 96 A.D. after the mould of Nero. He earned himself the nickname ‘Neron Redivivus’ (Nero coming back to life). He is also remembered for having proclaimed himself ‘master and god’ and demanded all people to swear an oath ‘by the genius of the emperor’ Thus, he does also fit the description of the first beast in Rev 13:1-8. In the last analysis there can be no doubt that the first beast represented by the number 666 was for John and his first century A.D. audience the Roman government (represented by Nero) persecuting them. And the second beast exercising the authority

of the first beast and in favour of it represent all those who were enforcing the oppressive laws of the emperor (false prophets and priests) at the time. This explains why most of the verbs used concerning the activities of the second beast are in the present tense as noted earlier.

We need now to ask what it practically meant for the early Christians to be marked by the mark of the beast, on the forehead and on the right hand. We must explore two contexts relating to the Christians of the first century A.D. in interpreting this part. The first context is the Greco-Roman one. The word used for 'mark' is *charagma* in Greek. There was a common practice in the Roman Empire of branding (i.e., putting a *charagma*) domestic slaves with a mark of their owner. If the mark of the beast is connected to this custom then its meaning is to say that those who worshipped the beast belonged to it as his property.

Secondly and most importantly, on every agreement of sale, there was a *charagma*, that is, a stamp, engraved device with the name of the emperor as well as the day's date. If the mark of the beast reflects this custom then it means that those worshipping the beast were those accepting his authority. Military men were engraved with their general's name as a way of expressing their loyalty to him. had a practice of branding themselves with the name of their general if they were devoted to him. The implication will be that those paying homage to the beast were his devoted followers. Overall, from the Greco-Roman Empire's context, being marked by the mark of the beast, for John's audience meant belonging to the beast and accepting his dominance over oneself. And it was actually happening that those who refused to accept the demands of the emperor were killed; if not killed, they would be economically disadvantaged. This could be what is reflected in John's vision as 'buying and selling' in connection with the mark of the beast. Christians had to make a public choice for Christ or for Caesar.

The second context to consider is the Jewish background of Rev 13:16-18. The indication that the second beast caused all, both great and small, rich and poor, to be marked on the forehead and on the right hand is best understood as a parody of the Jewish custom of wearing phylacteries<sup>9</sup>. The Jews had a custom of moving about, wearing phylacteries on the forehead and on the left arm close to the heart. Phylacteries were little

leather boxes which contained little scrolls of parchment. Some passages from the Torah (e.g. the Shema, Deut 6:4-9) were written in these scrolls. In short, the phylacteries contained the Word of God, his commandments. They reminded the people to obey God's Word and that should submit to his authority to receive his blessing. In this case, being branded by the mark of the beast would symbolically mean the exact reverse of obeying God's commandments. It meant idolatry – submitting to the authority of the beast, the embodiment of Satan called 'the dragon' who gave power to the beast according to the book. It meant disobedience of the Word of God in pursuit of pagan gods of the Romans. So, with the vision of the two beasts, John was encouraging his persecuted fellow Christians to remain faithful to God's Word and avoid emperor worship.

In the light of the above exposition, it can be ascertained with no shred of doubt that the 'mark of the beast' in Revelation has nothing to do with COVID-19 vaccine! The writer of Revelation had no idea that sometime, more than 2000 years later after his time, in 2019, a virus would emerge in China called coronavirus. It was not John's concern that in 2020/2021 some vaccines for COVID-19 would be produced and be given to people. It is crucial to remember that the Book of Revelation is an apocalypse rather than a prophecy, an apocalyptic literature rather than a prophetic book predicting the future.

One key feature of apocalyptic writings is to present, in the form of a revelation (apokalupsis in Greek) a past or present event as though it would happen in the future. Technically this is called vaticinium ex eventu (i.e., 'prediction out of an event') technique. Therefore, the interpretation of the mark of the beast in Rev 13:16-18 should refer primarily to what had happened or was happening during John's time in the first century A. D. and not to some far distant future. We have already noticed that the activity of the people being marked by the mark of the beast is written in the present tense to show that it happened then when John was writing. Therefore, there is no need to mix up issues: if one has reservations (legitimate or otherwise) on COVID-19 vaccines, Rev 13:16-18 should not be forced to legitimize one's opinion.

Nonetheless, as 21st century Christians, living in the era of COVID-19, we can still ask ourselves if Rev 13 has relevance for us. The answer

is affirmative. The mark of the beast for us today need not be any physical or literal mark on our bodies like the proposed electronic microchip or certificate of COVID-19 vaccination of some sort. The mark of the beast for today's Christians means anything we do that goes against God or Christ and would show our allegiance to Satan and his human cohorts.

To say 'no' to the mark of the beast is to obey God's Word, keeping it close to our hearts, and allowing it to direct our thoughts and decisions in our entire life, public and private. If one lives a life contrary to God's Word – one is already embodying in oneself, the 'mark of the beast'. Thus, if those behind the manufacturing and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines do so in a manner contrary to God's Law, they will also be branding unto themselves, the mark of the beast! Consequently, it makes no sense for a Christian to fear COVID-19 vaccine as the mark of the beast, if at the same time, one is leading a life contrary to Christ.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has offered a detailed exegetical exposition of the meaning of the mark of the beast referred to in the Book of Revelation (13:16-18). It has been argued that the text should be interpreted taking cognizance of its historical context of the first century A.D. when it was written. In that context, the mark of the beast (i.e., the number 666) meant the name of Emperor Nero who arguably is used to represent the evil Roman religious and political system of the time which was persecuting Christians. The mark of the beast has nothing to do with COVID-19 vaccine of the 21st century which was unknown to John and his audience.

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<sup>1</sup> Williamson, S. Peter. *Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015.) 238

<sup>2</sup> Fani-Kayode, Femi. 'Covid-19 and the Mark of the Beast', [https://m.facebook.com/ffaniKayode/posts/10158287115637210?locale2=pl\\_PL](https://m.facebook.com/ffaniKayode/posts/10158287115637210?locale2=pl_PL). Accessed: on 31 August 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas, J. Christopher & Macchia, D. Frank. *Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016.) 244-47.

<sup>4</sup> Farley, J. Roland. *Apocalypse Then and Now: A Companion to the Book of Revelation* (New York, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999.) 117.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas & Macchia, 246.

<sup>6</sup> John M. Phiri *The Crazy Catholic Talks About the Number 666*, (Ndola: Mission Press 2004.) 172.

<sup>6</sup> *he Crazy Catholic Talks About the Number 666*, 172.

<sup>7</sup> *The Crazy Catholic Talks About the Number 666*, 172.

<sup>8</sup> Norbert Brockman & Umberto Pescantini. *A History of the Catholic Church* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa) 28.

<sup>9</sup> Barclay, William. *The Revelation of John: Volume 2 Chapters 6–22* (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1983) 235.

## **Symbolism of Wound in the Spiritual Canticle of St. John of the Cross**

*Lefani Francis Mwanza, O. Carm.*

### **Introduction**

An accomplished Spanish poet, mystic and reformer of the 16th Century, John of the Cross utilized symbolism in his exploration of Spiritual Life.<sup>1</sup> Analysis of the works of John of the Cross reveals that poetry can be understood as being the primary mode through which he presents his doctrine of the processes characterizing the Spiritual Life. It has to be noted; that it was only after requests for explanations of the poetry that John of the Cross, wrote prose as explanatory notes to his poetry.

### **Spiritual Life: A Process of Purification of the Bride**

John of the Cross, presents the Spiritual Life as a process of purification of the Soul through various levels and stages with the ultimate goal being unification of the Beloved with the Bride (Soul). Through intricate connections, ordinary and perhaps mundane words acquire new meaning in the poetry of John. From the wounding of love, the Bride is led through, “mountains and lonely wooded valleys” into “sweet garden of her desire,” where the Bride dwells “in the serene night with a flame that is consuming and painless”.<sup>2</sup> Through a bold and well calculated rejection of common and conventional usage of themes upon poetry, John generates a rich synthesis of meaning in the Spiritual Life discourse which in *The Spiritual Canticle* is presented through poetic communication between the Beloved and the Bride.<sup>3</sup> By great wit, John transforms complicated and complex concepts of the Spiritual Life into beautiful, comprehensible and applicable themes through poetry rich in symbolism.

### **Symbolism in the Poetry of John of the Cross**

Through various dictions relating to the ordinary and mundane activities of the human condition, John manages to communicate the intricacies of the Spiritual Life in a poetically captivating manner. In the *Spiritual Canticle*, symbol becomes for me, the most interesting part of

the poetry of John. In this current project I understand symbols as a sign that has further layers of meaning in it. By being broader and more ambiguous in meaning, symbols are differentiated from signs.

In the *Spiritual Canticle*, John of the Cross explores the Spiritual Life in a language that is rich in symbolism. Using simple object choices such as ‘wine cellar’, ‘valley’ and ‘herd’ John creates an environment where the Spiritual Life is understood in a completely new way where the Beloved becomes a part of the Bride on account of the Bride having drunk of her Beloved.<sup>4</sup> Through use of the ocular imagery of drinking, John presents the reality of Spiritual Union between the Beloved and the Bride. It is ingestion of the Beloved by the Bride in ‘the inner wine cellar’ that the union between the Beloved and the Lover is actualized. Through implicit association, the Beloved is recognized as being represented by wine. Wine, therefore, in this instance becomes a symbol of Christ who is the Beloved of the *Spiritual Canticle*.<sup>5</sup> Wine identically relates to the ingestion process and through such ingestion of the Beloved, the Bride is brought into intimate union with the Beloved, whom she has sought in different places only to be found, “in the inner wine cellar”. The word choice of John, in this instance shows his understanding of the realities of Spiritual Life as having its final goal in the union of the Beloved and the Bride.

### **John of the Cross in the Context of Carmelite Doctors of the Church**

John of the Cross does not stand alone in understanding the Spiritual Life as a Journey in search of the Beloved. Apparently, this view of the Spiritual Life as a Journey is drawn from the life of the Prophet Elijah who is recognized as a Figure of Inspiration by the Carmelites.<sup>6</sup> Distinctive stages of the Spiritual Life as a journey are discernible in the Elijah Cycle of the 1st Book of Kings in the Hebrew Scriptures. It is therefore plausible to consider that the understanding of the Spiritual Life as a journey through various levels and stages is adopted by the Carmelites from the foundational stories of their Spiritual Father.

Teresa of Jesus and Therese of the Child Jesus and Holy Face are the other two Doctors of the Church from the School of Carmel. It is of

special interest to note that in these two female Doctors of the Church, the Spiritual Life is presented in the context of a Journey. Teresa of Jesus with her *Interior Castle* and *The Way of Perfection* characterizes the Spiritual Life as a journey evidenced by the various levels within the walls of the Castle and the Spiritual Union being only achievable after one has journeyed, “*The Way of Perfection*”. Therese of the Child Jesus and Holy Face, in her, ‘little way’ where there is use of elevators, in *The Story of a Soul*, clearly advances the same thesis of the Spiritual Life as a Journey. Thus, the three Carmelite Doctors of the Church are seen as having a common understanding of the Spiritual Life as a Journey. Furthermore, it is recognized from the foregoing that the Carmelite Doctors of the Church seem to impart their understanding of the Spiritual Life primarily through the use of symbolism.

### **Symbolism in The Spiritual Canticle**

In its endeavour to explore the concept of Symbolism in the poetry of John of the Cross, the project will concentrate its attention on the *Spiritual Canticle*. Recourse to other poems of John of the Cross will be made where such a detour assists in clarification of symbolism in the *Spiritual Canticle*. Instances abound where some people are of the opinion that John of the Cross is too difficult to understand, furthermore, that his use of symbolism is difficult to interpret. Nevertheless, I am of the humble opinion that with the right interpretive key (that is, within Carmelite Spirituality), John of the Cross is one of the most interesting Doctors of the Church.

This project explores ‘wound’ which is one of the symbols that John uses in the *Spiritual Canticle*. Furthermore, the project attempts at identifying the key elements of wound as a symbol appearing in *The Spiritual Canticle*, describing the manner in which John constructs this symbol. It is expected that this project will provide an analysis of some of the symbolic nature of wound in *The Spiritual Canticle*.

The term symbol enters into the English language as a derivative from the Greek *symbolon* and Latin *symbolum* which etymologically means a token, a sign. In its usage in the literary sense symbol denotes a communicative element representing or standing for a complex of person, object,

group, or idea, it is more than just mere representation. Furthermore, a symbol denotes through representation a complex set of abstract values. Symbol is something which is more than what it is, it goes beyond its literal meaning, it is characterized with further layers of meaning and at times it goes beyond what the writer consciously intended.

Poetry has the capacity of communicating both positive and negative elements. In the poetry of John of the Cross, this characteristic of poetry being capable of communicating contrasting elements is clearly exemplified. *The Spiritual Canticle* contains in its stanzas the reality of death and life, of wounding and healing thus making *The Spiritual Canticle* polyphonic. This current project considers only four themes of wound as a symbol contained in *The Spiritual Canticle*. The project attends to the following themes; firstly, wound as genesis of encounter between the Bride and Beloved, secondly, wound as process of tearing the sweet veil, thirdly, wound as expression of love and lastly the intention of the Beloved in wounding the Bride.

### **Wound: Genesis of Encounter between Bride and the Beloved**

Quantitatively, the symbol wound is the predominant symbol in *The Spiritual Canticle*. The symbol occurs both explicitly and implicitly. Five times the symbol is explicit and in four instances it is implicit. To articulate the dynamics characterizing the relationship between the Bride and the Beloved, John employs the symbol of wound. As a sign, wound denotes that which is unpleasant and as John puts it a form of suffering.<sup>7</sup> It thus becomes curious for John to use wound as the principal expression of the relationship between the Beloved and the Bride since this relationship is characterized by other realities apart from suffering. Only when considered as a symbol, does wound expose the multiplicity of the intricacies of the relationship between the Bride and the Beloved and its complexity.

John presents the relationship between the Bride and the Beloved as having its genesis through the process of the wounding of the Bride by the Beloved. It is understood here that John is of the opinion that the relationship between the Bride and the Beloved begins with an invitation extended by the Beloved towards the Bride. An invitation made through

the love of the Beloved which wounds the Bride.<sup>8</sup> This invitation is in the form of the wounding of the Bride, whose wounding prompts her constant search for Beloved. The wounding of the Bride in itself necessitates the constant search for the Beloved by the Bride. Mourning the absence of the Beloved, the Bride states, “You fled like the stag, after wounding me”.<sup>9</sup> This notion of the Beloved being the source of the wound that characterizes the Bride is reiterated in *The Dark Night* where the Bride says, “as I parted his hair, it wounded my neck”.<sup>10</sup> Through the use of personification John exposes his understanding of the Spiritual Journey as being characterized by difficulties as the Bride strives for communion with the Beloved.

The Bride is presented as being fully aware of the reality that, absence of the Beloved creates a thirsting for the Beloved that can only be quenched by union with the Beloved.<sup>11</sup> Leonardo Doohan believes that the wound that characterizes the Bride is attributed to the action of the Holy Spirit.<sup>12</sup> The Bride experiences this action of the Holy Spirit as a wound through the process of purification that she undergoes as preparation for her union with the Beloved. Through an increase in the desire for the Beloved that the Bride experiences her capacity for full communion with the Beloved is attained. This wounding is experienced as a “flame of love that tenderly wounds,” the soul of the Bride, the wounding occurs at the very centre of the Bride.<sup>13</sup> The Bride is thus freed from all other desires and now thirsts for the Beloved and only finds solace in the wounding action of the Holy Spirit experienced as a flame of love. It is at the deepest centre of the Bride that she experiences this wounding action of the Beloved.<sup>14</sup>

### **Wound: The Process of Tearing of the Veil**

The process of the encounter between the Bride and the Beloved presents another stratum upon which John constructs the symbol of wound to explicate the processes that characterize the Spiritual Journey of the Bride towards union with the Beloved. John introduces the symbol of wounding functioning as a process of emancipation of the Bride by the Beloved.<sup>15</sup> Through an appeal to those already in freedom the Bride requests that she be wounded even more.<sup>16</sup> Freedom is placed in direct

opposition with attachment in this instance, on the one side is freedom experienced as union with the Beloved pitted against attachment experienced as separation from the Beloved. Through paradox, John here constructs one of his most impressive points regarding the Spiritual Journey. Freedom is often associated with independence of entities yet John presents union between Bride and Beloved as an expression of the full freedom of the Bride. In *The Spiritual Canticle* 7, the Bride states;

All who are free  
tell me a thousand graceful things  
of you;  
all wound me more  
and leave me dying  
of, ah, I-don't-know-what behind  
their stammering<sup>17</sup>

Communion between the Bride and the Beloved is presented in the form of union and thus distinguished from attachment. Where union achieves freedom for the Bride, attachment yields dependence and confusion.

Further analysis of wound as symbol in this part of *The Spiritual Canticle*, points to the process of the wounding of the Bride by the Beloved as being, the “tear through the veil of this sweet encounter”.<sup>18</sup> The symbol of wound is here understood as pointing to the reality that while the Bride experiences her encounter with the Beloved as characterized by pain, it is a sweet pain as the Bride is torn from attachments and experiences freedom in the tearing of the veil of sweet encounter.<sup>19</sup> In the process of self-abandonment, the Bride experiences the encounters with the Beloved that constitute the delightful. In the wonderful pain of encounter with Beloved, the wonderful pain of love heals the Bride.<sup>20</sup>

Informed by the foregoing, the wound is understood to symbolize the painful moment of a severing of the attachments that ordinarily prevent the Bride from coming into union with the Beloved.<sup>21</sup> Attachments by their very nature impede the union of the Bride with Beloved. No matter how minute attachments may be, they block that initial contact between the Bride and the Beloved. The initial encounter of the Bride with the Beloved, brings to the Bride a consciousness of the fact that attachments

are a stumbling block preventing her attainment of a sweet encounter with the Beloved. The Bride is cognisant of the fact that only the Beloved has the capacity and power for her healing.<sup>22</sup> Likewise, the Bride recognizes that the messengers, sent by the Beloved only point to the direction of union with the Beloved. They only mitigate the pain of her wounding but her real cure is in union with the Beloved. The wounding therefore, of the Bride by the Beloved is seen as a tearing of the veil of separation and ultimately leads to union with the Beloved.

### **Wound: An Expression of Love**

In *The Spiritual Canticle* 34, John explains the symbolism of wound as being an expression of Love. This reality of the Bride's experience of wounding as an expression of love is fully captured by the Beloved when he states; "and in solitude he guides her, he alone who also bears in solitude the wound of love".<sup>23</sup> John presents a reciprocity of the Beloved towards the Bride in this stanza; the Bride is able to love the Beloved on account of the Beloved having loved her first.<sup>24</sup> The qualification of the wound that characterizes both the Bride and the Beloved as the wound of love presents the third element in the symbol of wound as articulated by John in *The Spiritual Canticle*.

This stanza of *The Spiritual Canticle* presents the full reality of the environment in which the growth of the relationship between the Bride and the Beloved is attained. The Bride having previously left all that is beautiful to the eye, which the Bride enumerated as:

O woods and thickets  
 planted by the hand of my Beloved!  
 O green meadow,  
 coated, bright, with flowers,  
 tell me, has he passed by you?<sup>25</sup>

Having gone through a difficult journey of letting go that which is beautiful, the Bride is released from entanglement by attachments. It is love in itself that releases the Bride from attachments which separates her from the Beloved and it empowers her to love and seek the Beloved more sincerely.<sup>26</sup> This process of attainment of freedom by the Bride is characterized by a form of suffering that is borne by both the Bride and

the Beloved. For as the Beloved states, “She lived in solitude, [...] he alone, who also bears in solitude the wound of love”.<sup>27</sup> While the Bride experiences her separation from the Beloved as suffering in the form of a wound, the Beloved on his part experiences suffering in his being separated from his Bride. With love being the emotion that purifies the intention of the Bride towards union with the Beloved, the Beloved continues to draw the Bride towards himself.<sup>28</sup> Knowledge of the Beloved acquired through creatures becomes the constant reminder, the very pain of love to the Bride, that she is a state of separation from the object of her desires, the Beloved.<sup>29</sup> Wound thus becomes the symbol of the love which purifies and unites the Bride to the Beloved.

Informed by the foregoing, it thus becomes plausible to subscribe to the notion that the wounding of the Bride occurs in the context of love. The Bride is wounded by and for love. While suffering the pain of being wounded by encounter with the Beloved, the Bride invites the Beloved, “all wound me more” as she has realized it is only in union with the Beloved that true love is attained.<sup>30</sup> This process of wounding of the Beloved is the result of “the constant self-giving of God. God gives Himself to man unselfishly.” It is an invitation to the Bride that instead of choosing the gifts of the Beloved, she should rather opt for a choosing of the Giver of the gifts.<sup>31</sup> The messengers have failed her and only the love of the Beloved can bring true union with source and summit of her true desire, union with the Beloved.

### **The Beloved’s Intention in Wounding of the Bride**

Through symbolism of wound, John proceeds to explicate the intention of the Beloved in wounding the Bride. At her wits end, the Bride rhetorically questions the Beloved regarding his intention in wounding her. The Bride asks, “Why, since you wounded this heart, don’t you heal it?”<sup>32</sup> Here, it becomes apparent, that the dynamics in the relationship between the Bride and the Beloved seems incomprehensible to the Bride. The intention of the Beloved seems to elude the Bride at this state. For as much as she understands that she carries in herself the wound of love, she fails to see the rationale of the Beloved in wounding her.<sup>33</sup> The actions of the Beloved confuse the Bride, as she understands that it is love that has

wounded her and yet her search for this love only yields further pain as she becomes even more conscious of her separation from the object of her love.

Noting that love is never idle, John recognizes that the intention of the Beloved in wounding the Bride is that she becomes correctly disposed towards the source of her existence. The Bride was created for communion with the Beloved and attachments that characterizes the Bride have corrupted her. She fails to find satisfaction in creation for she was purely created for union with the Beloved.<sup>34</sup> In spite of creation revealing something of the reality of God, it is only in the Bride being taken fully into the possession of the Beloved that she can find true healing which she has earnestly sought in her questioning of the Beloved;

Why, since you have wounded  
this heart, don't you heal it?  
And why, since you stole it from me,  
do you leave it so,  
and fail to carry off what you have  
stolen?

It is of keen interest that John here uses 'heart' as a self-reference of the Bride. The heart is the seat of emotions and in the Brides being stolen by the Beloved and yet the Beloved not taking that he has stolen brings confusion to the Bride.<sup>35</sup> John has the Bride in total confusion as she seeks the intention of the Beloved. It is to enkindle love and delight in the Beloved that leads the Beloved wounding the Bride. The bride is wounded such that she seeks and comes to full union with the Beloved.

Moreover, the wounding by the Beloved is intended at extinguishing the miseries that characterizes the Bride. The wound of the Bride thus becomes a constant reminder to the Bride that there is something lacking in her that is only achievable through union with the Beloved.<sup>36</sup> Most of the images that John employs in this part of *The Spiritual Canticle* puts to the fore the confusion and helplessness of the Bride. She is presented as constantly seeking that which she seems to be in possession of. Her stolen heart is there and yet the miseries she experiences remind her that her heart is stolen. She receives arrows that pierce her to the core from what she conceives of the Beloved.<sup>37</sup>

In remaining hidden to the Bride, the Beloved intends that the Bride is stripped of all that prevents union between Beloved and Bride. In addition, the Bride is healed from disfigurement by sin through her union with the Beloved.<sup>38</sup> John is here recognized as using a paradox in presenting the intention of the Beloved in his wounding of the Bride. The Bride is wounded in order that she is healed from the effects of sin. It is thus apparent here that John rejects the conventional usage of wound and through this rejection points to the reality of healing coming from wounding. Progression in the Spiritual Journey is thus portrayed by John of the Cross as being characterized by moments where the Bride fails to understand the action of the Beloved. The Bride seems to have negative knowledge in the sense that she knows that she does not know the intentions that the Beloved has for her.

### **Fundamental Convictions and Conclusion**

Drawing from the foregoing, it is noted that John of the Cross uses wound not as a sign but as a symbol. As presented above, wound in *The Spiritual Canticle* exposes a multiplicity of meanings thus denoting it is not a sign but a symbol since it contains more than one meaning. The project explored the various meanings of wound in *The Spiritual Canticle*, noting that John uses a number of images as symbols to communicate the realities of the Spiritual Journey. Wound as a symbol in *The Spiritual Canticle* has a plurality of meanings and this project only concentrated on four of these meanings. In the first instance, wound was considered as the genesis of the encounter between the Bride and the Beloved. Upon this encounter through wounding the process of tearing the veil of separation between the Bride and Beloved is advanced, through the expression of love. It is the intention of Beloved in wounding the Bride, that she is brought into union with Him and thus the Bride purged of her disordered affections becomes one with Christ, the Beloved. In consideration of the foregoing, one comes to the conclusion that through symbolism John of the Cross explores the relationship between the Bride and the Beloved.

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<sup>1</sup> Graviss, Dennis. *Portrait of the Spiritual Director in the Writings of Saint John of the Cross*. (Roma: Edizione Carmelitane, 2014), 66.

- <sup>2</sup> John of the Cross. *The Collected Works of John of the Cross: Spiritual Canticle*. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez. Trans. (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1991), 14, 22,32,39.
- <sup>3</sup> Muto, Susan. *John of the Cross: The Dark Night*. (Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 1994),25.
- <sup>4</sup> *The Spiritual Canticle 26*.
- <sup>5</sup> John of the Cross. *The Collected Works of John of the Cross: The Spiritual Canticle*. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez. Trans. (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1991), 575.
- <sup>6</sup> Chalmers, Joseph. *The Sound of Silence: Listening to the Word of God with Elijah the Prophet*. (Faversham, Kent: St. Albert Press, 2007), 11.
- <sup>7</sup> John of the Cross. *The Collected Works of John of the Cross: The Spiritual Canticle*. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez. Trans. (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1991), 478.
- <sup>8</sup> John of the Cross. *The Collected Works of John of the Cross: The Spiritual Canticle*. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez. Trans. (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1991), 478.
- <sup>9</sup> *The Spiritual Canticle 1*.
- <sup>10</sup> John of the Cross. *The Collected Works of John of the Cross: The Dark Night*. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez. Trans. (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1991), *The Dark Night 7*.
- <sup>11</sup> Mina, Macario Ofilada. *Flame in the Night Canticle of the Mountain*. (Roma: Edizione Carmelitane, 2015), 104.
- <sup>12</sup> Doohan, Leonardo. *The Contemporary Challenge of John of the Cross*. (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1995),100.
- <sup>13</sup> John of the Cross. *The Collected Works of John of the Cross: The Living Flame of Love*. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez. Trans. (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1991), *The Living Flame of Love 1*.
- <sup>14</sup> Thompson, Colin P. *St John of the Cross: Songs in the Night*. (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 245.
- <sup>15</sup> John of the Cross. *The Collected Works of John of the Cross: The Spiritual Canticle*. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez. Trans. (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1991), 500.
- <sup>16</sup> *The Spiritual Canticle 7*.
- <sup>17</sup> *The Spiritual Canticle 7*.
- <sup>18</sup> *The Living Flame of Love 1*.
- <sup>19</sup> John of the Cross. *The Collected Works of John of the Cross: The Spiritual Canticle*. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez. Trans. (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1991), 507.
- <sup>20</sup> Dombrowski, Daniel. *St. John of the Cross: An Appreciation*. (Albany: State University of New York, 1992), 97.
- <sup>21</sup> John of the Cross. *The Collected Works of John of the Cross: The Spiritual Canticle*. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez. Trans. (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1991), 508.
- <sup>22</sup> *The Spiritual Canticle 6*.
- <sup>23</sup> *The Spiritual Canticle 34*
- <sup>24</sup> Graviss, Dennis. *Portrait of the Spiritual Director in the Writings of Saint John of the Cross*. (Roma: Edizione Carmelitane, 2014), 104.
- <sup>25</sup> *The Spiritual Canticle 4*.

- <sup>26</sup> Graviss, Dennis. *Portrait of the Spiritual Director in the Writings of Saint John of the Cross*. (Roma: Edizione Carmelitane, 2014), 114.
- <sup>27</sup> *The Spiritual Canticle* 34.
- <sup>28</sup> Mina, Macario Ofilada. *Flame in the Night Canticle of the Night*. (Roma: Edizione Carmelitane, 2015), 104.
- <sup>29</sup> Herrera, R. A. *Silent Music: The Life, Work and Thought of John of the Cross*. (Grand Rapids: WM. B. Eerdmans, 2004), 94.
- <sup>30</sup> *The Spiritual Canticle* 7.
- <sup>31</sup> Mina, Macario Ofilada. *Flame in the Night Canticle of the Night*. (Roma: Edizione Carmelitane, 2015), 144.
- <sup>32</sup> *The Spiritual Canticle* 9.
- <sup>33</sup> John of the Cross. *The Collected Works of John of the Cross: The Spiritual Canticle*. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez. Trans. (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1991), 505.
- <sup>34</sup> Mina, Macario Ofilada. *Flame in the Night Canticle of the Night*. (Roma: Edizione Carmelitane, 2015), 115.
- <sup>35</sup> John of the Cross. *The Collected Works of John of the Cross: The Spiritual Canticle*. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez. Trans. (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1991), 506.
- <sup>36</sup> John of the Cross. *The Collected Works of John of the Cross: The Spiritual Canticle*. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez. Trans. (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1991), 509.
- <sup>37</sup> *The Spiritual Canticle* 8.
- <sup>38</sup> Mangiaracina, George. *A Lenten Journey with St. John of the Cross*. (Wellesley: Christos Publishing, 2009), 167.

## Physicians of the Soul

*Dr. Sigurd Lefsrud*

*“The guiding of man, the most variable and manifold of creatures, seems to me in very deed to be the art of arts and science of sciences. Any one may recognize this, by comparing the work of the physician of souls with the treatment of the body...”<sup>1</sup>*

With these words Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, the 4th-century Cappadocian Church Father, begins a discourse on the unique role of the spiritual physician, whose practice has similarities with medical physicians, yet greatly surpasses the latter in depth and breadth. Meditating on this theme seems eminently fitting right now, given the situation the world finds itself in. After a year mired down by a pandemic, we have become obsessed with the care and safety of the body, so it is an opportune time to rebalance our perspective by being reminded of matters of the spirit, the lifeblood of the Body of Christ.

The Covid-19 pandemic will long be remembered throughout the world as a time of struggle and sorrow. Many lives have sunk deeper into poverty, many have been psychologically hurt by isolation, and many have died. Everyone is aware of these grave physical and social harms caused by both the virus itself and extensive lockdowns, but what are the spiritual consequences of the pandemic? Much thought and action have been focused on the former, but the Church has only begun to assess the latter. How has the pandemic spiritually affected the lives of Christians throughout the world? Has the Church fulfilled its calling to be “salt and light” in addressing spiritual needs, which are in many ways more critical than physical ones? Has it risen to the challenge, or rather sunk beneath the waves of tribulation?

St. Gregory’s Second Oration, popularly known as *De Fuga*, provides a helpful lens through which we can gain illumination and focus on these questions. He wrote it to provide an explanation for why he fled into solitude immediately after being ordained to the priesthood, and why it was over a year until he returned from his retreat. He had several good reasons for his flight, the first and most important being that he was in

a state of confusion and shock after being ordained suddenly and rather forcefully by his father. However, the last reason he mentions is the most pertinent to our study. Knowing the grave responsibilities and challenges of his new vocation, he felt inadequate to the task: “I did not, nor do I now, think myself qualified to rule a flock or herd, or to have authority over the souls of men.”<sup>2</sup> He was a humble man and knew well his own failings, insisting that one must guard against the desire to “undertake to heal others while [we] ourselves are full of sores.”<sup>3</sup>

After providing an explanation for what he admits was a lapse of judgment in fleeing from the scene, St. Gregory begins a long exposition on the challenging nature and dignity of Christian ministry. He does so by comparing the work of those who seek to heal the body with those whose calling is to heal and nurture the soul. While he affirms that caring for the body is essential and a great good, the healing of souls “is of more consequence, from the nature of its subject matter, the power of its science, and the object of its exercise.”<sup>4</sup> This is so because the former is “mainly concerned with the surface, and only in a slight degree investigates the causes which are deeply hidden. But the whole of our treatment and exertion is concerned with the hidden man of the heart.”<sup>5</sup>

St. Gregory’s point should be self-evident to any Christian who takes his faith seriously, for we all know that our bodies are temporal and will one day dissolve into the earth, while our souls are immortal. Yet in everyday life do we act as if we really believe that the health of souls “is of more consequence” than the healing of our bodies? Do we not in fact far more consistently glorify the medical profession and its practitioners, while thinking little of the spiritual physicians in our parishes and religious communities? I have been surprised during this current pandemic how health care workers have regularly been granted an exaggerated status as heroes for simply doing their job, while religious leaders caring for others have not even been noticed. The latter are insignificant because any contributions they make are viewed as trivial compared to that of the healthcare worker. In the broader context, society increasingly views the Christian Church as irrelevant and useless because while highly valuing material gains and benefits it gives little or no import to the spiritual dimension of the human person. This trend which characterizes

modernity is one that should be of grave concern to us all.

The words of St. Gregory serve to awaken us on this theme by heralding the truth of the matter in comparing physicians of the body with physicians of the soul:

“The one preserves, if it already exists, the health and good habit of the flesh, or if absent, recalls it ... But the scope of our art is to provide the soul with wings, to rescue it from the world and give it to God, and to watch over that which is in His image. If it abides, to take it by the hand, if it is in danger, restore it, if ruined, to make Christ to dwell in the heart by the Spirit—and, in short, to deify, and bestow heavenly bliss upon, one who belongs to the heavenly host.”<sup>6</sup>

The art of the Church is the highest art and also the noblest science, for its aim is nothing less than the complete transformation of the human person, body and soul, into the likeness of God. This task far surpasses that of the physical sciences, as for example the castle designed by an architect surpasses the sandcastle patted together by a child: the former has beauty of form and lasting solidity, while the latter is crude and quickly washes away with the waves. For our earthly days are like flowers that quickly fade and blow away with the wind (Psalm 103.15), whereas our resurrected bodies will live forever. Caring for the body is important and valuable, but even at their best the remedies of doctors are only a temporary fix, whereas working toward the deification of the human person not only far more fully defines what a person actually is—a being of both body and soul—but has eternal consequences.

Therefore, it is important to ask ourselves at this moment of history: to what degree has the Church lived up to this tremendous calling, providing souls “with wings” during the pandemic? Have we been a witness of the paramount value of the spiritual in the midst of the world’s preoccupation with the physical? Have we disseminated the message that the infection of sin is far more serious than Covid-19, for it destroys the person’s very being, body and soul? And that the greatest cure is Jesus Christ, who “vaccinates” us with the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives? “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned

... even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life" (Rom 5.12, 18). Has the voice of the Church, her gospel message, been heard with clarity and verve during the pandemic? Or has it rather been stifled, if not silenced—overwhelmed by the shouts of those who worship the idol of personal safety above all else. "Be safe!" has become the new mantra of the masses—physical health taking precedence over all other dimensions of human life, including the psychological, economic, and (especially) spiritual. Obvious examples of this skewed focus include the fact that prevalent lockdowns designed to prevent the spread of the virus have created a dramatic rise in other serious problems such as domestic abuse, suicides, and home abortions (via pills), which have been given little attention compared to the frenzy of activity concentrated on preventing the spread of the virus. Furthermore, millions of people have lost their livelihood and sunk deeper into poverty, exacerbating other social problems. Finally, parishes have been closed for months on end, depriving hundreds of millions of spiritual sustenance.

How has the Church responded to these issues, to the often-over-amplified fear pervading public life? Has it been a witness of courage and resilience, of trust in God and the efficacy of prayer, or has it rather by its actions failed to challenge the prevalent attitude that physical health inherently usurps all other considerations about what it means to be human? The world has been living in a pandemic of fear, which in some ways is worse than the virus itself, for it places an irrational emphasis on the safety of the body and thus demeans the dignity of the human person, who at his most noble overcomes the mere instinct for survival. When the mere sneeze of a person sends others scuttling away with alarm, it is a sign that something is not right with either our psyches or our existential point of view.

It seems clear that the Church has sent mixed messages to both the faithful and greater society this past year. (In the following, I speak from my experience in North America, which I acknowledge may be quite different from some other countries.) If the Eucharist is indeed the "source and summit" of Christian life<sup>7</sup>, should parishes ever be closed for weeks or months on end—for *any* reason? Yet in many parts of the world that is precisely what happened, with most bishops readily acquiescing to

State demands. For what reason? Mainly, it seems, to simply cooperate with the authorities for the sake of what has been deemed the “public good,” however debatably restrictions were applied to local parishes. In most locales few bishops made efforts to question or challenge lockdown orders with the goal of keeping parishes open to the faithful. Indeed, some even surpassed the strict measures of the State by requiring their priests to refrain from anointing the sick and providing Viaticum for the dying. As a result, many elderly—who compose the vast majority of those suffering from the virus—died alone and without receiving last rites. In all of this it is important to ask ourselves what the Church is conveying to the world about the nature of the Christian faith. More pointedly, what kind of a “sign to the nations” (Isa 11.12) is the Church being when it withdraws its ministry particularly at moments of great need? If the sacraments are indeed our very lifeblood as Christians, one could use the analogy of a sick patient (which all of us are) having his IV removed at the very moment he is most in need of life-giving fluids. This analogy may seem extreme, however, the closure of parishes created genuine spiritual distress to countless believers, especially daily mass-goers who for the first time in their lives were unable to receive the eucharist for months on end.

Throughout history it has particularly been priests and religious (more than anyone else in society) who risked their own health during pandemics to reach out to the sick and dying with spiritual counsel and the sacraments. And it is important to note that our current pandemic is minor compared to others such as the Black Plague of the 14th century and the Spanish Flu of the early 20th century, which killed exponentially more. Have we become so careful, or perhaps so desirous of public approbation, that we now withdraw from performing the vital ministry of the Church at the first sign of physical risk? Jesus did not come to our world at arm’s length, but rather reached out his arm to touch all of the contagious (of both body and soul), including even lepers who sought his presence and healing. If the Church is indeed the continuation of Christ’s mission, the hospital of the soul, the only place offering eternal sustenance and salvation to the world—a mission far surpassing that of the medical establishment—should it not have been in overdrive during the

pandemic rather than often absent from the life of society? A medical hospital would never close its doors during a public emergency, for to do so would belie its very purpose for existence. Should not the same be said (and even more so) about the Church?

Fear has played far too great a role in society and the life of the Church this past year. It is understandable given our fragile human condition that many are easily frightened about what is unseen and therefore mysterious, especially things like viruses. We are afraid of the dark, of murky water, of diseases, and most potently, death. Our Christian faith, however, provides the vision and strength to overcome such fears. Indeed, the quality of courage has been a distinguishing characteristic of all the saints through the ages, from the confessors to the martyrs. A healthy faith does not run away from the unseen but towards it, for we believe that it is the things of the Spirit, hidden in mystery, that are the very source of our life. And we are confident that God rules the entire cosmos, seen and unseen, with His loving care. St. Paul summarizes this conviction well:

“So, we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.” (2 Cor 4.16-18).

The mission of the Church is to be a witness of hope and faith in the midst of the world’s fear—an example of the hidden power of prayer, of trust that our Sovereign Lord is watching over all that happens. As such, the mantra “Be Safe!” which seems to pervade all communication these days—whether on websites, TV advertisements, or tagged at the end of conversations and emails—should not be the primary refrain of the Christian. Rather we must give voice to biblical words which express the confidence of our hope: “Fear not!” (Lk 12.32), or “Be strong and of good courage!” (Deut 31.6). For “neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8.38-39).

All of this also raises the question of what St. Paul meant when he exhorted the Church in Rome to “be subject to the governing authorities” (Rom 13.1), for that is of course an important rationale for accepting restrictions on worship and the closure of parishes. The principle is by no means clear cut, for throughout history it has always been necessary for the Church to discern the limits of this teaching. Believers in the early Church under Roman rule obviously did not obey the State regarding its mandate to worship idols, but rather gladly died as martyrs to give witness to their faith in the true God. And despite Communist threats, deportations, and the murder of countless priests and religious, Russian believers under Stalin continued to secretly gather for worship even though it was forbidden by law. The current pandemic by no means compares with those seasons of martyrdom, nevertheless, it highlights two important principles. Firstly, there have been, and always will be, governments that seek to suppress Christian worship because they view it as a negative force in society. Secondly, for Christians’ worship is non-negotiable: participating in the life of the Body of Christ and receiving the precious gifts of His Body and Blood is the very heart of Christianity, and means everything to the faithful. We all agree that Christians are sustained and nourished in their faith by gathering together and receiving the sacraments, but do we consider the opposite true? Are the faithful weakened and even harmed when they are deprived of Christian community and these gifts of the Spirit? To at least some degree, the answer must be “yes,” for “the work of our redemption is accomplished” through the sacred liturgy,<sup>8</sup> the place where we most profoundly commune with our Lord.

All of the foregoing is a presage to what is in the end the most important question: what happens next? Will social distancing and mask-wearing continue to be the norm even when the pandemic threat has subsided? If so, will the Church support such behaviour, even though it has a negative effect on personal relationships and community life? Along those lines, could it become accepted liturgical practice for priests to distribute Holy Communion with disposable gloves and masks, and if so, what would this convey symbolically about the great mystery of the Eucharist? Even more crucially, what has happened this past year raises questions about how the Church will respond to other future challenges that threaten the

good of humanity. For not only new, and potentially more deadly, pandemics will continue to arise as they have throughout the ages, but other threats—arguably even more dire—face the Church and all of humanity. For example, many western governments have begun promoting abortion as a “human right,” and advocating euthanasia as the “alleviation of suffering.” The genetic revolution has led many prominent scientists and cultural leaders to advocate transhumanism, which foresees the integration of technology into the human body and mind. The justification for such developments is the betterment of humanity—indeed, its salvation—yet from a Christian perspective these things pose a grave threat to the very idea of what it means to be human—*imago Dei*, sacred and inherently spiritual beings with lives that extend far beyond this temporal veil. Along those lines, it is important to mention that sickness and death are not inherent evils in the Church’s teaching, and indeed often serve as means of grace and a dramatic witness to the truth of the gospel. One need only consider the powerful testimony of those who are patient and steadfast in suffering, and of course the brave example of the martyrs through the ages, whose blood is the very seed of the Church.

In summary, it must be emphasized that none of the preceding discourse is meant to belittle the contributions of healthcare workers and the improvements in medical science which have saved countless lives and helped all of us be healthier. Rather, it is to focus attention on what is most important: the salvation of souls. For as St. Gregory of Nazianzus reminds us, “the scope of our art is to provide the soul with wings, to rescue it from the world and give it to God, and to watch over that which is in His image”<sup>9</sup>, a task unique to the Church, and one that is of far greater consequence than that of medicine, or any other earthly forms of salvation. Our hope and comfort are ultimately in our Lord Jesus Christ, who frees us from fear and seeks to deify us so that we can participate even in the very life of God for eternity. It is this message which must always be front and centre in the Church, over all other temporal concerns, for it defines the very meaning of “salvation.”

The Covid-19 pandemic has raised many questions about what “faithfulness” and “witness” mean for the Church in its ministry to souls and its prophetic role in society. If St. Gregory is right about the supreme

dignity and worth of the Church's ministry—that spiritual well-being is of inherently greater consequence than physical well-being—then all of us will continue to have many more questions to answer, more prayers to raise, more examinations of conscience to perform in considering the public witness of the Church in the years ahead. Our calling as the Body of Christ will certainly remain a challenge, demanding great love and self-sacrifice:

“We, upon whose efforts is staked the salvation of a soul, a being blessed and immortal, and destined for undying chastisement or praise, for its vice or virtue—what a struggle ought ours to be, and how great skill do we require to treat, or get men treated properly, and to change their life, and give up the clay to the spirit!”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> De Fuga, 16.

<sup>2</sup> De Fuga 9.

<sup>3</sup> De Fuga 13.

<sup>4</sup> De Fuga 16.

<sup>5</sup> De Fuga 21.

<sup>6</sup> De Fuga 22.

<sup>7</sup> Lumen Gentium, 11.

<sup>8</sup> Sacrosanctum Concilium, 2.

<sup>9</sup> De Fuga 22.

<sup>10</sup> De Fuga 28.

## **The Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Religious Beliefs and Practices in Matabeleland South Province, Zimbabwe.**

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The first cases of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) were reported in China in December 2019. Since then, the disease has spread fast at international levels, Zimbabwe included. Due to the fast spread of the disease in terms of casualties and geographic coverage, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the coronavirus pandemic a public health emergency of international concern on January 30, 2020 and a pandemic on March 11, 2020. In Zimbabwe the first COVID-19 case was reported on 21 March in the resort town of Victoria Falls. The country enforced lockdowns as one of the public health response measures. The main purpose of the study is to critique the impact of COVID-19 on religious beliefs and practices of Christians and African Indigenous Religions (AIRs) adherents in Matabeleland South Province. The qualitative approach was employed using the descriptive case study design. Purposive sampling method was used to select thirty (30) research participants. Online open-ended questionnaires and telephone interviews were the main tools. The theoretical framework of this study was guided by Ninian Smart's seven dimensions of religions. The findings were that the COVID-19 pandemic has adversely affected the religious beliefs and practices of the Christians and AIRs adherents in Matabeleland South. The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in the cancellation of worship service gatherings, ceremonies and festivals. Many churches have resorted to online services. Some people even questioned the existence and supremacy of the Christian and AIRs Supreme Being. A majority of people began to use African Traditional medicines and methods on top of the Western medicines to serve themselves from COVID-19 pandemic. On a positive note, some Christians and AIRs adherents have been drawn nearer to God. The study concluded that COVID-19 has impacted negatively and positively on the religious beliefs and practices of Matabeleland

South populace. The study recommends that the Zimbabwean government should work together with the international community to halt the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. There should be more broadcasts online of church sermons and religious services through social media platforms. The communities should be educated on the importance of maintaining nature and ecological balance since COVID-19 is alleged to have originated from wild animals.

**Key words:** Impacts. COVID-19, religious worship, Matabeleland South, Zimbabwe.

### **Background of the study**

According to Mgojo, Plato in his *Cratylus* once said, “To teach a thing rightly it is necessary to define its name.”<sup>1</sup> As such we feel obliged to attempt to define and delineate the background of (COVID-19) in Matabeleland South Province. Numerous scholars have attempted to define and explain the background of the (COVID-19) in Matabeleland South province. According to Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) Situation -94 Report<sup>2</sup> the first human case of the COVID-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus causing COVID-19, subsequently called SARS-CoV-2 was first reported by officials in Wuhan City, China, in December 2019. It is important to note that whilst some of the earliest known cases had a link to a wholesale food market in Wuhan some did not. The above report further points out that environmental samples taken from the wholesale food market tested positive for SARS-CoV-2, further proposing that the market in Wuhan City was the source of this epidemic.<sup>3</sup> Since the disease had advanced to become a global pandemic the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the coronavirus pandemic a public health emergency of international concern on January 30, 2020 and a pandemic on March 11, 2020.

The above view is also in line with what was put across by Murewanhema, Burukai, Mazingi, Maunganidze, Mufunda, Munodawafa and Pote (2020)<sup>4</sup> who assert that the first cases of COVID-19 were reported in China in December 2019 and the disease has evolved to become world-wide pandemic. Thus, the above scholars agree that the pandemic began in Wuhan, China in December 2019 and has spread internationally.

Dzinamarira, Mukwenha, Eightessadi, Cuadros, Mhlanga and Masuka (2020)<sup>5</sup> are of the idea that Zimbabwe has not been spared by COVID-19. They point out that the first COVID-19 case was reported on 21 March in the resort town of Victoria Falls. By 31 March 7 more people had tested positive with 1 reported death. These scholars even point out that there was a steady increase in the number of cases in the months of April to July 2020. Above all, they even postulate that there has been an uneven spread of the virus in Zimbabwe and Harare, Bulawayo, and Matabeleland South provinces are currently the COVID-19 hotspots in the country.

In 2020 lockdown measures were declared by the Zimbabwean government to curb the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the year 2021 started with a cloud of gloom and uncertain future with the latest lockdown measures being declared. Announcing the stiff lockdown measures the Vice President and health minister Constantine G. Chiwenga declared that the country had seen a “surge in Covid 19 cases during the festive seasons”<sup>6</sup> with cases almost doubling in the past months of January and February.

The above document read by the Vice President Constantine Chiwenga pointed out that gatherings were to be reduced to not more than 30 people at all funerals. All other gatherings at weddings, churches, bars, bottle stores, gymnasiums, restaurants, etc. were banned for 30 days. The correct wearing of masks, social distancing, hand sanitization and temperature checks were to be strictly enforced and offenders being prosecuted.<sup>7</sup> More so, only essential services were to remain open such as hospitals, pharmacies and supermarkets with only essential staff allowed to come to work. The services could only open at 8 am and close at 3pm and were subjected to curfew that started at 6pm and ended at 6am. Despite all these stiff lockdowns the situation even worsened to the extent that by 19 January 2021 new cases were 783, deaths 53. Cumulative cases 28675, recoveries 18110 deaths 825.<sup>8</sup>

In the foregoing section we have sketched the background that should provide the base and direction of this research. Hence, it is very clear that we are dealing with a phenomenon that cannot be ignored. In the next paragraph, we define what the statement of a problem is and the

key issues this study raises that need to be investigated.

### **Statement of the problem**

Murewanhema, Burukai, Mazingi, Maunganidze, Mufunda, Munodawafa and Pote<sup>9</sup> assert that the first cases of COVID-19 were reported in China in December 2019. These scholars pointed out that ever since that time the disease has evolved to become worldwide pandemic with Zimbabwe included. Strict lockdown measures have been declared one after the other. Hence, the question is, what is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the religious beliefs and practices in Matabeleland South province?<sup>10</sup>

### **Research questions**

The following research questions were used to unlock the main study:

- How did the Covid 19 impact on the religious practices and beliefs of Matabeleland South province populace?
- What strategies can be employed to overcome the impact of COVID-19 in the above province?

Having delineated the research questions, in the next section we examine the aim and objectives of the study.

### **Aim and objectives of the study**

The overall aim of this study was to understand and explain how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted on the religious practices and beliefs of the Matabeleland South province populace. More specifically, the main objectives of the study flowing from the research aim were:

- To unpack and explain how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on the religious practices and beliefs of Matabeleland South Province populace.
- To determine the strategies to overcome the impact of COVID-19 in the above province.

### **Research Methodology**

In this study we used qualitative research. The qualitative research

is based on an interpretive paradigm. Interpretive approaches to research have the purpose of understanding the world of human experience<sup>11</sup>. This suggests that reality is socially constructed as propounded by Mertens (2010)<sup>12</sup>. Creswell (2010) asserts that the interpretive researcher relies on the participants' views of the situation under study and takes cognizance of the impact on the research of their own experiences.<sup>13</sup> In this study, we used qualitative methods to adequately describe or interpret a situation in relation to how the COVID-19 has impacted on the religious beliefs and practices of the Matabeleland South populace.

For the research design we used a case study design. The case for this study were the Christians and African Indigenous Religions (AIRs) adherents from Matabeleland South region. We used a case study so that we would get an in-depth analysis of a single setting of the populace within the Matabeleland South province as even suggested by Moorhead and Griffin (1995)<sup>14</sup>. Participants were given a voice to articulate their experiences and their interpretation of the situation. Such an approach created space for the participants to speak for themselves, thereby providing thick descriptions of their lived experiences, their thoughts and feelings with regard to the impact of COVID-19 in the Matabeleland South region. We applied a case study design since it has numerous advantages as even posited by Moorhead and Griffin (1995)<sup>15</sup>. According to these scholars, case study design has the advantage of permitting the researcher to probe the situation in detail. Thus, it actually facilitated the discovery of unexpected relationships yielding a wealth of descriptive and explanatory information.

However, we would like to note that a case study had some limitations. For instance, according to Moorhead and Griffin (1995)<sup>16</sup> the data generated through a case study cannot readily be generated to other situations because the data generated is closely tied to the situation studied. More so, the data may again be biased towards the researcher's closeness to the situation. Above all, case study research tends to be very time consuming. Hence, when applying the case study in the research study we had to take such constraints into consideration.

Purposive sampling was used to select the participants of the study. The method was useful in making sure that we excluded people who did

not fit the requirements of the study. A sample of thirty (30) participants from both rural and urban areas was chosen. For research instruments, online open-ended questionnaires were sent to the selected twenty participants. Using such an instrument increased the response rate. In actual fact the low cost and overall convenience of online surveys brought a high response. The respondents were also able to answer questions on their own schedule at a pace they chose.

Above all, the respondents were not disclosing their answers to us so it was easier for them to open up. This was far much better compared to interviews whereas as interviewers we could influence responses in some cases.

Telephone interviews were used to interview ten participants from Matabeleland South province. This instrument assisted us to uncover rich descriptive data on the personal experiences of the participants and they remained focused on the topic under discussion. The interview results were tape recorded. The other advantage of using interviews was that we were able to interview the participants in their mother language. This created a free environment which allowed the participants to reveal their innermost feelings and experience in line with the impact of COVID-19 on their respective religions. Having outlined the research methodology, the next section examines the theoretical framework.

### **Theoretical framework**

The theoretical framework of this study was guided by Ninian Smart's seven dimensions of religions. We applied this framework because Ninian Smart actually uses the method of phenomenology or 'informed sympathy', through which he describes "the experiences and intentions of religious participants" or "what religious acts mean to the actors"<sup>17</sup> as noted by Malhotra Ashok (1999). Therefore, we used Ninian Smart's theory because it offers a non-judgemental description of the way religion is believed and practised by the adherents in Matabeleland South.

According to Malhotra Ashok (1999), Ninian Smart believes that all religious and secular belief systems evolve doctrines and philosophy for various reasons. These differing doctrines or philosophies are integrated

with other aspects of religion because they offer explanation and justification for the seven dimensions.<sup>18</sup> The above scholar also notes that Ninian Smart posits that all religions display their practical aspects through ritual. Rituals consist of activities like prayer, worship, meditation, pilgrimage, sacrifice, sacramental rites, rites of passage and healing.

Malhotra Ashok (1999) also notes that Ninian Smart posits that all religions have their mythic or narrative dimension.<sup>19</sup> Myths are stories about the invisible, divine or sacred world that are beyond being straight history. They even tell the stories of the founders or most significant personalities of these religions.<sup>20</sup> For example, they are stories about the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus or even stories about Buddha's life, temptations and enlightenment.

Malhotra Ashok also asserts that for Ninian Smart there is also the experiential or emotional dimension of each religion.<sup>21</sup> One can refer to aspects like the visions of the Prophet Muhammad, the conversion of Apostle Paul in Christianity and the enlightenment of the Buddha, which constitute seminal events in human history. Such events were also emotionally charged.

Malhotra Ashok (1999) points out that for Ninian Smart a religious tradition offers ethical and legal imperatives which might form the core of the religious practices.<sup>22</sup> Such dimensions often address the question of ultimate liberation and salvation. For instance, in Buddhism there are virtues and regulations such as the five precepts to control the lives of the monks, nuns and monastic communities. In Judaism there are the Ten commandments, whilst the Muslims are governed by Sharia law which shapes a society on a moral, religious and political level. The Muslims also have the Five Pillars which demands them to pray daily, give alms to the poor and have a pilgrimage to Mecca.

The Social and Institutional Dimension like the Material Dimension outlined below has to do with the "incarnation" of religion. According to the Bishop, Ninian Smart notes, "Every religious movement is embodied in a group of people, and that is very often rather formally organized- as Church, or Sangah or umma...To understand faith we need to see how it works among people."<sup>23</sup>

Lastly, there is also the Material Dimension which is the second

“incarnation” of religion in that a tradition becomes incarnate in material form. These can include buildings, works of art, artifacts and many other creations. However, it may also be the case that some religions abstain from external symbols as being potentially idolatrous. Hence, it is this kind of theoretical framework which guided our study.

### **Discussion of findings on the impacts of the COVID-19 on the religious practices and beliefs in Matabeleland South province**

This section showcases the impacts of the COVID-19 on the religious beliefs and practices of Matabeleland South province populace guided by Ninian Smart’s theory outlined in the preceding section. At this juncture we would like to point out that in this region we have Christianity and African Indigenous Religions<sup>i</sup>. In this section, it shall be shown that the religions in the province have been heavily affected negatively and positively by COVID-19 pandemic.

#### **Impact on the institutional aspects**

Firstly, from the online open-ended questionnaires and telephone interviews responses we noted that the Christian churches in Gwanda, Umzingwane, Matopo, Plumtree and Beitbridge districts were affected as institutions. The government pointed out that gatherings at churches were to be banned since they fuelled the spread of COVID-19 pandemic. According to Interviewee A (Interviewed 10 January 2021):

Since April 2020 the church as an institution has been adversely affected. In the year 2020 the first lockdown stipulated that only fifty and below church members would attend a service at a given time following World Health Organization rules. Children were not allowed. At another time the number was raised to one hundred and children were not allowed. In January 2021 another lockdown was given which declared that gatherings like churches and weddings were to be banned for thirty days. This was again further extended to the 15th of February 2021. This had been caused by the high morta

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<sup>i</sup>African Indigenous Religions are made up of the Shona, Ndebele, Sotho, Venda, Kalanga and Tonga religions.

lity rate in the country at the end of year. Now we no longer have church services and Sunday school meetings. Our Pastor and church leaders had advised that we will have online services. Unfortunately, some of our members are finding it difficult to do so since we do not have money to buy internet bundles or WhatsApp bundles. So, this is a mammoth task.

Interviewee C (Interviewed 11 January 2021) also pointed out that the COVID-19 pandemic has also adversely affected the running of church cell group meetings and Sunday School services. According to the above interviewee:

This COVID-19 pandemic has adversely affected the running of our church cell group activities. Before the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns in Gwanda urban we used to have our cell group meetings once per week during the evenings. All these have been stopped because we have to abide by what has been declared by the government through Vice President Chiwenga at the beginning of the year that there should be a curfew from 6pm to 6am.

Therefore, the church institutions have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Impact on the ritual aspects**

Christianity and AIRs in Matabeleland South had religious practices they observed before the advent of COVID-19. From the telephone interviews and online open-ended questionnaires we noted that the religious rituals like prayer, worship, meditation, sacrifice, sacramental rites, rites of passage and healing were affected. For instance, according to Interviewee F (Interviewed 15 January 2021):

Before the COVID-19 pandemic we used to go to church and be revived by the church liturgy, worship, Holy communion, word of God, the preaching, music and even music. In the year 2020 we did not attend our Easter celebrations because of COVID-19. No baptism was conducted in our church because church gatherings

had been banned. In Gwanda, Beitbridge, Plumtree, Umzingwane and Plumtree districts during the rainy season we normally conduct prayer for rains but we failed to have it due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Hence, COVID-19 affected the conduct of sacrifices, Holy communion, baptism and Easter celebration within Christianity in Matabeleland South.

### **Impact on doctrinal beliefs**

From the online questionnaire and telephone interviews responses we noted that the COVID-19 pandemic affected doctrinal beliefs of both Christians and adherents of AIRs in Matabeleland South. The members lost faith and trust in God because some were infected and affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Their beliefs in God and soteriological beliefs were affected. For instance, according to Interviewee D (Interviewed 13 January 2021):

As a Christian, before COVID-19 era I had strong faith and trust in the Christian God, but from what has befallen my family and community members I now doubt the existence and supremacy of this Christian God. A number of them have passed on due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Right now, as I am speaking to you the other two members are in the Intensive Care Unit at United Bulawayo Hospital. They are actually battling for their lives. So how can I trust such a God who allows us to be in such deep trouble?

Interviewee H who had a belief in Ndebele traditional religion (Interviewed 17 January 2021) supported the above views saying:

In Ndebele traditional religion we regard God as Unkulunkulu. This means we believe God to be the greatest among the great. There is no one as great as he is. He is also Usomandla. This means God is regarded as the Mighty one, the Almighty, the origin and source of all energy and power. He has all control over men and the universe. From what happened in 2020 and January 2021 in Matabeleland South and even other parts of Zimbabwe I now doubt God's supremacy. As an omnipotent and omniscient God, He should have

overcome the COVID-19 disease which is causing all this unnecessary havoc in Gwanda, Beitbridge, Umzingwane and Matopo areas.

This was supported by some Shona Indigenous Religion believer who pointed out that his belief in the Shona God as *Samasimba*<sup>ii</sup> has been affected by the high mortality rates due to COVID-19 disease. Therefore, from the online questionnaires and telephone interview responses we noted that the respondents' doctrinal beliefs were shattered since their lives were infected and affected by the pandemic.

From the majority of telephone interviews and online open-ended questionnaires responses from Beitbridge, Gwanda, Matopo and Umzingwane we noted that due to COVID-19 pandemic which is causing high mortality rate in the province some Christians and AIRs adherents have resorted to the use of traditional medicines like *zumbani* (Shona) / *Umsuzwane* (Ndebele), which is a shrub whose leaves are used to prepare coffee mixture, and *bute* (Shona) / *imfuko* (Ndebele), which is a traditional snuff to treat COVID-19. Some used traditional methods like steaming *kufukira* (Shona), *ukufutha* (Ndebele). The adherents believed that the Coronavirus could not stand high temperatures. From all this we then drew the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic had adversely affected the Matabeleland South populace.

### **Impact on emotional, spiritual and psychological aspects**

The COVID -19 pandemic has also affected some adherents of the Sotho, Venda, Shona, Ndebele and Kalanga religions in Matabeleland South emotionally, spiritually and psychologically. From the telephone interview and online open-ended questionnaire responses, we noted that whilst these people recover physically from the pandemic the effects of the pandemic have continued to live within them longer. Some interviewees pointed out that their spiritual life had been tested to the extent that they lost confidence in themselves because of the pandemic. They no longer had zeal to pray the way they used to do. Some thought that it was God's way of punishing people in Matabeleland South for their extensive sins.

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<sup>ii</sup>Samasimba means God is regarded as the Mighty one, the Almighty, the origin and source of all energy and power

### **Positive impact**

However, on a positive note, from the online questionnaire and telephone interview responses we also noted that some adherents of Christianity in Gwanda, Beitbridge, Umzingwane, Matopo and Plumtree areas had been drawn closer to God. They prayed and fasted daily for an end to the COVID-19 pandemic since they thought that COVID-19 was a punishment from God due to the rampant sins. That group of people believed in 2 Chronicles 7: 14 which encourages Christians to humble themselves, pray and seek God's face so that He would heal their land. Some would pray that the physicians, scientists, nurses and doctors would have wisdom and knowledge from God. It was also revealed that some adherents of AIRs frequently offered petitions to God through the ancestral spirits so that he would come to their rescue. Thus, their doctrinal, ritual, emotional were positively affected.

### **Conclusions**

Judging from what happened in Matabeleland South province due to COVID-19 pandemic, we came up with the following conclusions: Firstly, on a negative note, Church institutions were affected. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the cancellation of church service gatherings, ceremonies and festivals. Many Christian churches members resorted to online services.

Secondly, doctrinal beliefs had been affected. Some members in Matabeleland South province questioned the existence and supremacy of the Christian and AIRs God. A majority of people were now using African Traditional medicines and methods on top of the Western medicines to serve themselves from COVID-19 pandemic.

Thirdly, COVID-19 has affected the conduct of rituals like prayers, Holy communion, baptism in Christian churches. Even AIRs rituals had been impacted on. Lastly, the adherents of Christianity and AIRs in Matabeleland South have been affected emotionally, psychologically and spiritually. A majority of them have lost faith and trust in their Supreme Being.

However, on a positive note, although the COVID-19 disease has left some bleeding wounds on Matabeleland South populace, some adherents

of Christianity and AIRs were drawn nearer to God since they now believed God to be their last hope. Some even thought it was punishment from God because they thought that COVID-19 was a result of the sins of the people that were rampant, hence they became committed to God.

All in all, the study concluded that COVID-19 has impacted negatively and positively on the religious practices of Matabeleland South province populace. The religious doctrines, rituals, religious institutions were impacted on. Finally, the emotional, psychological and spiritual aspects were adversely impacted on as well.

### **Recommendations**

- The study recommends that the Zimbabwean government should work together with the international community to halt the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic by instituting community isolation measures to reduce the daily number of infected cases. This means that in the midst of challenges we hope and can cope with the new realities and even adopt new ways of living.
- There should be more broadcasts online of church sermons and religious services through social media platforms.
- The communities should be educated on the importance of maintaining nature and ecological balance since COVID-19 is alleged to have originated from wild animals.
- Above all, adherents of both Christianity and AIRs should continue worshipping God because He has power over all creation.

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<sup>1</sup> Eliot K.M. Mgojo “Prolegomenon to the Study of Black Theology” in *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* Volume 21, 1977,25

<sup>2</sup> Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) Situation Report-94 accessed at [www.who.int/situation-reports](http://www.who.int/situation-reports)>2... On 7 February 2021

<sup>3</sup> Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)

<sup>4</sup> Grant Murewanhema, Trouble Burukai, Dennis Mazingi, Fabian Maunganidze, Jacob Mufunda, Davison Munodawafa, and William Pote. (2020) A descriptive survey of the COVID-19 in Zimbabwe from March -June2020: policy and strategy implications. *Pan African Medical Journal* 2020;37(1): 33[doi] Special Issue on COVID-19 in Africa Volume 2

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- <sup>7</sup> Tafadzwa Dzinamarira, Solomon Mukwenha, et al.in Coronavirus Disease 2019(COVID-19)
- <sup>8</sup> Department of Civil Protection. #MaskUpZimbabwe
- <sup>9</sup> Murewanhema and others
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- <sup>13</sup> Gregory Moorhead & Ricky Griffin W. Organizational Behavior: Managing People and Organizations (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1995), 551
- <sup>14</sup> Gregory Moorhead & Ricky Griffin W. Organizational Behavior: Managing People and Organizations (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1995), 551
- <sup>15</sup> Gregory Moorhead & Ricky Griffin W. Organizational Behavior: Managing People and Organizations, 551
- <sup>16</sup> Gregory Moorhead & Ricky Griffin W. Organizational Behavior: Managing People and Organizations, 551
- <sup>17</sup> Ashok Malhotra (1999) Ninian Smart “Dimensions of the Sacred: An Anatomy of the World’s beliefs”, Comparative Civilizations Review: Vol.41: No. 41, Article 9. Available <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr/vol41/iss41/9>
- <sup>18</sup> Malhotra Ashok ,84
- <sup>19</sup> Malhotra Ashok ,84
- <sup>20</sup> Malhotra Ashok ,84
- <sup>21</sup> Malhotra Ashok ,84
- <sup>22</sup> Malhotra Ashok ,84

- <sup>23</sup> James Bishop in 'Ninian Smart's Seven Dimensions of Religion and why is it helpful' found in Bishop's *Encyclopedia of Religion, Society and Philosophy: Thinking Religion and Philosophy*

## **The Church's Response in a Covid 19 Era**

*Lovemore Gutu. O.Carm.*

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic – direct and indirect have been grave to the Church and to the world. Millions of people have contracted the virus and millions also have died. Daily people's lives around the world have been radically altered. Physical distancing has reshaped human interaction in different ways including worship and religious observances. The Church has been unable to gather for months, even during special seasons of the Church such as Lent and Easter. African liturgy is full of joy, love and togetherness which is very evident during weddings, funerals and during the celebration of the sacraments particularly the Eucharist.<sup>1</sup> Many people have found solace, healing, faith, hope and love through the church gatherings. However, this Covid 19 era has made the mandate of the church of proclamation of the Gospel very difficult to achieve. Church buildings are deserted and some instances have become expensive monuments, difficult to maintain because our main source of income, the faithful and the Minister, are both under lockdown in their homes. Prayer meetings, Church gatherings, Sacraments and many other activities have been banned making it difficult for the Church to practice its mandate.

Some priests are having experiences whereby they have numerous calls and messages from distraught lay faithful who are yearning for the services of a priest. Some families have had unfortunate incidents in which they have encountered deaths. Most of our faithful had for a long time relied on the priest to conduct services for many gatherings but this has not been possible because of Covid 19. Furthermore, even some young men and women who had planned to marry had failed because of the pandemic, some eventually separated whereas others gave up on the Church's blessing and began living together without it. The thought of a priest in any celebration has become a wishful one for the faithful.

As a result, this pandemic has brought a new dimension to the love taught to us by Jesus Christ (John 13: 34). We see how Jesus Christ was not afraid of those suffering from leprosy, demons or any ailment (Mark 1:40-45). Jesus showed love to all. However, during this pandemic

the priest has found it very difficult to remain in contact with people for pastoral care.<sup>1</sup> The priest fails to fully help people face the stress of the pandemic even with digital resources to encourage and sustain the people's faith.

Churches and faith communities have to find ways to accompany the most vulnerable people and communities, as well as to be in solidarity with each other. In his encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio*, John Paul II says; "For missionary activity renews the Church, revitalizes faith and Christian identity, and offers fresh enthusiasm and new incentive. *Faith is strengthened when it is given to others!* It is in commitment to the Church's universal mission that the new evangelization of Christian peoples will find inspiration and support."<sup>2</sup>

Consequently, the Church cannot afford to be indifferent and be isolated in the face of glaring pandemic that is enveloping Zimbabwe and the world. This crisis should force the Church to awaken to the demands of the great ministry given to us by Jesus in ways that create new hope, possibilities and a new resolve for all people (Mt 28: 19:20). Our Lord Jesus Christ shows us this in his life, teachings and actions that have great concern, care and compassion that surpass all boundaries (Mark 1: 40- 45).

The Bishops of the Catholic Church in Zimbabwe once lamented the silence of the Church during an economic meltdown in 2008. They wrote; What happened to our Christian values of love, peace, justice, forgiveness, honesty, truthfulness? Where was the voice of the Church which is called upon to be the conscience of the nation? Clearly, we did not do enough as the Church of Christ to defend these values and to raise an alarm at the appropriate time. We too have often tended to look inward rather than outward and also ignore the wisdom from our Christian sisters and brothers outside Zimbabwe.... As the Church of Christ, we confess that we have failed the nation because we have not been able to speak with one voice. We have often not been the salt and the light that the Gospel calls us to be. We therefore confess our failure and ask for God's forgiveness.<sup>3</sup>

The above confession by the bishops, even though written for

an economic meltdown can be heard echoing during this time of the pandemic where the priest is under lockdown and the church is closed. The use of technology has become the norm in most parts of the world but in the developing world it has proved to be very expensive. Though this is a good initiative, there is a greater call to encourage people to use Small Christian Communities (SCC) of about 3 or 4 people to keep the fire of Christ burning. These Small Christian Communities can be observed between families or people of the same area observing Covid 19 measures which include social distancing, sanitizing and wearing of masks<sup>ii</sup>.

In some parts of Latin American, Catholics have focused on the ‘Basic Christian Community’ movement. The movement provides an alternative local Church’s structure to the normal Catholic parish, gathering believers into close-knit, self-directing religious communities. This style of evangelism has been very effective among the poor and uneducated of Latin America in recent years.<sup>4</sup>

Small Christian Communities can help people to gain access to necessary information and to strengthen each other with the word of God. This strategy would help to bring people together, to give advice to each other in particular toward the biggest stakeholders of such a process, namely the victims of violence and human rights abuses which have increased significantly during the lockdown.<sup>5</sup>

The SCC would engage each other to enhance:

- Bible sharing
- Testimonies
- Investigate and help each other in matters of the family
- Understand human rights abuses
- Understand state responsibilities
- Understand the actions of institutions including the Church, media and civil society.

To establish the Kingdom of God as preached by Jesus Christ, the Church must carry on the task of ministering to the faithful. Ministry

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<sup>ii</sup>The small Christian communities should not have more than 4 people to avoid big gatherings, as stipulated under covid 19 regulations.

to the people of God can be enhanced through SCCs, the smallest cells of God's family, where all boundaries of hate, racism and tribalism can be overcome. Through SCCs the work for faith, hope and love and even justice and peace, can be started and spread to the wider areas of the society.

The Church should continuously offer messages of hope and encouragement, sharing online resources not only to exchange information but also to support each other spiritually. Moreover, the use of Small Christian Communities should be utilized while observing covid 19 protocols. The Church's response to the crises in the world should support the most vulnerable and isolated. The hope to return to normally, 'the promised land' can be achieved if the Church does not become idle spectators. The Church should actively contribute to shaping the future of the world. This includes a sincere and open discussion at every level. This will give hope, that unites us and encourages people to share and contribute to a just world through our Christian traditions, teachings and appreciation of the value of human life.

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<sup>1</sup> Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa*, Of the Holy Father John Paul II to the Bishops and Priest and Deacons Men and Women Religious and All the Lay Faithful on the Church in Africa and its evangelization mission Towards the Year 2000 no. 42.

<sup>2</sup> John Paul II *Redemptoris Missio*. On the permanent validity of the Church's missionary mandate, 1990, 1.

<sup>3</sup> Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference (ZCBC), *The Zimbabwe we want: Towards a National Vision*, Harare, 2008, 12.

<sup>4</sup> Regan, David. *Church for Liberation: A Pastoral portrait of the Church in Brazil* (Dublin: Dominican Publication: Fowler Wright Books LTD, 1987), p.21.

<sup>5</sup> Regan, *Church for Liberation: A Pastoral portrait of the Church in Brazil*, 155-56.

## **A Critical Evaluation of the Realities of COVID-19 and A Quest to Restore the Broken Lives Rooted on Mission and Theology**

*Dr. Annah Shamiso Mandeya, HLMC.*

### *Abstract*

*As this paper is being written in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, it sympathetically points out that the pandemic has brought enormous trauma, horrifying, scaring, disrupted economies, disrupted social life and unemployment. Generally, everything has been negatively affected locally and globally. Perhaps, people need to flush back with the same scaring interpretations people had during the beginning of HIV and AIDS in the past. Some of the scary words used were shuramantongo (mysterious), kambezo (small axe), mukondombera (outbreak), etc. HIV and AIDS had become the talk of the day, particularly in Africa. It had become the pulse of social media. Sadly, the infected and affected suffered stigmatization, discrimination, blame, rejection, etc. However, they overcome it in the end and today we are living with this disease that came to stay. Perhaps it could be the same with COVID-19.*

**Keywords:** Attitude, Mission, Theology, Church, churches, HIV and AIDS and COVID-19

### **Introduction**

There is no joke that the rising death toll caused by COVID-19 across the world is a reality and is instilling fear and panic in most if not all people (African Union 2020). The demands of living with, managing, and preventing this pandemic seem to be increasing fear, panic, and suffering on vulnerable groups such as women, children, poor households, people living with disability, the aged, and people living with HIV and AIDS (PLWHA) (African Union 2020). The past has shown us how the Roman Catholic Church and many other churches worked very hard on trying to break the issues of stigmatization and discrimination through home-based care, awareness, and advocacy on HIV and AIDS interventions and prevention rooted in the mission of theology and lessons got from the sacredness of a person.<sup>1</sup> Owing to the involvement of the Healing Church and its bringing awareness and advocacy on the HIV and AIDS

pandemic up to date some people are living with HIV and AIDS and they are still hopeful and happy.<sup>2</sup>

### **A Theological Lesson from COVID -19 Pandemic**

The article would like to point out that it is a sign of desperation when people question God's existence and His love in line with their suffering due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In this scenario, God seems to be far away and not caring. Indeed, this is a visible sign that shows how people's faith has been shaken and this even caused doubt in the love of God. The paper would like to point out that individuals who are suffering or infected by COVID-19 are likened to be imitating the suffering of Christ. In other words, it is "Christ who is infected by COVID-19". In the Christian world, we are all called to be partakers in Christ's suffering, thus by assisting the individual people in their families, communities, societies and nation at large.

### **Working from Home Owing to COVID-19**

COVID-19 has made some homes unsafe places to live and work whilst for others, homes have become the best workplaces.<sup>3</sup> Chicken rearing, gardening, and other possible income-generating projects have been done successfully at home as one would have enough time to work on these as they will be working from home. In short, such people have been able to do charity work, loving and caring for others. They have been able to strengthen family bonds through praying and sharing together. Unfortunately, it has been the opposite of some families whose homes have become the devil's workshops. The effects of COVID-19 remind us that we are all vulnerable to infection and can easily get sick and that we are not separated from each other but dependent on each other rooted on God.<sup>4</sup>

### **Churches have been closed down due to COVID -19**

It should be noted that the closing of Churches because of COVID-19 has made humanity understand that God is not only found in the Church buildings but rather He is found everywhere even in our homes. Our homes are places of worship too and have automatically become churches,

meaning, 'Churches have multiplied enormously'.

The era of COVID -19 calls mainly for resilience and adaptation and embracing new strategies on this pandemic (Smith et al. 2020). It is high time the Church has to step outside the box and respond urgently to serve lives, basing on the mission theology. Church leaders have to increasingly encourage prayer meetings, works of mercy, forgiveness, love, charity, and hospitality through the use of simple social media platforms such as WhatsApp, which is afforded by the majority. History has taught us that the world and the Church have undergone very difficult times in the past and overcame them through God's grace. Consequently, the article emphasizes the need to realize that this is not a new thing as it has happened in the past and urges humanity to accept it with hope.

### **Educational Institutions closed up due to COVID-19**

The convention on the rights of Children emphasizes that education is one of the rights of the children. Unfortunately, this right is not spared by COVID-19. Schools and universities were closed in order to reduce the spread of COVID-19.<sup>5</sup> This has made many parts of the world resort to distance learning, through the use of information and communications technologies. Sadly, in most parts of Africa, this option is not very viable.<sup>6</sup> Experience has shown that the impact of any crisis in all spheres of life has always been found affecting the girl child mostly.<sup>7</sup> The Church is to step outside the box, in collaboration with the government and well-wishers like UNICEF, UNESCO, etc, and ensure that children from marginalized families are also receiving online lessons.

### **Social life is now out of reach owing to COVID-19**

As the families are forced to stay indoors parenting is negatively affected. Parenting when not properly done results in unending conflicts. This could also be a breeding ground for domestic violence and many other forms of child abuse. Responding to the above-revealed problems rooted in the theological perspective as Christians one asks a question; what are our obligations toward one another? Thus, like what was demanded in the era of HIV and AIDS that demanded mission dimension to be carried out working rooted on collaboration to be applied on

COVID-19 interventions. The paper would like to emphasize that the disruption of everyone's lives has led people to make discoveries about themselves, their neighbors, nationally, and globally. Meaning that one's problem is the global problem.

### **Conclusion**

The paper concludes by saying that God is in control of this world and is able to bring good out of a terrible situation. Possibly what we need is to assist each other in this dark moment as much as we can in helping them to accept the situation in which we are, rooted in the body of Christ. It is through our action rooted in Christ that hope is given to the hopeless individuals and God's presents if fully experienced. The paper agrees that the Roman Catholic Church and many other Churches that use buildings during their worshipping times concerning their theology rooted in communal prayers were challenged with the ban on Sunday Masses and services. Consequently, COVID-19 pandemic revolutionized worship globally. In addition, it should be noted that as much as the Church was affected religious communities have not been spared by this pandemic. Their way of life has been severely affected, communal life in particular as they adhere to COVID-19 regulations keeping social distance and other observances. Therefore, we are all urgently called to pay more attention to the vulnerable, infected, and affected making them have their rights and freedom upheld and this is where God's call will be fully answered in this era of COVID-19.

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<sup>1</sup> Kelly, Michael J. HIV and AIDS, A Social Justice Perspective. Pauline Publications, 2020. P.7

<sup>2</sup> Vitilo, Robert J. Pastoral Training for Responding to HIV and AIDS. Nairobi: Pauline Publications Africa, 2007. P 27.

<sup>3</sup> Bohoslavsky, J. P. Covid-19: Urgent appeal for a human rights response to the economic recession. United Nations Humana Special Procedures. 2021.

<sup>4</sup> European Centre for Disease and Prevention and Control, 2020

<sup>5</sup> African Union, 2020; UNECA, 2020

<sup>6</sup> AFP 2020

<sup>7</sup> Armstrong Associates Consulting 2012

## **‘The Church is the Mother of Christians’: The Relevance of the Church in Contemporary Era**

*Dr Doreen Mashava*

### **Introduction**

Natural disasters come and go, so do pandemics. The Church, amid it all is not left unaffected. She is tried and tested during such times as is the faith of her members. How can the Church be a Mother to Christians, even in these times of adversity? The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that ‘it is in the Church, in communion with all the Baptized that the Christian fulfils his vocation.’<sup>1</sup> From the Church one receives the following; the Word of God with the teachings of the “Law of Christ,” the grace of the Sacraments to sustain one on the way, learns an example of holiness, recognizes its model and the source in the all-holy Virgin Mary, discern the authentic teaching of those who live it as well as discover in the spiritual tradition and long history of the saints who have gone before.<sup>2</sup> This, in a nutshell describes the Church as the Mother and what it does, teaching, sanctifying and developing a Christian. The Magisterium describes the Church as the “pillar and bulwark of truth.”<sup>3</sup>

### **Images of the Church**

The Church has seven precepts set in the context of a moral and Christian life bound to and nourished by liturgical life.<sup>4</sup> The Church must teach, interpret and defend the Word of God.<sup>5</sup> The Church is presented as the universal sign and sacrament of salvation, “for she is at once a visible assembly and spiritual community.”<sup>6</sup> The Church is presented in *Lumen Gentium* 8 as a woman. In imaging the Church, Preston uses ten metaphors, Church as; i) *Ekklesia* (ἐκκλησία) or Assembly, ii) The People of God, iii) Brotherhood, iv) Temple, v) Flock, vi) Kingdom, vii) The Poor of the Lord, viii) The Bride of Christ, ix) The Body of Christ and x) New Creation (v).

### **Church as a Family**

As the African Synod of 1994 puts it, ‘the future of the world and of

the Church passes through the Family. Not only is the Christian family the first cell of the living ecclesial community, but it is also the fundamental cell of the society.' The Synod views the African family as 'the foundation on which the social edifice is built.'<sup>7</sup> To this end, the synod considers the 'evangelization of the African family as a major priority.'<sup>8</sup> Orobator views the African social fabric as in danger of collapse because of the cumulative impact of the deteriorating economic crisis.<sup>9</sup> As a matter of fact, the Synodal Fathers acknowledge the vital connection between challenges of the African family and the mission of the Church. This view synchronizes with that of Nigerian Political economist, Adebayo Adedeji who considers that 'the African social structure is currently undergoing severe strain and stresses.'<sup>10</sup> This goes to show that social structures have an important role to play in moulding the Mother Church by binding people together. In Zimbabwe, the socio-economic hardships have contributed to breakdown in social structures namely the extended family system. Natural disasters including the COVID pandemic, leave families stranded, isolated and vulnerable. It is at times like this that the warmth of the Church is felt even if it means keeping virtually connected to her members.

### **Church as Mother**

The Church as a woman, whether as a girl or bride or wife or mother or widow is an image in the Old Testament (OT) and finding new life in the New Testament.<sup>11</sup> Church as a woman is more basic compared to Church as a bride. The more primary image that enables the Church to be a bride is the Church as a woman. While Second John refers to one local church as 'Elect Lady' (vs 1) and the other as 'Elect Sister (vs 13), First Peter refers to the Church as 'She who is in Babylon, elect together with you' (1 Pet 5:13). For Preston, this lady, this woman, whether the Church throughout the world, or Church in a particular locality, may be seen not as a bride but as Mother.<sup>12</sup> This was a development of the image of the Church which became significant in the early Christian centuries and has remained an important part towards popular piety to this modern day, 'Our Holy Mother the Church.'<sup>13</sup> Roots for this development are seen in

the New Testament (NT) for example in Gal 4:26, where Paul speaks of ‘the Jerusalem, which is above our mother,’ echoing Isaiah’s words on the faithful mother city of Zion. This is one way of talking to a Church as a moral person, distinct from Christ and not just the ‘whole Christ’ and yet distinct from any members of the Church.<sup>14</sup> Preston views the image of the mother Church as the individual members of the Church thought of ‘as children of the Church even though there is no subsistent entity of the Church altogether distinct from the sum total of the individual members of the Church.’<sup>15</sup> The Church thus nurtures her children and gives strength and guidance on how to cope even in difficult times.

### **Church in Small Christian Community**

The Church can also be viewed as the Mother of Christians in the Small Christian Community (SCC). Viewing the Church at this level is being truly relevant because it is here that the members of God’s community interact on religious and spiritual matters at a personal level. It is here that the members feel the warmth provided by the Church. The growth and influence of SCC throughout Africa are mixed, with them not having taken root in some parts of the continent.<sup>16</sup> ‘Where they are flourishing, SCCs are an important pastoral strategy and even a new way of being a communitarian Church.’<sup>17</sup> The ‘new moment’ includes strengthening of parish-based as well as family-based SCCs that are faith-sharing or Bible-sharing groups based on lectionary readings, building on the implementation of the 1994 Synod and the ecclesiology of the ‘Church-as-Family.’ For Healey and Hinton, SCCs are an essential part of the restructuring process in both parish and dioceses through SCC members who reach out to the poor and marginalized people in their community. This way the SCC can reach out to those in the community who are sick, be it cancer, HIV, or other burdens of life even before the priest gets to know about it. As a matter of fact, the Pastoral theme for the Archdiocese of Harare for this year is, ‘I am a Missionary Disciple in my SCC - Baptized and Sent.’ By reaching out to members in the SCC through her membership, the Church is exercising her missionary mandate, serving as an umbrella, the Mother Church.

In Healey and Hinton's opinion, SCCs can work as a bridging gap between the 'haves' and 'have-nots' being important catalysts of peace and reconciliation in the communities.<sup>18</sup> This way SCCs act not just as prayer groups but making concrete follow up on justice and peace issues at local level.

Pope John Paul II states in *Apostolic Exhortation on the African Synod*: 'Above all, these communities are to be committed to living Christ's love for everybody, a love which transcends the limits of natural solidarity of clans, tribes and other interest groups.'<sup>19</sup> The final message of the Synod states that the communities will provide the best means to fight against ethnocentrism within the Church itself and within the nations, as 'these individual Church-in-Families have the task of working to transform society.' The youths in Africa should not be left out as they desire to have their own Youth Groups or communities to discuss and reflect on matters concerning them. Since the youths are found on Social Media, the Holy Father advises the Church to follow them where they are. The African men also need to be part of this umbrella Mother Church and continued efforts to in-cooperate them is an ongoing process in an all-inclusive approach. Thus, Healey and Hinton argue that the parish-based SCCs challenge dioceses in Europe and North America where the parish is not a 'home' or 'community' for people but only a provider of services, due to the growing secularization in these continents.<sup>20</sup> In the contemporary era, engaging SCCs and other Christian groups in various spiritual activities helps bond members together even in their brokenness caused by the pandemic.

### **The Body of Christ**

St. Paul uses the term 'church' sixty-five times in his writings. He views the Church as the Body of Christ, who is its head and from whom the Church receives her fullness (Col 1:18; Eph 5:22-24, 29-30). For Paul, the members of the body have different functions all belonging to the same body and each with a particular function (Rom 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-26, 27-31; Eph. 4:11-14). In Hahn's view<sup>21</sup>, the Church as the body of Christ gives Paul the means to stress the unity amongst all believers

(Cor. 12:12; Rom 12:4). For him, this unity finds its sacramental reality first in Baptist (1 Cor. 12:13) then in the Eucharist: because ‘there is one bread, we who are many are one body’ (1 Cor. 10:17). Thus, since the Church is one body with Christ as its head, she should strive to work as one. The challenges faced in today’s world are seen when the members of this body of Christ, the Mother, begin to compete rather than to work together. This can only be possible if the Church continues to function as the ‘Living Temple’, indwelt by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16-117; Eph 2:19-22; Mat 16:18). The Church is built on Christ the ‘living cornerstone’, into a ‘spiritual house’ where the true sacrifices are offered (1 Pet 2:5). The Holy Spirit binds people together into a united people, under one umbrella, the Mother Church. These members are children of God (Eph 4:1-6) and equal members in the kingdom reconciled through the love of Christ. If one could draw an extrapolation from Hahn’s view, all children from the same mother are to be considered special.<sup>22</sup> Our contemporary setting tends to classify ‘children of this same Mother’ based on social status, wealth, level of education or public visibility. There is no better time to work together as members of the Body of Christ than in times of adversity

### **Conclusion**

The Church is indeed the Mother of Christians. The Church, in communion with all the Baptized, helps Christians fulfil their vocation. The Church shares the Word of God, teaches on matters of faith and helps impart sanctifying grace through the sacraments. The Church nourishes, sustains and develops a Christian spiritually. The Magisterium describes the Church as the pillar of truth. In the contemporary era, the Church’s relevance in nourishing, sustaining, and developing the baptized in their spiritual life. The family is the first Church and basic unit with which the Mother Church is built. The SCC is particularly strategic in propagating pastoral ministry as the Church’s building blocks through these Parish subunits. It is the members in the SCCs who are instrumental in reaching out to the sick as well as enforce justice and peace at community level. ‘A family that prays together, stays together.’

- <sup>1</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church. "I believe in the Holy Catholic Church." (Theological Publications in India. 2013.), 2030
- <sup>2</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2030
- <sup>3</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2032
- <sup>4</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2041, 2048
- <sup>5</sup> Dupuis, Jacques. *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church.* (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2008.) 299.
- <sup>6</sup> Dupuis, Jacques. *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church,* 300.
- <sup>7</sup> John Paul II. *Ecclesia in Africa* (September 14, 1995). [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va) Accessed 1 November 2020. 2
- <sup>8</sup> Orobator A. E. *The Church as Family; African Ecclesiology in its context.* (Nairobi, Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa, 2006.), 48
- <sup>9</sup> Orobator A. E. *The Church as Family; African Ecclesiology in its context.* 49.
- <sup>10</sup> Orobator A. E. *The Church as Family; African Ecclesiology in its context.* 49
- <sup>11</sup> Preston, Geoffrey. *Faces of the Church, Meditations on a Mystery and its Images.* Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark, 1997, 78
- <sup>12</sup> Preston, Geoffrey. *Faces of the Church, Meditations on a Mystery and its Images.* 84
- <sup>13</sup> Preston, Geoffrey. *Faces of the Church, Meditations on a Mystery and its Images.*84
- <sup>14</sup> Preston, Geoffrey. *Faces of the Church, Meditations on a Mystery and its Images.* 84
- <sup>15</sup> Preston, Geoffrey. *Faces of the Church, Meditations on a Mystery and its Images.* 84
- <sup>16</sup> Healy Nicholas M. *Church, World and the Christian Life; Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology.* Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2000. 97
- <sup>17</sup> Healy Nicholas M. *Church, World and the Christian Life* 97
- <sup>18</sup> Healy Nicholas M. *Church, World and the Christian Life* 97
- <sup>19</sup> *Apostolic Exhortation on the African Synod*
- <sup>20</sup> Healy Nicholas M. *Church, World and the Christian Life* 98
- <sup>21</sup> Hahn, Scott (Gen. Ed.). *Catholic Bible Dictionary.* United States of America: Doubleday, 2009. 58
- <sup>22</sup> Hahn, Scott (Gen. Ed.). *Catholic Bible Dictionary* 58

## ***Mater et Magistra: The role of the Church's Magisterium in the development of social thought***

*Annah Kembo*

### **Introduction**

“The Church in each country, under the Pastoral guidance of the local bishops, has a continuing duty to apply the values of the gospel to the problems of the society and so help all members of the Church, lay, religious and ordained to play an active part in striving to build a just and compassionate social order”<sup>1</sup> Here the duty of the Church is highlighted as that of guiding the faithful in matters of faith and morals in a society. “For more than a century the Catholics have analysed the issues of life in society to propose fundamental principles, to define judgement criteria and suggest concrete guidelines”<sup>2</sup> This whole thought is called ‘Catholic Social Doctrine’. Several Popes have taken the lead in expounding Catholic Social Teaching by writing many documents called Encyclical Letters. One such letter is the *Mater et Magistra*. This article seeks to discuss the role of the Magisterium in the development of the social thought, in light of *Mater et Magistra*.

### **The Church's Magisterium**

The Church upholds the truth and safeguards it. God gave authority to the Church to teach the truth. This authority to teach is called the Magisterium of the Church. The magisterium is the highest teaching office of the Church. Magisterium is the teaching that comes from the Church's leaders. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that “The Pope and the Bishops are authentic teachers, that is teachers endowed with the authority of Christ, who preach the faith to the people entrusted to them, the faith to be believed and put into practice. The ordinary and universal Magisterium of the Pope and the Bishops in communion with him teaches the faithful the truth to believe, the charity to practice, the beatitude to hope for”<sup>3</sup> The magisterium says that the Church is “the pillar and ground of the truth”. At the same time, it is the source of life to all who are lost and those who need guidance. Jesus gave two tasks to the Church, to teach and to guide the faithful in their personal capacities

and also as nations and to do that with motherly care. The Church needs to always see to it that her children are well fed with correct knowledge. “Great is their dignity also, a dignity which she has always guarded most zealously and held in the highest esteem”.<sup>4</sup>

“It is said that Christianity is the meeting-point of earth and heaven. It lays claim to the whole man, body and soul, intellect and will, inducing him to raise his mind above the changing conditions of this earthly existence and reach upwards for the eternal life of heaven, where one day he will find his unflinching happiness and peace”.<sup>5</sup> Those who are in this Church need to reflect that they are living a life that they show heaven on earth by leading a just life and a life full of charity.

### ***Mater et Magistra***

The term *Mater et Magistra* means Mother and Teacher and this document describes the Church in her role as Mother and Teacher of all nations. This encyclical was written by Pope John XXIII on May 15 in 1961. It was written when the Second World War had ended and the Cold War had begun. This encyclical letter was written as a continuity of previous encyclicals which are *Rerum Novarum* of 1891 and *Quadragesimo Anno* of 1931. In *Mater et Magistra*, Pope John XXIII makes great reference to these two documents. The world had drastically changed in the last 30 years from *Quadragesimo Anno* of 1931. After the war things had changed politically, economically and socially that led the highest office of the church to promulgate this encyclical.

### **The Role of The Church’s Magisterium in *Mater et Magistra***

*Mater et Magistra* then came in to explore the role of the Church in issues dealing with social progress and justice in the world with the intention of giving or raising awareness on the dignity of all people. For a long time, the Church’s role has been to educate and direct people towards salvation. “Though the Church’s first care must be for souls, how she can sanctify them and make them share in the gifts of heaven, she concerns herself with the exigencies of man’s daily life, with his livelihood and education, and his general welfare and prosperity”.<sup>6</sup> She was mainly concerned with the care of souls and leading them to the kingdom of

heaven. Apart from this, the Church's role also involves the taking care of the livelihood, education and complete wellbeing of humanity. The Church must not only show concern on spiritual things or matters. Her authorities make it a point that the people know that it is their concern that the faithful lead a life full of charity and human respect. Following Jesus' example who, in as much as his primary mission was salvation for mankind, he still fed the hungry and had concern for their worldly needs. "The Church in all this is but giving effect to those principles which Christ Himself established in the Church He founded when He said 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life'"<sup>7</sup> The social life of the faithful is the concern of the Church leaders since the Church itself exists in the world where harmony must prevail among the people. *Mater et Magistra* looked at Christianity and Social Progress.

Coleman states that, "Pope John XXIII, in this encyclical, refers and strongly affirms the teachings of earlier encyclicals and boldly emphasises their lessons such as the recognition of work as a human activity, the right to private property and the right of workers to enter into association"<sup>8</sup> He also points out the importance of Christian Brotherhood when undertaking all these activities. In this encyclical, it is expressed that "in light of individual enterprises being the key to economic progress, the state is asked to be very careful and not interfere with one's capabilities to support his or her family. It is highlighted that with the increase of social relationships made possible by the latest technologies, the workers had a right to a fair and just wage."<sup>9</sup> A worker's wage had to reflect his or her contribution to a company. There should be a just wage determined in accordance with justice and equality.

The document further highlights that "a nation should have a clear balance between economic development and social progress and not undermine the welfare of the people for financial gain"<sup>10</sup> There should be equal distribution of properties together with ownership in business enterprises and economic and social policies should be applied to promote it. In this encyclical, the Pope strongly urges the faithful to keep in mind the fact that property and riches do not have any spiritual significance but the most important thing is striving towards being in the Kingdom of God, in heaven. But it encourages the people to realise that they need to

build the kingdom of God here on earth by leading a just life, a life full of charity and human respect.

One of the other important outcomes of this encyclical is about the wages which are just. The Church says that, for the workers to receive just wages they need not be determined by the marketplace or by the employers alone but there must be an agreement. "It must be determined in accordance with justice and equity; which means that workers must be paid a wage which allows them to live a truly human life and to fulfil their family obligations in a worthy manner".<sup>11</sup> There are factors to consider when gazetting a just wage in a society, "the effective contribution which each individual makes to the economic effort, the financial state of the company for which he works and finally the requirements of the common good of the universal family of nations of every kind, both large and small".<sup>12</sup> The Church states that the above principles are valid always and everywhere and they help us to have a just society where workers are justly remunerated. But for a society to be just there must be free discussion between the employer and the employee, meaning the available resources must be shared justly even if it means they are not enough for all. Cassidy comments that "Pope John XXIII also reiterated on the issue of the relationship between the workers and managers whose relationship he said had to be re-established based on justice and equality".<sup>13</sup> Workers were urged to be morally principled and have respect for civil law in line with the common good. A worker has to take a break from work as well. This should be done so as to regain strength and renew his or her spiritual life. This gives time for worshipping God and attending Mass. Employers also were urged to be considerate and keep the common good in mind whenever they pursued economic activity. Here common good means sharing everything equally, seeing that the natural resources are shared equally among all.

The rich countries or the more developed countries were also urged to help the under developed countries who were struggling to provide basic necessities to their people. They should help by feeding the hungry, building shelter for the homeless, as well as upgrading their infrastructure and developing their technology. As this happens, respect for each country's individuality and dignity of each person had to be accorded.

However, the Church realises that,

development in social relationships brings many advantages in its train. It makes it possible for the individual to exercise many of his personal rights, especially those which we call economic and social and which pertain to the necessities of life, health care, education on a more extensive and improved basis, a more thorough professional training, housing, work, and suitable leisure and recreation. Furthermore, the progressive perfection of modern methods of thought, diffusion of the press, cinema, radio, television makes it possible for everyone to participate in human events the world over.<sup>14</sup>

The problem which the Church authorities notice and teach is to make sure that as the people are socially taught there must not be an increase in laws and restrictions that jeopardize human life. These laws will narrow the person's freedom of action. Naturally man acts freely if he is in a free environment, but when the environment is restrictive then, even the person will find it hard to behave freely and to have his own initiatives. When there is no personal freedom, you cannot hold anyone accountable or responsible for his or her actions, the church reminds the government authorities to put in place laws that do not suppress freedom of expression. There should be freedom and responsibility put into practice.

The encyclical stresses the need for rebuilding or reconstruction of a social order. The document strongly urges that in as much as man can make all technical and economic progress, there will be no peace nor justice in the world until they return to a sense of their dignity as creatures and children of God.<sup>15</sup> It is said that a man separated from God is nothing but a monster. Pope John XXIII emphasises the need for the formation of man's conscience aligning it to God, the principal source of all justice, truth and love.<sup>16</sup> One has to allow God to rule one's life. The document also stresses the point that men are by nature, social beings. The church builds her social teaching by stressing this point and at the same time guaranteeing an individual's dignity. "The principles she gives are of a universal application, for they take human nature into account, and the varying conditions in which man's life is lived, taking into account the principal characteristics of contemporary society".<sup>18</sup> This encyclical

also urges the studying of social doctrine in most educational institutions, be it in seminaries, lay institutions or in associations, parishes and all Catholic schools to have a curriculum promoting social teaching. Social doctrine was also urged to be included in most publications such as newspapers, magazines and also broadcasted on radio and television. It also emphasised the point that social doctrine should not only be studied but put into practice as well. The basic principle of See, Judge and Act should be applied when putting social principles into practice. In the event of a conflict, disagreement or argument, people are urged not to lose respect for each other but instead find a common ground and resolve amicably. When in contact with those who do not share the same Catholic faith, the document urges Catholics not to do anything that compromises their religion and morality. They have to do everything in a spirit of understanding and unselfishness.

### **Conclusion**

The encyclical *Mater et Magistra* is of great importance in how the society needs to live. It points out important points which each individual needs to remember and consider putting into practice. It serves as the voice of the voiceless as it promotes human dignity and a life lived in charity. This letter has something in common with *Rerum Novarum* and it makes emphasis of many same points. It made clear that even private properties are to be seen as means to promote human race, not to be seen as instruments of personal gain or self-rule. Hence, it reiterates that, as Leo XIII so wisely taught in *Rerum Novarum*: “whoever has received from the divine bounty a large share of temporal blessings, whether they be external and corporeal, or gifts of the mind, has received them for the purpose of using them for the perfecting of his own nature, and, at the same time, that he may employ them, as the steward of God’s Providence, for the benefit of others”. The church says those with talents must not hide them for they are for the good of all meaning that this encyclical calls for unity of purpose amongst everyone.

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<sup>1</sup> Coleman, John J. *Globalisation and Catholic Social Thought: Present Crisis, Future Hope*. (New York: Orbis Books, 2005.) 23.

<sup>2</sup> Holland, Joe. *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: The Popes Confront the*

- Industrial Age 1740-1958. (New York: Paulist Press, 2003.) 9.
- <sup>3</sup> The Catechism of the Catholic Church, CCC. (Nairobi: Pauline Publications, Africa, 1994.) 2034.
- <sup>4</sup> Mater et Magistra. Encyclical of Pope John XXIII on Christianity and Progress, 1961, 5.
- <sup>5</sup> Atherton, John. Christianity and the New Social Order: A Manifesto for the Future. (London: SPCK Press, 2011.) 36.
- <sup>6</sup> Mater et Magistra. Encyclical of Pope John XXIII on Christianity and Progress, 1961. N\*3
- <sup>7</sup> Himes, Kenneth R. Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations. (Washington DC: George Town University Press, 2004.) 10.
- <sup>8</sup> Coleman, John J. Globalisation and Catholic Social Thought: Present Crisis, Future Hope. (New York: Orbis Books, 2005.) 17
- <sup>9</sup> Mater et Magistra. Encyclical of Pope John XXIII on Christianity and Progress, 1961, 15.
- <sup>10</sup> Mater et Magistra. Encyclical of Pope John XXIII on Christianity and Progress, 1961, 17.
- <sup>11</sup> Mater et Magistra. Encyclical of Pope John XXIII on Christianity and Progress, 1961, 71.
- <sup>12</sup> Mater et Magistra. Encyclical of Pope John XXIII on Christianity and Progress, 1961, 72.
- <sup>13</sup> Cassidy, Eoin G. The Common Good in an Unequal World. (Dublin: Betaprint Publishers, 2007.) 13.
- <sup>14</sup> Mater et Magistra. Encyclical of Pope John XXIII on Christianity and Progress, 1961, 62.
- <sup>15</sup> Mater et Magistra. Encyclical of Pope John XXIII on Christianity and Progress, 1961, 221.
- <sup>16</sup> Mater et Magistra. Encyclical of Pope John XXIII on Christianity and Progress, 1961, 222.
- <sup>17</sup> Mater et Magistra. Encyclical of Pope John XXIII on Christianity and Progress, 1961, 220.
- <sup>18</sup> Holland, Joe. Modern Catholic Social Teaching: The Popes Confront the Industrial Age 1740-1958. (New York: Paulist Press, 2003.) 9.

**A focus on Augustine's Understanding of the Most Holy Trinity  
Concentrating on the Unity and the Distinction of Three Persons of  
the Trinity and its Implications on Families in Zimbabwe**

*Gift B Chinyadza, O.Carm.*

*Abstract*

*This article focuses on the doctrine of the most Holy Trinity according to St Augustine and its implications on family life in Zimbabwe. What is of interest in this article is how Augustine explains the unity and the distinction of the three Persons of the Triune God and lessons which can be drawn on family life in Zimbabwe. The article identifies some of the challenges of family life in Zimbabwe and goes on to reflect on the idea that Augustine's doctrine of the most Holy Trinity on the unity and distinctions of the three Persons of the Triune God as a perfect model for family life in Zimbabwe.*

**Introduction**

Family life in Zimbabwe has been affected by many challenges. These challenges have threatened some core values that are supposed to be foundational in the life of families. The doctrine of the Most Holy Trinity is vital to a proper understanding of the nature of God. Understanding the doctrine of the Most Holy Trinity helps one to know how God relates to humanity and how humanity relates to God and to others who were created by the same Triune God. This article focuses on exploring Augustine's theological understanding of the Blessed Trinity concentrating on the unity and the distinction of three Persons of the Trinity and its implications on families in Zimbabwe. The article shall begin by a background of Augustine on the whole doctrine of Trinity and then looking at Augustine's views on the unity and equality of the three divine Persons. The article will then go on to discuss the distinctions of the three divine Persons within the Godhead. Lastly the article will discuss Augustine's understanding of the Trinity as the perfect model of families in Zimbabwe.

## **Background**

Augustine's understanding of the Trinity is found in some of his works including *City of God*, and *On Christian Doctrine*, but mostly centred in the *De Trinitate*. In the *De Trinitate*, Augustine defends a Latin pro-Nicene understanding of Trinitarian doctrine from the standpoints of Scripture and logic. His book *De Trinitate* also shows that he searches for reflections of the Trinitarian processions in the highest functions of the human soul. *De Trinitate* is shaped by a spiritual quest to know and understand the God in whom Augustine believes.<sup>1</sup> After the Church had established the doctrine of the Trinity, Augustine wrote his book *De Trinitate*. Augustine in *De Trinitate* Augustine had three objectives. According to Clark, Augustine wished to demonstrate to critics of the Nicene Creed that the divinity and co-equality of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are embedded in scripture.<sup>2</sup> Augustine endeavoured to show non-Christian thinkers the importance of faith in Jesus Christ in revelation and how redemption took place. Finally, Augustine wanted to persuade his readers that salvation and spiritual growth are linked with knowing themselves as images of the Triune God, from whom they came and to whom they go, with a dynamic tendency to union realized by likeness of God who is Love.<sup>3</sup> The following paragraph's will not pre-empt Augustine's whole understanding of the most Holy Trinity but will focus on his understanding of the unity and distinction of the three divine Person who are one God since they are of the same substance.

## **Unity of The Three Persons in One Godhead**

In the *De Trinitate*, Augustine notes that only one God exists in three divine Persons, namely the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. According to Coppage, Augustine ascribes to the truth that "these three are at once distinct and co-essentially one in substance".<sup>4</sup> Using the authority of Scripture, Augustine holds the understanding that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are of one and the same substance.<sup>5</sup> Hence, Augustine begins his Trinitarian theology with one Godhead which the three divine Persons share in common. By insisting on the unity and equality in that substance, Augustine's view differs from the one held

by the Cappadocian fathers. For Augustine, this one substance (God) is love. Augustine asserts that the existence of the Trinity in one God is an aspect of revelation that is clearly illustrated in Scripture and Tradition. Concentrating on Scripture, Augustine comprehends God as an absolute, simple and indivisible being.<sup>6</sup> This conception acts as the base for his explanation of the doctrine of the Most Holy Trinity. Augustine takes the divine nature itself as his point of departure.<sup>7</sup> Augustine opts to call this divine nature ‘essence’ instead of the well-used ‘substance.’ For Augustine, ‘substance’ suggests a being which possesses attributes, which is different from ‘essence’ which he employs for the reason that God is identical to His attributes. Augustine holds that essence is the Trinity.<sup>8</sup> According to Coppedge, the unity that is in the Trinity is “squarely in the foreground, subordinationism of every kind is rigorously excluded”.<sup>9</sup>

Augustine stresses that the essence of the Trinity is one; therefore, whatever quality that is attributed to God should be also attributed equally to each divine Person of the Holy Trinity.<sup>10</sup> Thus, “not only is the Father not greater than the Son in respect of divinity, but Father and Son together are not greater than the Holy Spirit, and no single Person of the three is less than the Trinity itself”.<sup>11</sup> For Augustine, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are not to be regarded as three separate Persons or Individuals. Thus, each of the divine Persons is identical with the divine substance itself.<sup>12</sup> According to Kelly, the three Persons can be regarded “severally to indwell and coin here with each other”.<sup>13</sup> Explaining the relationship among the three divine Persons, Augustine affirms that the three divine Persons act *unum principium*, that is, one in principle.<sup>14</sup> This implies that since the three are inseparable, the operations they undertake are done inseparably: “where there is no difference of natures, there is none of wills either”.<sup>15</sup>

### **Distinction of The Three Divine Persons of The Holy Trinity**

For Augustine, the distinction between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is something that is united in their mutual relations found in the Godhead. Coppedge affirms that the difference is seen among the three in the sense that the Father begets, the Son is begotten and the Spirit bestowed by the Father and the Son as a gift.<sup>16</sup> Even though the three

Persons are identical in divine nature, Augustine explains well that each Person is unique in His association with the other two:

Just as the Father, then, begot and the Son was begotten, so the Father sent and the Son was sent [...] And just as being born means for the Son his being from the Father, so his being sent means his being known to be from him. And just as for the Holy Spirit his being the gift of God means his proceeding from the Father, so his being sent means his being known to proceed from him.<sup>17</sup>

Here, the phrase ‘being sent’ implies how they reveal themselves as the Son and the Spirit, while the phrases ‘being born’ and ‘being gift’ reveals their eternal origin and procession. Augustine’s effort is to reveal that ‘being sent’ does not mean the Son is not equal to the Father. He achieves this by differentiating missions from generation and procession.

Augustine views the above distinction from two perspectives: ontological and epistemological. The ontological view holds that generation and procession constitute the ontological foundation for mission. This implies that the Son does not become Son because he has been sent. However, the Son is constituted as Son by virtue of his generation by the Father. The reason why the Son was sent is that he is from the Father. Furthermore, the Father and the Son share the similar substance, that is love. In the same way, Augustine shows this in his *De Trinitate* IV 29, 174 that the Holy Spirit does not become the Holy Spirit by being sent; rather, the Holy Spirit is constituted as Holy Spirit by proceeding from the Father and the Son. The epistemological perspective overturned this order. From this perspective, it is a mission that constitutes the epistemic foundation for a generation and procession. Augustine’s *De Trinitate* states that the mission of the Son reveals his eternal generation by the Father, while the mission of the Spirit reveals his eternal procession from the Father and the Son.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, it is implausible to conclude that sending indicates inferiority on the part of the one sent.

### **Challenges threatening family life in Zimbabwe today**

Apart from many joys, many families in Zimbabwe seem to have more difficulties which are destroying the love and unity or the oneness

that is supposed to be preserved and enjoyed by families. The numerous challenges have triggered an ill-fated reality. Among the reasons affecting families in Zimbabwe are secularism and globalization. These coupled with divisions, disputes, conflicts, divorce, hierarchy and inequality, migration, individualism, poor relationships, and lack of communication have affected families in Zimbabwe negatively. The paper will explain how two of these have affected families. On migration, Betty Bigombe and Gilbert Khadiagala noted that “international migration is a double-edged sword to families, supplying potential economic benefits through remittances, but it also breaks the ties of friendship that bond families”.<sup>19</sup> Chirozva identifies individualism as one of the causes of family disintegration in Zimbabwe. He notes that, “with the prevalence of nuclear families in modern day Zimbabwe, strong sentiments of individualism have started being felt”.<sup>20</sup> For him this has affected family relations that are supposed to make family life meaningful.

### **Augustine’s understanding of the Most Holy Trinity as the perfect model of families in Zimbabwe**

Having considered the challenges mentioned above, just like the Triune Persons, family members should always collaborate in whatever they do as a family. Family members should not negatively compete in whatever they do, for this destroys the spirit of oneness. The Triune Persons should inspire families to work as a team to attain family goals. If every person in the family cooperates, such cooperation brings trinitarian values: love, communion, communication, unity and beauty then family life becomes fulfilling. The CCC highlights that the family is “a privileged space for values such as fraternity, love, respect and solidarity between generations where dignity is promoted thereby overcoming individualism and contributing to the common good of the society”.<sup>21</sup> Families should learn from the Triune Persons to value and give each family member the opportunity to contribute anything that is good for the family. The trinitarian community teaches human families to value teamwork. It is through operating this way that leads families to oneness. Roxanne King highlights that “when those in families give of themselves and share love and unity with each other, they are able to reflect the

image of the Holy Trinity”.<sup>22</sup> This is what Zimbabwean families should learn from the theology of love and unity emerging from the trinitarian community. In order to maintain and strengthen the bonds of love and unity within families, family members need to have time to visit one another and interact physically. Visiting and having time with one another is a great sign of love. It is important for families to have time together. Families should learn from the three divine Persons who always live together in harmony and peace especially considering Augustine’s understanding of the Trinity with particular attention to the unity of the three divine persons.

In addition to the above, Many Zimbabwean families are tormented by hatred, divorce, conflict, mistrust and punishing of each other while on the other hand, these negative attributes do not exist in the Trinity. It is a fact that married people are struggling with many difficulties and challenges, but they should not terminate their marriages, for it is a covenant. The essential attributes of marriage: unity and indissolubility, must always be valued. Marriage is a covenant; thus, it should not be broken. Men and women in marriages should be inspired by the love and unity that exist within the Trinitarian community. Equality must be fostered among people of different genders in families and this can be probable if individuals in families acknowledge that differences that people have with regards to their genders and abilities do not imply inferiority. In the trinitarian community, the attributes of love, unity, communion, communication, absolutely overflow in their perfection. For that reason, people in marriage should take the Trinity as their role model. This may help married people to maintain and cultivate the attributes of love and unity so as to preserve their families which are to be a reflection of the Holy Trinity.

Furthermore, in one of the paragraphs above, it has been noted that individualism has tormented marriages and family life as well. Moreover, globalization is also leading family members to live individualistic lives. Technology is occupying people’s minds to the extent that they take other people for granted. It helps people in doing work and in many aspects, but if misused it can foster attitudes of individualism, lack of care for the other, self-centeredness and arrogance. Individualism does not exist in the

trinitarian community. Catherine Lacugna states that Trinitarian communion is opposed to individualism, isolationism, and asocial personhood.<sup>23</sup> Pope Francis states that the individualistic spirit leads to intolerance and hostility in families.<sup>24</sup> A person who aspires to live as a self-contained subject and even as an isolated individual undermines human growth and well-being. Thus, the most Holy Trinity can be considered to be a good example of communion as well as love which must be experienced and individuals must be ready to go beyond themselves. This love can only be possible when there is unity which is one of the most attributes of the Trinity which must inspire men and women in Zimbabwe to model their families according to it.

### **Conclusion**

In a nutshell, one can note that Augustine's understanding of the doctrine of the most Holy Trinity especially on the unity and distinctions of the three Persons can be seen as a perfect model of families in Zimbabwe. This is because family life is being affected by many things of which some of them are uncontrollable. However, if families are modelled upon how the three Persons of the Trinity relate to each other although they are distinct as Persons, it can help to restore family values. Values of unity, love, respect, equality and many more can be bolstered.

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<sup>1</sup> Copper, Allan. *The God who is Triune: Revisioning the Christian Doctrine of God*. Madison: InterVarsity Press, 2007, 94.

<sup>2</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *The Trinity*. Trans. Edmund Hill. (Brooklyn: New City Press, 1991 Clark, Mary T. *De Trinitate*) 91.

<sup>3</sup> Clark, Mary T. *De Trinitate*, 91.

<sup>4</sup> *The Trinity*, 102.

<sup>5</sup> *De Trinitate* I.4, 67.

<sup>6</sup> Coppedge, Allan. *The God who is Triune: Revisioning the Christian Doctrine of God*. (Madison: InterVarsity Press, 2007) 102.

<sup>7</sup> Kelly, A. *The Trinity of Love: A Theology of the Christian God*. (Wilmington, Delaware: Glazier, 1989), 272.

<sup>8</sup> *A Theology of the Christian God*, 272.

<sup>9</sup> *Revisioning the Christian Doctrine of God*, 103.

<sup>10</sup> *The Trinity*, 102.

<sup>11</sup> *A Theology of the Christian God*, 272.

<sup>12</sup> McBrien, P. Richard. *Catholicism*. Vol I. (New York: McMillan Publishing Co., 1980), 299.

<sup>13</sup> *The Trinity of Love: A Theology of the Christian God*, 273.

- <sup>14</sup> Kelly, J.N.D. *Early Christian Doctrines*. 5th Ed. (London: A & C Black Publishers Ltd, 1977).
- <sup>15</sup> *The Trinity of Love: A Theology of the Christian God*, 273.
- <sup>16</sup> *The God who is Triune: Revisioning the Christian Doctrine of God*, 103.
- <sup>17</sup> *The Trinity*, 174.
- <sup>18</sup> *The Trinity*, 176-77.
- <sup>19</sup> Bigombe, Betty and Khadiagala, Gilbert. *Major Trends Affecting Families in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 14. <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/family/Publications/mtbigombe.pdf>, Accessed: 28 October 2020.
- <sup>20</sup> Chirozva, 25.
- <sup>21</sup> *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*. (Nairobi: Pauline's Publications Africa, 1994), 1601.
- <sup>22</sup> Roxanne King; 1.
- <sup>23</sup> Lacugna, Catherine M. *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*. (Chicago: Harper San-Francisco, 1992), 277.
- <sup>24</sup> Pope Francis. *Amoris Laetitia*, 33. [https://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papafrancesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20160319\\_amoris-laetitia\\_en.pdf](https://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papafrancesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf). Accessed: 9 October 2020.

## **Synodality as a Way of Being a Church Today: Implications, Challenges and Prospects**

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### *Abstract*

*Since its introduction, the Synod of Bishops has been a platform where a group of bishops gather to deliberate on issues of concern to the Church and make recommendations for possible implementation by the Pope. In so doing, as Paul VI had desired, the Synod fathers have been of great help to the Pope in advising him on crucial matters of the Church. Even though not all the recommendations have been considered by the Pope, the mere exposure of the issues during the deliberations have opened up more debate among theologians, scholars and the wider Church. This article examines the concept of synodality as a new way of being Church. Originating from a Synod, synodality is emerging as a model of a Church in which all members, both lay and clerics, are interested in and participate in the affairs that affect them as members of the Church and all take time to listen to one another. The article argues that with all its challenges, such a model is faithful to the idea of the Church as a community of baptized members and encourages all to feel being part of the Church.*

### **Introduction**

In 1965, immediately after the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI announced the establishment of the Synod of Bishops. His intention was that such a platform of bishops should help him in deciding on some crucial matters of the Church.<sup>1</sup> This meant deciding on matters of urgency to be discussed, deliberating on such issues and finally recommending some resolutions to the Pope. Perhaps, Pope Paul VI came up with such an initiative based on how the Bishops who participated in the Second Vatican Council helped during the deliberations and resolutions of the council. When establishing the Synod of Bishops, Pope Paul VI left the idea open for possible improvements. Over the years, the concept of a Synod has undergone a lot of developments. During his

papacy, John Paul II used it as a tool for continental Churches to renew their Christian commitment as they were approaching the second millennium. This can be evidenced by the convocation of the African Synod in 1994, the American Synod in 1997 and the Asian Synod in 1998. Pope Francis too has used the synod to deliberate on crucial issues relevant to our time such as the family and the youth. Pope Francis has already convoked the next synod which will be held in 2022 and will deliberate on the theme of synodality. When he announced the theme for the next synod, in his remarks, Pope Francis stated that “From the beginning of my ministry as Bishop of Rome, I sought to enhance the Synod, which is one of the most precious legacies of the Second Vatican Council. It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium.”<sup>2</sup> True to his words, the synod has become an important platform in the papacy of Pope Francis. The synod has not just remained a platform where bishops meet to discuss ideas that they feel are relevant for the Church. It has rather become a platform where all members of the Church are consulted for contributions, either directly or through chosen representatives. It has also become a platform where continental Churches express concerns particular to them and express their right to be heard. As such, the International Theological Commission was right when it stated that with synodality there is “something new that has been maturing in the ecclesial consciousness starting from the Magisterium of Vatican II.”<sup>3</sup> In a way, the synod is becoming an emerging and a new model of the Church. This article examines the implications of synodality as a new way of being Church. It also outlines the challenges and prospects that such a model offers.

### **Fundamental Concept of a Synod**

The term synod derives from the Greek words *sun-* meaning ‘together’ and *hodos* meaning ‘way.’<sup>4</sup> Therefore, from its etymological definition, the term synod has connotations of ‘walking together.’ The International Theological Commission affirms this as it defines a synod as indicating “the path along which the People of God walk together.”<sup>5</sup> However, according to the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, a synod is “a general term for ecclesiastical gatherings under hierarchical authority, for the

discussion and decision of matters relating to faith, morals, or discipline.”<sup>6</sup> This entails that if a meeting discusses matters of faith, morals and discipline but yet it is not an ecclesiastical gathering, it cannot be called a synod. In the same way, any ecclesiastical gathering that does not discuss matters of faith, morals and discipline under the direction of the Church hierarchy cannot be called a synod.

According to the document entitled *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church* the word “synod” has been widely applied, with a specific meaning, to the ecclesial assemblies convoked on various levels whether diocesan, provincial, regional, patriarchal or universal to discern, by the light of the Word of God and listening to the Holy Spirit, the doctrinal, liturgical, canonical and pastoral questions that arise as time goes by.<sup>7</sup> However, this article is only interested in the Synod of Bishops. *The Code of Canon Law* states that the “synod of bishops is a group of bishops who have been chosen from different regions of the world and meet together at fixed times to foster closer unity between the Roman Pontiff and the bishops, to assist the Roman pontiff with their counsel regarding the preservation of faith, morals and ecclesiastical discipline.”<sup>8</sup> This is in line with Pope Paul VI’s motive for establishing the synod of bishops in 1965.

The Synod of Bishops, as stated earlier, is subject to the authority of the Pope. He, therefore, is the one who convokes the synod, chooses participants, determines the agenda, presides over it and approves its resolutions.<sup>9</sup> This means that the Pope has the authority too to disapprove some resolutions and recommendations made by the bishops at a synod.

There are three main types of synods. The first one is called an ordinary general assembly. This type of synod is convened to reflect on matters pertaining to the good of the universal church.<sup>10</sup> An example of this type of synod was the Synod on Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment held in October 2018. The second type of synod is called an extraordinary general assembly. This too deals with matters pertaining to the good of the universal church. However, the difference is that an extraordinary general assembly treats those matters that are urgent.<sup>11</sup> Such synods are not very common as up to date, there have been only three extra-ordinary synods. The last type of synod is called a special

assembly. This deals with matters pertaining to the Church in a specific geographical area.<sup>12</sup> An example of this is the synod on the Pan-Amazon region held in 2019. Worth-noting is the fact that a synod is held in phases. Such phases may include breaks for further consultations and reflections. At the end of every synod, the Pope issues a post-synodal exhortation.

### **Synodality: Definitions and Implications**

Synodality is defined as “the involvement and participation of the whole People of God in the life and mission of the Church.”<sup>13</sup> This means that everyone participates by the virtue of being a member of the Church rather than his or her status in the Church. Thus, synodality promotes the baptismal dignity and co-responsibility of all, makes the most of the presence in the people of God of charisms dispensed by the Holy Spirit. This implies that consulting and listening to all members of the church is essential for discerning a path forward. For instance, Martin Coffey recalls that during the preparations of the first African synod, “the local parishes and the small Christian communities the people met to reflect on their Christian experience to review the past and to dream of the future.”<sup>14</sup> He goes on to say that even during the Synod deliberations, while the bishops were meeting and deliberating in Rome, the people back home were watching, waiting and praying for an outcome that would give new life and vigour to the Church in Africa.<sup>15</sup> The connection between the deliberating bishops and the faithful who keep interested in the synodal process postulates a Church that unites by the virtue of belonging to one community without interfering with one another’s position within the Church community. In other words, the bishops remain fully Christian and fully cleric, while the laity remain fully Christian and fully lay and yet every one of them fulfils their Christian responsibility.

Synodality does not, however, seek to do away with Church hierarchy. In fact, synodality leans on two pillars: the *sensus fidei* of the entire People of God and the sacramental collegiality of the episcopate in communion with the See of Rome.<sup>16</sup> It leans on the entire people of God in as much as every member participates and contributes to the Church and it leans on the collegiality of the Bishops in as much as the bishops are the ones who convene for deliberations and forward the resolutions

and recommendations to the Pope. Synodality could rightly be described as the fruit of the renewal promised by Vatican II in its promotion of ecclesial communion and episcopal collegiality.<sup>17</sup>

### **A Brief Historical Overview of the Development of the Synod**

As already pointed out, the synod of bishops was established by Pope Paul VI in 1965 after the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council. He officially launched the synod of bishops first with the issuing of the Apostolic Letter *Apostolica Sollicitudo*. In the Letter, Paul VI explicitly states that the idea of the synod was born out of an apostolic concern. He adds that the Synod of Bishops is meant to provide information and offer advice to the Pope. It can also enjoy the power of making decisions when such power is conferred upon it by the Roman Pontiff.<sup>18</sup> However, he left it open that the idea of the synod could be improved with the passing of time depending on the needs and demands of the time. And indeed, the synod has undergone changes throughout the years. Paul VI himself issued *Ordo Synodo Episcoporum* in 1966 which contains all the Norms regarding the manner of conducting the Synod of Bishops. The 1983 Code of Canon Law also devoted a chapter on the synod. The latest update on the synod is by Pope Francis, who, in *Episcopalis Communio* articulates the purpose of the synod and its various components.<sup>19</sup>

### **Biblical Foundations of Synodality**

The Bible has a number of references which can be considered as connotations of synodality. For instance, in Matthew 20:24, the disciples get indignant when the mother of the sons of Zebedee asks for favours from Jesus on behalf of her children. They were getting jealous that these two disciples would be favoured by Jesus. Noticing their reaction, Jesus immediately warns them that “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their superiors exercise authority over them. It shall not be this way among you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant” (Mt 20:25-26). Jesus also says the same words when a dispute arose among his disciples about who is the greatest (Lk. 22:24-30). Jesus teaches them a new way of exercising authority over one another. Authority among his disciples, must not be the one of dominion.

Instead, the greatest would be one who would consider himself the least among his brothers. Jesus does not want to get rid of authority as if it were not important at all. He rather wants his disciples to emphasize on it so much to the extent of forgetting their brotherhood. In the same way, synodality does not mean to put aside and underrate the leadership and hierarchy of the Church but that the emphasis should be laid on belonging to the community of the Church.

In Acts of the apostles, we also encounter a Church that really makes use of the model of the Church as the body of Christ. The members make decisions together, contribute to the well-being of the Church and take care of the side-lined (Acts 5:19-21; 8:26,29,39; 12:6-17; 13:1-3; 16:6-7,9-10; 20:22). This is evident from the introduction of the ministry of diaconate after the complaint of the widows (Acts 6:1-6). This symbolizes a listening Church at its best, a Church that cares for the needs of each member of the community, a Church that walks together with every member.

### **Theological Basis of Synodality**

The idea of synodality in its basic and fundamental sense is not opposed to Catholic theology. In the long run, it actually affirms true Catholic ecclesiology. Theologically, therefore, synodality is inspired, first of all by the Holy Trinity itself. In the mystery of the Holy Trinity, all the three persons are distinct from one another and yet remain one. The presence of one person does not diminish the existence of another. The idea of synodality is neither meant to get rid of Church hierarchy nor to engage the Church in a democratic process. Rather, it is about discerning together as members of one community that is the Church and yet each maintains his distinctness in identity. And so, the Church is One because she has her source, her model and her goal in the unity of the Blessed Trinity.<sup>20</sup>

Secondly, the concept of synodality also resonates with the model of the Church as a mystical communion. Of this model, Avery Dulles states that the Church is seen in the analogy of a human body equipped with various organs.<sup>21</sup> Alluding to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, he further adds that such a community is constituted by a complete self-forgetfulness of love.<sup>22</sup> Here too the emphasis is on the baptismal consecration that each

Christian shares by the virtue of belonging to the Christian community. It is a community that prioritizes love and self-forgetfulness by choosing to walk together and listen to one another.

### **Synodality in the Contemporary World: Some Challenges**

The first challenge of synodality in the contemporary world is the political ideologies that are currently reigning the world. For quite some time, people had always fought for the right to participate in government affairs of their country. This is why many countries opted for democracy as a system of government. However, there have been many occasions when the right to participate has been abused. With such a mindset hovering all over, a synod can be mistaken for a forum where people express their preferences by imploring the game of numbers while foregoing the discernment which comprises the process. Avery Dulles also recalls that in nations accustomed to the liberal democratic tradition, there has been a movement to introduce into the Church the principles of the constitutional government and something corresponding to the bill of rights.<sup>23</sup> Marie-Dominique Chenu refers to the challenge as public opinion. He writes that “public opinion with its associated problems only became prominent in society and within the church from the birth and expression of popular awareness in social and political life.”<sup>24</sup>

Secondly, while the synod is meant to foster the unity and universality of the Church, specifically the unity between the Pope and bishops, it may be used as a platform for threatening the unity of the Church. This may be, for example, recommending issues that threaten the purity of the Christian faith and teaching. The other challenge can be the erratic understanding of synodality. Even though synodality implies that every member of the Church should participate in the affairs of the Church, there are other areas that do not need the consultation of the laity. And so, synodality has its own limits.

Synodality can also be a threat to the authority of the Church especially the Pope. The mere chance of bishops having the ability to decide on crucial matters of the Church side by side with the Pope can instil an attitude that can underrate the papacy. In line with this, Jessica Murdoch, associate professor of fundamental and dogmatic theology at Villanova

University, also cautions against interpretations of synodality which negate the importance of the Church's order of authority. According to her, "good ecclesiology preserves the distinctions in the hierarchy and in the Church as a body."<sup>25</sup> In other words, it must always be remembered and respected that the bishops are under the authority of the Pope and the Church is under the authority of God.

### **Prospects of Synodality**

Synodality as an emerging model of the Church has a high chance of being adopted in the Church today. First of all, synodality is faithful to the fundamental calling of Christians. Thus, all Christians attain their identity by the virtue of Baptism and through this sacrament all are members of the same family. It is after the reception of other sacraments that their roles are distinguished. The International Theological Commission also adds that "the ecclesiology of the People of God stresses the common dignity and mission of all the baptized, in exercising the variety and ordered richness of their charisms, their vocations and their ministries."<sup>26</sup>

Ladislas Örsy describes synodality in terms of the teaching and learning Church which, in Latin, he calls *ecclesia docens* and *ecclesia discens*. According to him, the whole Church, no one excepted is a learning Church. There is no person who does not have the invitation and duty to learn more and more about the word of God.<sup>27</sup> Örsy does not intend to do away with Church authority as he notes that there is a distinction between the clergy and lay. He, however, cites that when an ecumenical council solemnly proclaims the Catholic doctrine, it teaches in the name of the whole Church. But the bishops also learn a lot from the reflections of theologians, for instance, from the commentaries on the documents after the Second Vatican Council.<sup>28</sup> In this sense, Örsy proves that synodality is in fact not a strange idea or one incompatible with Church doctrine.

Örsy further shows some optimism as he notes that since the Second Vatican Council a better balance has been sought and there is a gradual progress in involving the laity in contributing to the crucial matters of the Church. As such, synodality is in fact already in practice.<sup>29</sup> According to Örsy, the Church can no longer challenge this world out of its own

institutional aspirations. There is a need for a listening Church rather than a promulgating Church.<sup>30</sup> O'Brien is also for the idea that synodality is in fact already in force. He, however, suggests that before a questionnaire stage is reached during the preparations for a synod, there has to be a less formal but a deeper kind of listening to the joys and hopes and struggles and anxieties of the people of God.<sup>31</sup> Otherwise, synodality risks being a shallow idea.

*Gaudium et Spes* too affirms that from the beginning of her history the Church has learned to express the message of Christ with the help of the ideas and terminology of various peoples, and has tried to clarify it with the wisdom of philosophers and with the help of the Holy Spirit.<sup>32</sup> The Constitution further states that to ensure that such messages are helpful to the people of God, it is the task of the entire people of God, especially pastors and theologians, to hear, distinguish and interpret the many voices of our age and to judge them in the light of the divine Word.<sup>33</sup>

Dulles proposes that the Church must adopt the idea of creative interaction and resourcefully respond to the initiatives of others. This does not entail taking over the slogans of secular nature but by sifting and reshaping them to fit the Christian message. Such creative interaction refers to the exchange of ideas between the laity and clergy. He adds that the creative interaction that was brought about by Vatican II has brought positive fruits.<sup>34</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Since Vatican II, the Church has experienced a lot of changes. Just as Popes John XXIII and Paul VI desired that the Church should renew herself internally and externally in her interaction with the world, there have been efforts to realize the same. The establishment of the synod after the Second Vatican Council was a step-ahead on this. With so much talk about synodality and active participation of the laity in crucial matters concerning the Church nowadays, the Church cannot avoid more introspection on it. Synodality simply means that the whole Church is a subject and that everyone in the Church is a subject.<sup>35</sup> In the words of Theodore Steeman the Church as it is today is a Church in movement, a Church in change, in search of something.<sup>36</sup> And indeed, since Vatican II there was

born a new Church striving to retain its baptismal community definition.

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- <sup>1</sup> Paul VI. *Apostolica Sollicitudo*, Apostolic Letter on Establishing the Synod of Bishops for the Universal Church. 15th September, 1965. [http://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/motu\\_proprio/documents/hf\\_p-vi-motu-proprio\\_19650915\\_apostolica-sollicitudo.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/motu_proprio/documents/hf_p-vi-motu-proprio_19650915_apostolica-sollicitudo.html).
  - <sup>2</sup> Vatican News. “Synod of Bishops to Take up Theme of Synodality in 2022.” 7th March, 2020. <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2020-03/synod-of-bishops-to-take-up-theme-of-synodality-in-2022.html>
  - <sup>3</sup> International Theological Commission. *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*. (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2018), #5.
  - <sup>4</sup> Fanning, William. “Synod.” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 14. (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1912). <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14388a.htm>
  - <sup>5</sup> International Theological Commission, *Synodality*, #3.
  - <sup>6</sup> Fanning, William. “Synod.” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*.
  - <sup>7</sup> International Theological Commission, *Synodality*, #4.
  - <sup>8</sup> Code of Canon Law #342.
  - <sup>9</sup> Code of Canon Law #343.
  - <sup>10</sup> Code of Canon Law #345.
  - <sup>11</sup> Code of Canon Law #345.
  - <sup>12</sup> Code of Canon Law #345.
  - <sup>13</sup> International Theological Commission, *Synodality*, #6.
  - <sup>14</sup> Coffey, Martin. “Introduction,” In *The African Synod a Step Forward: Post-synodal Special Assembly Held at the Carmelite Centre*. (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1995), 6.
  - <sup>15</sup> Coffey, Martin, “Introduction,” 6.
  - <sup>16</sup> Ed Condon. “What is ‘Synodality’? Experts Explain.” Catholic News Agency. Published on 25th October, 2018. <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/what-is-synodality-experts-explain-60147>.
  - <sup>17</sup> International Theological Commission, *Synodality*, #8.
  - <sup>18</sup> Paul VI, *Apostolica Sollicitudo*.
  - <sup>19</sup> Vatican News. “What is a Synod of Bishops?” accessed on 4th October, 2019. <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2019-10/what-is-synod-bishops-faq.html>.
  - <sup>20</sup> International Theological Commission, *Synodality*, #45.
  - <sup>21</sup> Dulles, Avery. *Models of the Church: A Critical Assessment of the Church in All its Aspects*. (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd, 1976), 46.
  - <sup>22</sup> Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 44.
  - <sup>23</sup> Dulles, Avery. *The Resilient Church: The Necessity and Limits of Adaptation*. (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1977), 35.
  - <sup>24</sup> Chenu, Marie-Dominique. “Public Opinion in the Church.” In *Rethinking the Church*. Edited by Mario Cuminetti and Fernando Vittorino Joannes. Translated by Edmund Burke (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan Ltd, 1970), 112.
  - <sup>25</sup> Ed Condon, “What is ‘Synodality’? Experts Explain,” Catholic News Agency, 25th October 2018. <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/what-is-synodality-experts-explain-60147>.
  - <sup>26</sup> International Theological Commission, *Synodality*, #6.

- <sup>27</sup> Örsy, Ladislav. *The Church: Learning and Teaching*. (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1987), 40.
- <sup>28</sup> Ladislav Örsy, *The Church: Learning and Teaching*, 40.
- <sup>29</sup> Ladislav Örsy, *The Church: Learning and Teaching*, 41.
- <sup>30</sup> Ladislav Örsy, *The Church: Learning and Teaching*, 140.
- <sup>31</sup> John, O'Brien. *Seeds of a New Church*. (Dublin: The Columba Press, 1994), 149.
- <sup>32</sup> *Gaudium et Spes* #44.
- <sup>33</sup> *Gaudium et Spes* #44.
- <sup>34</sup> Dulles, Avery. *The Resilient Church*, 33.
- <sup>35</sup> International Theological Commission, *Synodality*, #55.
- <sup>36</sup> Steeman, Theodore. "Conflict in the Conciliar Church." In *Rethinking the Church*. Edited by Mario Cuminetti and Fernando Vittorino Joannes. Translated by Edmund Burke (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan Ltd, 1970), 129.

## **Principles of Interreligious Dialogue: Bridging a Relations Gap Between the Roman Catholic Church and the Zimbabwean State**

*Shelton Slyvester Zimondi, O.Carm.*

### **Introduction**

Conflict is a reality of life. It seems to characterise the daily order of the world today. Africa and Zimbabwe in particular are not exceptions. Almost every facet of social life is caught up in conflict and violence at religious, social and political spheres, among other aspects of daily living.<sup>1</sup> This article aims to demonstrate how the principles of interreligious dialogue (IRD) may assist in bridging the relations gap between the Roman Catholic Church and the Zimbabwean state. To achieve this aim, the writer will begin by defining key terms followed by a brief discussion on dialogue. Thereafter, the author will show how the ten principles of IRD according to Leonardo Swidler may assist in resolving the conflict between the aforementioned parties. Eventually, the writer will give a critique and draw a conclusion that through the pedagogical, informative and personal aspects of the principles of IRD the relational gap between the Catholic Church and the state would be narrowed down.

### **About dialogue**

The term dialogue comes from two Greek words: dia, meaning “through” and logos, interpreted as “word or meaning”, as such, to dialogue is to engage in constructing meaning through written or spoken word.<sup>2</sup> According to Leonard Swidler, a dialogue entails a conversation on a standard subject between two or more parties with diverse views whose primary purpose is to learn from each other in order to change and grow.<sup>3</sup> A principle is a fundamental guiding rule or value for behaviour or evaluation that is used as a foundation for reasoning or conduct. Thus, in dialogue a principle governs or brings about a standard. For the purposes of this article, the term church will refer to the Roman Catholic Church in Zimbabwe.

Patently, dialogue demands an active search of building bridges of understanding and bringing down walls of prejudice and hostility.<sup>4</sup>

Dialogue entails conversation and active communication, of which these in turn overcome conflict and violence. Of capital importance, oneness is the goal of dialogue. As such, a mature institutional dialogue is the one which seeks to overcome all divisions, paving a way to consensus on matters of belief, doctrine and practice.<sup>5</sup> Clearly, through serious engagement with the other, dialogue leads us into learning about our own prejudices and grey areas as well as discovering new insights about our convictions and traditions. Subsequently, dialogue would help to dispel prejudice and hate, and to boldly confront tensions and conflicts, diffusing them with great sensitivity and humility.<sup>6</sup> Cognisant that society encounters vast conflicts among other challenges today, engaging into a dialogue where common ground for addressing these challenges is created and respect for divergence of views is valued, signifies joint efforts focused on a common goal, benefiting all. Put differently, dialogue seeks not standardisation of society but promotes unity in diversity – a global village where differences are accommodated and respected. Nevertheless, how can an effective dialogue take place to resolve conflict, injustice and violence? The principles of IRD serve as the ground rules to achieve a smooth and fruitful dialogue.

### **What relations gap?**

To mention the need to bridge a relations gap between the Catholic Church and the Zimbabwean state presupposes a conflict. But what could be the conflict? In this article, the writer would like to recall the misunderstanding evidenced by the reaction of the Zimbabwean government through its Minister of Information, Publicity and Broadcasting Services, Mrs. Monica Mutsvangwa who emotionally reacted to the Pastoral Letter written by the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference (ZCBC) on 14 August 2020 as the conflict. In their Pastoral Letter, the bishops categorically mention that the nation is in a crisis, yet, the state says there is no crisis. The ZCBC highlights that there is multi-layered crisis convergence of economic corruption, human rights abuses, poverty, food insecurity, collapse of the healthcare system, egoistic economic policies impacting the common good, unresolved Gukurahundi tribal massacre, to mention but a few.<sup>7</sup> Undeniably, the issues enumerated in this Pastoral Letter did

not augur well with the state. For that reason, it issued a prompt response through the Minister's statement which was characterised by, distasteful language castigating the bishops. Mutsvangwa named and shamed the Catholic bishops. She described the claims of the Pastoral Letter as false and seeking to divide the nation. For the state, the letter is riddled with political undercurrent.<sup>8</sup> In fact, it seeks to incite the peace-loving citizens to overthrow the government. From the bishops' perspective, they were fulfilling one of their episcopal mandates of being the voice of the voiceless, emancipating those suffering under the yoke of the government – they were executing their prophetic mission. From the Pastoral Letter, one would deduce that the bishops were concerned about human dignity and common good. For the bishops, speaking for human dignity and common good is apolitical and a Gospel tenet. On the contrary, for the state this was demonic, misleading and uncalled for. Ultimately, the bishops highlighted in their letter: "As Bishops we have tried to open an honest dialogue on our health care personnel and the health care institutions and the door was shut in our face".<sup>9</sup> Therefore, it is evident that there is a conflict of ideas between the Church and the state.

### **Principles of Interreligious Dialogue Bridging the Relational Gap**

First and foremost, to bridge the relations gap presented above, both the state and the Church would need to be aware that a dialogue, as it were, is not a debate. Its primary thrust is not to win the argument nor to change the other. Instead, the object of the dialogue between the parties in question is for them to draw closer to each other and by doing so, they would understand each other better.<sup>10</sup> As such, they need to listen to each other as openly and sympathetically as possible.<sup>11</sup> In the light of the first principle that, we engage into a dialogue to learn, grow, and change ourselves, the two parties would need to individually allow themselves to learn and accept that they have different viewpoints with regards to the situation in the country. To elucidate, the state has to accept the Church's view that there is a crisis in the country. Likewise, the Church has to accept the opposing view of the state that there is no crisis. But one would ask: how does this work? Fundamentally, this would proportionally reshape their attitude toward each other and in turn change both partners. In fact,

it is of capital importance for the partners to recognize and celebrate the diversity of views and be willing to accept and respect the differences.<sup>12</sup> By doing so, each partner will be open to the learning process. Certainly, there is a need for receptivity and active communication between the Church and state. Further, the second principle is that the dialogue must be two-sided.<sup>13</sup> In other words, the dialogue must not only be between the Catholic Church and the Zimbabwean state, but rather, each participant should also dialogue with co-partners. For instance, the Church can dialogue with coreligionists, with fellow Catholics and likewise, the state can enter into dialogue with fellow politicians to share with them the fruits of the dialogue. This affirms the communal nature of dialogue.<sup>14</sup>

Third, for the dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Zimbabwean state to be fruitful, honesty and sincerity are critical.<sup>15</sup> It is imperative that each participant enters dialogue with complete honesty and sincerity.<sup>16</sup> Without trust there is no dialogue. If embraced faithfully, this principle would be of great help in creating a conducive platform for an authentic conversation between the Church and the state. This means that both dialogical players must clearly stipulate the direction in which the major and minor thrusts of their ideology move, the future projections, and possible difficulties which a participant may face with regards to one's own ideology.<sup>17</sup> As such, each participant must at least assume that similar honesty and sincerity is adhered to by the other partner thereby promoting openness between the Church and the state. Essentially, the idea is to move towards a more profound interaction in which the Catholic Church and the state are encouraged to honestly reflect on and struggle together over potentially sensitive and provocative matters.<sup>18</sup> Since generally their bone of contention is whether or not there is a crisis in the country, each partner should be accorded a platform to define what constitutes a crisis for them without judging them and their perspective must be respected by others. For example, the state should furnish how the signing of the 1987 Unity Accord resolved the Gukurahundi issue, and in the same manner, the Church should explain why they view the issue as still unresolved. As the fourth principle states, comparison should only be permitted where there are similar ideas. Fifth, an opportunity must be availed to each partner to define who they are, what it means to be an authentic Catholic

Church and to be a state. Only the members of a specific group can define themselves. That is, in dialogue only a state official can define the policies and vision of the state. Similarly, only a Catholic can define the Catholic principles and doctrines.

Sixth, for the Church and the state to engage in a sound dialogue each participant needs to suspend all prejudices and preconceptions, thus, as to where the areas of disagreement lie. In fact, the Church should strive to agree with the state as far as possible without losing its missionary and prophetic nature. Likewise, the state must not merely listen to what the Church is saying but rather, attempt to agree insofar as their integrity is not compromised. However, where either partner absolutely would “agree no further without violating one’s own integrity, precisely there is the real point of disagreement”.<sup>19</sup> As such, this principle would reveal the point of divergence. To clarify, despite that the Church is so much influenced by the Aristotelian and Thomistic tradition that human beings are social and political beings whose autonomous good cannot be separated from the common good, on the contrary, the state might have a different view altogether on this matter.<sup>20</sup> Seventh, as the Vatican Council II states: “*par cum pari*” (equal with equal), both the Church and the state must be ready to learn from each other and this would certainly position them equally.<sup>21</sup> Again, this principle would allow not a one-way dialogue but a collective one.

Eighth, to foster a fruitful dialogue, mutual trust is vital. This suggests that the dialogue between the Church and the state must take into consideration and approach first those issues most likely to provide common ground.<sup>22</sup> Given that the bishops in their Pastoral Letter directly pointed to the state difficult problems such as, the unresolved Gukurahundi tribal massacre, state officials’ corruption perpetrated by the ‘catch and release’ system, and human rights abuse, among others, it would be wise to tackle such issues later and not in the beginning of the dialogue. Such an approach would assist in building human trust. Subsequently, as the personal trust gradually deepens and expands, the thornier matters can be undertaken – thus, moving from the known to the unknown.<sup>23</sup> To illustrate, prior to the discussion of the thorny issues the commonly agreed matters or less controversial issues like the collapse

of the healthcare system, care of the corporate or common good, servant leadership, and poverty, may be discussed first.

Nineth, it is of paramount importance in the dialogue process that both the Catholic Church and the state be at least minimally self-critical of themselves and of their own ideas and convictions.<sup>24</sup> Above integrity and conviction, each participant has to introspect and make a self-assessment so that each can learn. For instance, the state may need to reflect and evaluate whether or not the set up Special Anti-Corruption Unity and the Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Commission are effective and independent. A lack of self-criticism suggests that one part has all the correct answers thereby making it difficult or unnecessary or unfeasible to dialogue.<sup>25</sup> Undeniably, this principle would assist participants to comprehend not only the other's position, belief and understanding, but their own perspective more intimately. Accordingly, the Church and the state's acknowledgement that they are not all-knowing would permit dialogue, learning and appreciation of the other. Lastly, both parties must attempt to experience the other partner's ideology.<sup>26</sup> Above all, the dialogue between the Church and the state should be ethical and value based, which would help each participant to progressively see the possibility of gain in losing previously held misconceptions and biases.<sup>27</sup> This means that the Church has to unlearn some misconceptions about the state and vice versa. Ultimately, such an authentic dialogue would help the two participants to explore new areas of reality, meaning, and truth which perhaps neither of them has ever recognised before.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, the above principles of dialogue would bridge the relations gap between the Catholic Church and the state.

### **Critique**

Although the principles of IRD would be of great value and assistance in bridging the relations gap between the Catholic Church and the Zimbabwean state, one would wonder to what extent the participants would be faithful to the dialogical process. Specifically, given the two diverse or parallel positions the parties hold, would it be easy to initiate the dialogue in the first place. Indubitably, it can be a mammoth task to initiate a dialogue. The bishops' attempt to dialogue with the state

with regard to the incapacitation of the healthcare system where the door was closed on their face is a typical example. The dialogue became difficult to undertake. As such, should the ZCBC continue trying to call for dialogue with the state? Certainly yes! Persistence pays. Furthermore, given the human tendency of secretiveness, egoistic and self-defence, it would be interesting to note to what extent both parties would trust, be honest, sincere, minimally self-critical, create an equal dialogical environment and have areas of common agreement. Again, there also seems to be a tendency for human beings wanting to convert the other or to convince them, to compare ideas and judge others. It is also incontestable that acceptance and learning of new ideology is not desirable, rather, one would prefer to remain with and safeguard what he or she believes. But, does all these render dialogue useless? Definitely not! Dialogue demands commitment and courage. Therefore, in order to resolve conflict and hate, and bridge the relations gap between the Church and the state, commitment, dedication, devotedness, discipline and courage are vital elements. Above all, the principles of IRD would only be helpful if both parties are authentic in dialoguing.

### **Conclusion**

This article has vividly shown that the principles of interreligious dialogue can actually help bridge a relations gap that exists between the Catholic Church and the state. Nonetheless, all that the parties have to do is to ensure that they enter into dialogue ready to learn, committed, without preconceptions and prejudices. Trust, self-critical, honesty and sincerity are also critical elements in authentic dialogue. The article has also proven that since dialogue is not contention or controversy, there is no need to be defensive or to prove an error in the other participant. Unequivocally, through the educative, informative and personal aspects of the principles of IRD dialogue the relations gap between the Catholic Church and the state would be resolved or narrowed down.

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<sup>1</sup> Gikonyo Mwangi. *Manual for Inter-Religious Dialogue*. (Nairobi: Franciscan Kolbe Press, 2012.), 28. [www.chemichemi.org](http://www.chemichemi.org). Accessed: 03 November 2020.

- <sup>2</sup> Gikonyo Mwangi. *Manual for Inter-Religious Dialogue*. (Nairobi: Franciscan Kolbe Press, 2012.), 11. [www.chemichemi.org](http://www.chemichemi.org). Accessed: 03 November 2020.
- <sup>3</sup> Swidler, Leonard. "The Dialogue Decalogue: Ground Rules for Interreligious, Inter-ideology Dialogue." *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 20:1 (1983) 1. [www.dialogueinstitute.org](http://www.dialogueinstitute.org). Accessed: 03 November 2020.
- <sup>4</sup> *Called to Dialogue, Interreligious and Intra-Christian Dialogue in Ecumenical Conversation: A Practical Guide*. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2016.)
- <sup>5</sup> *Called to Dialogue, Interreligious and Intra-Christian Dialogue in Ecumenical Conversation: A Practical Guide*. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2016.)
- <sup>6</sup> *Called to Dialogue, Interreligious and Intra-Christian Dialogue in Ecumenical Conversation: A Practical Guide*. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2016.)
- <sup>7</sup> Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference. Pastoral Letter: The March is Not Ended, 1. <https://www.cbcew.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2020/08/zimbabwe-bishops-pastoral-letter-140820.pdf>. Accessed: 20 October 2020.
- <sup>8</sup> ZBC News Online. <https://www.zbcnews.co.zw/government-condemns-utterances-by-zimbabwe-catholic-bishops-conference/> Accessed: 11 November 2020.
- <sup>9</sup> Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference. Pastoral Letter: The March is Not Ended, 4. <https://www.cbcew.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2020/08/zimbabwe-bishops-pastoral-letter-140820.pdf>. Accessed: 20 October 2020.
- <sup>10</sup> Second Vatican Council. *Vatican II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*. New rev. ed. Austin Flannery. (New York: Costello Publishing Company, Inc., 1998.), 1006.
- <sup>11</sup> Swidler, Leonard. "The Dialogue Decalogue: Ground Rules for Interreligious, Inter-ideology Dialogue." *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 20:1 (1983) 1. [www.dialogueinstitute.org](http://www.dialogueinstitute.org). Accessed: 03 November 2020.
- <sup>12</sup> *Called to Dialogue, Interreligious and Intra-Christian Dialogue in Ecumenical Conversation: A Practical Guide*. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2016.)
- <sup>13</sup> Swidler, Leonard. "The Dialogue Decalogue: Ground Rules for Interreligious, Inter-ideology Dialogue." *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 20:1 (1983) 2. [www.dialogueinstitute.org](http://www.dialogueinstitute.org). Accessed: 03 November 2020.
- <sup>14</sup> Swidler, Leonard. "The Dialogue Decalogue: Ground Rules for Interreligious, Inter-ideology Dialogue." *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 20:1 (1983) 2. [www.dialogueinstitute.org](http://www.dialogueinstitute.org). Accessed: 03 November 2020.
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## **Understanding Pluralism, Ecumenism and Religious Dialogue in Light of the Conciliar Doctrine of the Trinity**

*Rev. Pastor Tichafa Enias Shara*

### **Introduction**

The Conciliar doctrine of the Trinity cannot be defined outside the auspices of Scripture and Tradition, given that all doctrine is shaped by these two fundamentals. They are the source and foundation of faith. Therefore, it is no surprise that the Trinity, both in essence and in persons, in unity and in diversity, is explicit from the very outset of the creation narrative (Gen. 1:1, 27). In like manner, the practices and teachings of the Church fathers throughout history could not be found wanting insofar as defining the Trinity is concerned, nor did ecumenical councils. It is therefore against this backdrop that the researcher endeavours to provide a concise definition of Conciliar Doctrine of the Trinity prior to demonstrating its nexus with Pluralism, Ecumenism and Religious Dialogue.

### **Conciliar Doctrine of the Trinity**

Following the controversies and heresies, mostly around the divinity of Jesus Christ in the early centuries, it became incumbent upon the Church Fathers to critically and constructively look into the matter. The difficulties in trying to reconcile the incarnate God and his divinity in the whole economy of salvation proved unfathomable to the likes of priest Arius who propagated the Arian heresy. His argument thereof was, “the Son was a created, mediating figure through whom the one God made the world, and so was different from the Father”<sup>1</sup> The Nicaean Council called over by Constantine in 325, which was attended by over three hundred bishops and churchmen dispelled the Arian Heresy in favour of Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria.<sup>2</sup>

The doctrine, as formulated by the Church Fathers in the early ecumenical councils from the second century AD to the fourth century AD defines that, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are distinct yet identical. They are distinct as persons, yet identical as God.<sup>3</sup> Arias David further reinforces Friedman’s submission by asserting that, “The Son of God, who is the person of Jesus Christ, is consubstantial with God the

Father and is therefore God”<sup>4</sup> He further reiterates that, this statement of the Creed was directed chiefly against the Arians who denied the divinity of the Son of God.<sup>5</sup>

The ecumenical councils recognize the teachings of Origen as presented by Dyrness that, the Son is co-eternal with the Father, and of the same nature. In the same vein, Dyrness advances Tertullian’s expression of the distinctness between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit arguing that Tertullian was the first to use the term ‘person’.<sup>6</sup>

Constantinople 1, 381 AD was very much definitive in dealing with the residue of the Arian heresy. This was the Neo-Arian error propagated by Eunomius, and the ecumenical council advances that, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are distinct persons who are identical and indivisible in being, possessed of the fullness of deity.<sup>7</sup> Butressing the Constantinople Creed, Augustine says, “The works of the Trinity are indivisible”; arguably, he sees the Spirit as a bond of love between the Father and the Son.<sup>8</sup> Contrary to Augustine’s view of the Holy Spirit, Friedman underpins and reiterates that, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are distinct as persons, yet identical as God.<sup>9</sup> According to Anatolios, both Athanasius and Basil propagate that, the Holy Spirit has the same nature and order with respect to the Son as the Son has with the Father.<sup>10</sup>

### **Pluralism**

Pluralism is not an ideology whose initiates are mortals. Rather, it is a divine characteristic pronounced in God’s self-disclosure. In Genesis 1 we witness the manifestation of God in a pluralistic form. From the onset we see the beginning of God’s involvement in human life just as Newland further asserts that, this is common to most religions.<sup>11</sup>

According to Newlands, the Trinity is the model of unity and mission, whereby the three persons are united, yet discharging their mission in diversity. As such, the plight of pluralism is for other religions to be recognized as possessing certain values, and these are pointers to God.<sup>12</sup> This is the trajectory which was adopted by the Second Vatican Council in the quest to foster unity and tolerance. It is assumed that humanity is one in God despite their metaphysical structure, further to that, their experiences exhibit diversity; this pluralism is the hallmark of man’s humanness.<sup>13</sup>

In concurrence with Rahner and Vorgrimler, O'Collins and Farrugia postulate that, "Over against a rigid uniformity, the Second Vatican Council endorsed a proper diversity in Christian Tradition and worship".<sup>14</sup> It is therefore imperative to underscore that such a shift in the theological paradigm was born out of clear understanding of the Trinitarian Agenda as portrayed in the creation narrative.

In the trinity, we see a community which is bound together in selfless love. In his *Essays in Christian Apologetics*, Kreeft advances that, "The Father loves the Son, not himself; the Son loves the Father, not himself; the Spirit is the love between the Father and the Son, a love so real that it is a third Person".<sup>15</sup> This is expressly illustrated in a family relationship where, the husband and wife become one, knit together with the bond of love. The lover feels more complete with the loved than with himself. In like manner, one person of the Godhead feels absolute in unity with the other two. Kreeft further advances the centrality of love, family, community and relationship as essential and core to human existence.<sup>16</sup>

### **Ecumenism**

According to Brauer's *Dictionary of Church History*, Ecumenism refers to that which is concerned with the unity and renewal of the Church. This also includes concern with regard to the oneness of the church as confessed in its Creeds.<sup>17</sup> Dyrness and Karkkainen, defines Ecumenism as the practices of Churches and Christian groups in which they seek and work for the unity that binds them together as Christians. The ideology became popular and propagated by the Roman Catholic Church following the second Vatican Council (1962-1965).<sup>18</sup>

While ecumenism is defined in relation to the church and its members who are expected to exhibit the unity of the Spirit, it is fundamentally important to demonstrate that the Trinity is the true example of what true ecumenism is all about. The church being the reality of the oneness of the three members of the Trinity, Christians must indeed and in creed mirror the divine.

The Trinity is absolutely united in essence as all God yet manifesting their persons as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in perfect union. This must most supposedly be the endeavour of all those who call upon the

name of the Lord and claim to be members of the Church across traditional divides. There is promotion of Unity and diversity. The ecumenical Dialogue between the American Baptist and the Roman Catholic held between April 1967 and April 1970 came with a consensus that, the Church as a whole "...found its authority in the Triune God, the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, who communicated himself in a unique way to the Church..."<sup>19</sup>

Peter Kreeft puts it across profoundly in his postulation that what provides Christianity with a unique concept of unity is the Trinity; and nothing is more one than God, yet plurality is not only an assumption but an absolute reality.<sup>20</sup>

The persons of the Trinity are not withdrawn from each other, but there is a complete pouring of oneself toward the others.<sup>21</sup> This writer supposes this to be the essence of true Ecumenism, whereby every member involved is not withdrawn from the rest because of selfish ambitions. The lessons that are drawn from the Trinity as the pacesetter and pioneer of unity and diversity includes, but are not limited to; firstly, that whatever unity Christians wish to embrace must issue from the already existing unity of the Godhead, who, according to St Augustine as quoted by Hodgson, says, "The Trinity as a whole indwells in the Christian".<sup>22</sup> Secondly, Communion; there is perfect communion among the persons of the Holy Trinity. And lastly, there is collaboration and partnership.

It is supposed and therefore upheld that the Trinity, being a perfect union of three persons, is always in perfect communion and communication. Fortman buttresses the divine aspect of communication and unison by supporting the ideas of Scheeben who says, "...unity rules throughout; the divine nature and substance is one in all 3 persons, and these in turn are one with the essence. ..The communication of the essence from one person to the others involves no separation or partition of essence".<sup>23</sup>

Writing his consultation report on confessing the Apostolic Faith from the perspective of Pentecostal Churches, Jerry L Sandidge of the Assemblies of God submits that, Pentecostals need to remove their misunderstanding of ecumenical movement as super world-church. He emphasises that, it should be understood as a communion of communions.<sup>24</sup> It is therefore reasonable for this presentation to concur with

both Fortman and Sandidge and further add that inter-church organizational dialogue is a divine initiative whose foundation is embedded in the Trinity, and therefore a Trinitarian agenda.

The Church Fathers saw the need to improve communion and collaboration among Christians across traditional divides. According to Burgess and Gros, in their reference to the *Decree on Ecumenism*, dialogue was a necessary means of solving theological and ecclesiastical issues of faith and order (1).<sup>25</sup> The Church as “the people of God and the sacrament of Christ present on earth, and the communion of the faithful by the power of the Spirit”<sup>26</sup>, considers bilateral dialogue and church-to-church ecumenist to be so important in maintaining the Trinitarian unity.

Trinitarian unity and equality are vital in shaping Religious Dialogue. The Father, Son, and the Holy are not only diverse, they are also in absolute unity and the basis of this unity in Pentecostalism is “Koinonia” which issues from the Holy Spirit and evidences personal relationship with God through Christ.<sup>27</sup>

These inter-church dialogues aimed at archiving peace, unity and cooperation within the body of Christ best define Ecumenism, its aims and objectives.

### **Religious Dialogue**

A pluralistic approach to and understanding of the Trinitarian agenda in the economy of salvation are key in inter-religious engagements. Just a simple understanding that all humans are equal in the eyes of God and must exercise mutual respect is enough to unlock dialogue. Hence, we should treat each other with utmost respect. It is from this perspective as derived from the inclusivism of God that we witness the Second Vatican moving adrift from rigidity of uniformity to proper diversity.<sup>28</sup>

This must of course be an all-encompassing undertaking, involving all God’s people without necessarily sacrificing principles of faith on the altar. When the church extends the hand of unity and fellowship to different world religions, it must always retain its taste. Religious dialogue seeks to endear and accommodate with respect people of different persuasion.

## Conclusion

From the discussion presented above, the author submits that, indeed the conciliar doctrine of Holy Trinity is not only the foundation of Pluralism, Ecumenism and Religious Dialogue but it also encourages the same.

Trinity is the model of society, whereby the three persons of the Trinity represent a perfect society. A society characterised with unity and diversity. This is the whole essence of Pluralism as it borrows a leaf from the model set by the Godhead. Diverse as people really are yet united by the reality of humanness.

The unity of the Godhead is demonstrated in every aspect of life; from the individual as he or she assumes different roles and responsibilities, either as mother, to the children or wife to the husband. What changes are functions and not the essence, so is the case with the persons of the Trinity who are not only united, but promote the same unity, communion, communication, collaboration, coexistence, diversity and functional differences.

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<sup>3</sup> Fiedman, Russell L. *Medieval Trinitarian Thought From Aquinas to Ockham*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.) 1.

<sup>4</sup> Arias, David. *Johannine Themes in the Early Church Councils*. [www.catholic-resources.org](http://www.catholic-resources.org). Substantive revision 24 Sep 2005. 1999-2001.

<sup>5</sup> Arias, David. *Johannine Themes in the Early Church Councils*. 1999-2001.

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<sup>10</sup> Anatolios, Khaled. *Retrieving Nicaea*. (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2011.), 25.

<sup>11</sup> Newlands, George. *Generosity and the Christian Future*. (London: SPCK, 1997.), 111.

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<sup>13</sup> Rahner, Karl and Herbert Vorgrimler. *Theological Dictionary*. (New

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- <sup>16</sup> Kreeft, Peter. *Fundamentals of the Faith.* 122.
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- <sup>21</sup> Fortman, Edmund J. *The Triune God: A Historical Study of the Doctrine of the Trinity.* (London: Hutchinson & CO, 1972.), 300-302.
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- <sup>23</sup> Fortman, Edmund J. *The Triune God: A Historical Study of the Doctrine of the Trinity.* 300.
- <sup>24</sup> Sandidge, L. Jerry. *A Consultation: Confessing the Apostolic Faith from the Perspective of the Pentecostal Churches.* *Ecumenical Document VI: Building Unity.* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989.), 485.
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## **African Traditional Religion(s) and Inter-religious Dialogue** *Sheasby Gondo, CSSp.*

### **Introduction**

Dialogue is from the Greek words *dia* and *logos*. These words can translate to having a conversation or talking to each other. The study of interreligious dialogue is an attempt to engage for better understanding and cooperation. It is “primarily a conversation between believers of different faiths or religious traditions”.<sup>1</sup> It aims at assessing the barriers of communication between religious groups. More precisely, it is a means by which different parties can bypass these barriers. Notably, African Traditional Religion (ATR) is a segment that deserves an opportunity for dialogue with other religions. ATR is an indigenous response to the Supreme Being and his proxies. Considering the significant success of missionary activities in their deliberate and systematic effort to wipe out ATR. It is salient that Christianity re-engages to promote mutual respect. This article shall point out ways in which interreligious dialogue can assist one in forming an informed and better relation with ATR. It shall point out and assess some negative attitudes towards ATR and how their elimination results in good dialogue.

### **Exclusivism (Replacement model)**

To begin with, the Christianity and Islam express a domineering attitude towards African Traditional Religion. These religions sought to wipe out ATR by replacing it with their own beliefs. With the use of brute force, there was an imposition of Muslim beliefs and culture in the African countries in North Africa. Resistance of the Muslim religion and culture was a declaration of war by the resisting party.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Christianity with its promotion of the gospel through the courtship of the military and the missionaries, brought in the conquering and convert attitude by the *padroado* system<sup>3</sup>. The race between Islam and Christianity to proselytize Africans shows the attitude of exclusivism on both parties. They wiped out “pagan” cultures and replace them with their own religious beliefs.<sup>4</sup> As a result, most Africans subscribe to the tenets of these

two religions and condemn those of African Traditional Religion.

However, through interreligious dialogue one develops an attitude of cooperation and tolerance. In his speech during his visit to Asia in 1981, Pope John Paul II said, “the Catholic Church wishes to do everything possible to cooperate with other believers in preserving all that is good in their religions and cultures”.<sup>5</sup> This statement recognizes the good elements and positive contributions present in all religions. Above all, Christianity should not replace other religions, but should collaborate with them. Hence, Christianity’s attitude towards ATR should be rich in respect and co-operation in order to “preserve all that is good” in it. The only way this can be done is by recognizing the fact that ATR has a lot to offer its people and the world. This realization allows for mutual understanding and collaboration, which thwarts the tendency of downgrading the other. Therefore, studying interreligious dialogue is important to achieve this attitude of respect that promotes mutuality.

### **Fundamentalism**

Subsequently, another negative attitude that hinders success in interreligious dialogue is fundamentalism. This is a position that upholds the rudimentary aspects of a religion as the only truth. It explicitly claims not only to possess the absolute truth, but that it has a monopoly on its interpretation. This means that interpreting truth about religion should be in line with the assemblage’s acceptable standards of interpretation. Indeed, literalism is the core element of this position since there is a strict adherence to the unshakable principles. This position presents a challenge to dialogue because “... when the tenets of fundamentalism are fully applied to a specific religion, the result is that absolute truth is invariably in a particular tradition or text understood as belonging to a single, exclusivist group. Hence, a barrier in the level of learning required to enable dialogue between the religions to become an instrument of peace”.<sup>6</sup> Regardless of this interpretation, most religious sects take this position when they encounter ATR.

Interreligious dialogue brings to consciousness this unfair and rigid perception of religion and religious beliefs. Interpreting what is true has no monopoly, and no religion may dictate what is true for the other. This

means that religions like ATR should stake their cosmology without external interpretations. Studying interreligious dialogue brings a partial or complete transformation into the perception of ATR as an entity that has a right to define its existence and direct its trajectory. The fundamentals in Christianity, Islam, Judaism or Hinduism is not necessarily fundamental to ATR because ATR has confidence in its truths. Studying interreligious dialogue brings such facts to consciousness and hence curb the denigrating perceptions and attitudes towards ATR.

### **Intellectualism**

In interreligious dialogue, intellectualism is an attitude of expanding or contracting phenomena using academic or scientific principles. Intellectualism values the formulation of ideas and theories over the emotive tendencies. Coherency and scientific explanation of the religious beliefs is essential and only recognized theologians possess the keys to the truths. As a result, theologians and other academics shape and direct the course of religion and its beliefs. ATR has no recognition in most of the dominant religions because it has no representation in the academic circles. Most of its principles have no academic exposition and an analysis from the theological standards of other religions. For example, most academics who defend ATR are reactionary and argue from a defensive viewpoint. This subjects ATR to intellectual categories of other religions and hence the topics under discussion have no justification in its context. Soteriological and eschatological debates should not have a Christian background when one argues from an ATR standpoint. Some topics should not find their way in ATR because of their irrelevancy, a good example is eschatology.

The real challenge of intellectualism is not in the representation in the academic world, but on how it blocks the avenues of genuine dialogue. Religion expresses thoughts and feelings towards the Supreme Being. Its principles should in every aspect reflect this since they should be comprehensive. Discrediting ATR based on academic theories shows a failure to recognize its richness, since it expresses the human experiences. "Interreligious dialogue is not a philosophical, theological or intellectual exercise. It expresses the participants' lived faith. Therefore, interfaith

encounters form communities of awareness”<sup>7</sup> Studying interreligious dialogue transforms one’s perception and attitude towards ATR, since there is a recognition that dialogue is on different levels. Fults argues that “dialogue, therefore, is not just something that takes place on an official or academic level only; it is part of daily life during which different cultural and religious groups interact with each other directly, and where tensions between them are the most tangible”<sup>8</sup> This is in line with what John Paul II says, “Interreligious dialogue must reach to the grass-roots, correcting misunderstanding which communities have of one another, and fostering solidarity in the building of a more just and humane society”<sup>9</sup> The emotive tendency of ATR applies to dialogue, and this perception is clear when one studies interreligious dialogue.

### **Assessment**

To expose how interreligious dialogue can help change perception and attitudes toward ATR, this article highlights some negative attitudes that hinder religious dialogue. In resolving the brashness of exclusivism, interreligious dialogue equips one with the eyes that see other religious groups as equals. In doing away with exclusivism, one becomes conscious of the biases over other religions in favour of his. This applies to Christians as well because without this consciousness the Christian views might compel us to demonize and discredit other religions, especially ATR with impunity. In dealing with fundamentalism, the study of interreligious dialogue equips one with the hermeneutic tools that offer a broader and comprehensive interpretation of beliefs. It is a broadening of the epistemological horizon that gives one the capacity and ability to allow the possibility and validity of other interpretations in matters of faith and truth. It is a recognition that truth is one, its manifestation differs depending on social, cultural and spiritual aptitude of a group. This provides one with the ability to understand the system of belief in ATR, and its practice becomes more tolerable because of this extension of the horizon of knowledge.

Eradicating intellectualism opens ones to the reality and validity of emotive and supernatural knowledge. Religious truth does not subsist in intellectual principles, and the purpose of its existence is not academic.

In relinquishing intellectualism, one realizes that even though people can attain spiritual truth by the use of the minds, they cannot comprehensively explain the spiritual world. It is from this perspective that the lay-back attitude found in ATR in the attempt to understand the divine finds its justification. The complete subjection of thoughts, feeling and actions to the spiritual world without academic formulas also merits credit when one eliminates the attitude of intellectualism in approaching religion and religious dialogue. However, the approach to these negative attitudes demand openness and honesty by the individual. Thomas' Bacon's idols demand the individual to commit to their elimination for one to satisfy the demands for interreligious dialogue. Learning and knowing about something and doing it are different things. An emphasis on the pragmatic aspect of the study will have a higher chance of transforming the attitudes and perceptions of ATR.

### **Conclusion**

This paper attempted to explain how interreligious dialogue can change one's perception and attitude towards ATR. Exclusivism, fundamentalism and intellectualism help us understand the ways by which the interreligious dialogue transforms our perception and attitude towards ATR. This aid is through the negative because it uses the negative element to expose the positive ways in which interreligious dialogue handles the change. This transformation relies much on the participant's attitude towards dialogue and other religions. The ways by which religious dialogue brings transformation in the appreciation of ATR demand commitment and openness. The individual's effort is key in bringing forth this transformation.

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<sup>4</sup> Fitzgerald, Timothy and Martin Connell. *The Changing Face of the Church*. (Dublin: Liturgy Training Publications, 1969), 72.

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## **Mandela a Modern Christian Father** *Simbarashe Shepherd Marundu, ofm.*

### **Introduction**

Martyrdom is one of the oldest ways that the church used as a measuring stick for one to be considered a saint. This was done in response to the ongoing persecutions that happened in the Early Church. However, with the development of the Church, Martyrdom was redefined to go beyond the shedding of blood as the single criterion of identifying martyrs in the Church. The purpose of this essay is to discuss in detail the figure of Nelson Mandela and how his deeds can qualify him to be called a modern Christian Father while defying the criteria that the Church used. Nelson Mandela shall therefore be the character because of the various reasons that will be discussed in this essay but generally choosing him was because of how he suffered politically for the freedom of South Africa. The details in this essay will, therefore provide justification as to why Nelson Mandela can be considered a modern Christian martyr.

### **Understanding of Christian Martyrdom**

In order to address the demands of the question under discussion, it is important that one presents what martyrdom is, its types and how it can be relevant to the life of Nelson Mandela as an icon of Christian Martyrdom. The term “martyr” comes from *martus*, a Greek word meaning a witness in a court.<sup>1</sup> There are three different types of martyrdom categorized in the text of the seventh- or eighth-century *Cambrai Homily* and these are namely, white, blue and red martyrdom.<sup>2</sup> McLarty adds that the white martyrdom for someone is when they part for the sake of God from everything that they love, although they may suffer fasting and hard work.<sup>3</sup> The blue martyrdom is when through fasting and hard work they control their desires or struggle in penance and repentance.<sup>4</sup> The red martyrdom is when they endure a cross or destruction for Christ’s sake, as happened to the Apostles when they persecuted the wicked and taught the law of God.<sup>5</sup> Abogado would then reiterate that these three kinds of martyrdom take place in those people who repent well, who control their desires, and who shed their blood in fasting and labour for Christ’s

sake.<sup>6</sup> Martyrdom can also politicise the relationship between the groups for example the African National Congress (ANC) party and that of the Apartheid government which Nelson Mandela fought against and suffered so much persecution including imprisonment for twenty-seven years.

### **Nelson Mandela and his Legacy**

According to Benson, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela was born in a small village in the south-eastern region of South Africa called the Transkei.<sup>7</sup> His father was chief of the village and a member of the royal family of the Thembu tribe, which spoke the Xhosa language.<sup>8</sup> As a boy, Mandela grew up in the company of tribal elders and chiefs, which gave him a rich sense of African self-government and heritage, despite the cruel treatment of blacks in white governed South Africa.<sup>9</sup> Mandela was also deeply influenced by his early education in Methodist church schools and the instruction he received there set him on a path leading away from some African tribal traditions, such as an arranged marriage set up by a tribal elder, which he refused.<sup>10</sup> Benson further continues to say that after being expelled from Fort Hare University College in 1940 for leading a student strike, Mandela obtained a degree from Witwatersrand University and in 1942 he received a degree in law from the University of South Africa.<sup>11</sup> In 1962 Mandela was again arrested, this time for leaving South Africa illegally and for inciting strikes and he was sentenced to five years in jail.<sup>12</sup> The following year he was tried with other leaders of Umkhonto weSizwe on a charge of high treason, following a government raid of the group's secret headquarters and Mandela was given a life sentence, which he began serving in the maximum-security prison on South Africa's Robben Island.<sup>13</sup>

### **Icon of Forgiveness and Reconciliation**

Nelson Mandela can be considered a Christian Martyr because he presented himself as an icon of forgiveness and reconciliation, which is also an attribute of a martyr. He did so for the sake of resolving a conflict that existed between two communities. It is said that from his tiny cell on Robben Island, Nelson Mandela championed his political party ANC in such a way that finally a black person was chosen to lead South Africa.<sup>14</sup> His political career and enigmatic leadership were characterized by deep

sympathy, forgiveness, humility and reconciliation – virtues which were reflected in his deeds and speeches wherever he went, before and after his imprisonment on Robben Island.<sup>15</sup> According to Hughes, the majority of the people expected Nelson Mandela to exercise revenge following his release from prison but in the actual fact he forgave even his strongest political opponents and with great humility he tried his best to reconcile different antagonistic parties.<sup>16</sup> It can be noticed that nobody expected Mandela to be able to work closely with Frederick de Klerk, a person who belonged to the very South African regime which had brutally treated Mandela and his comrades in the ANC.

Furthermore, it was Mandela's love for peace and reconciliation which elevated him to international recognition and finally earned him the prestigious Nobel Peace Prize in 1993.<sup>17</sup> In 2012 the resolution of the Nobel Peace Prize Committee to award the Nobel Peace Prize to the European Union made the world remember the historic event when Mandela was given the Nobel Peace Prize for his relentless fighting for peace in South Africa and the world at large.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, in Nelson Mandela we see a good example of justice and peace, some of the basic tenets emphasized in Christianity as well as other world religions.<sup>19</sup> Nelson Mandela made a presentation to the Global Convention on Peace and Nonviolence, New Delhi, India on 31 January 2004 as he said that, "Peace is not just the absence of conflict; peace is the creation of an environment where all can flourish, regardless of race, colour, creed, religion, gender, class, caste, or any other social markers of difference."<sup>20</sup> One can already notice some attributes of a Christian Martyr as he had a vision that is aimed at attaining peace and not resorting to conflict.

### **Assisting and Empowering the Poor**

Nelson Mandela can also be regarded as one of the modern Christian Martyrs because he fought for the rights of the poor. While commenting on politics, Nelson Mandela once said that political power should be the basis for the economic empowerment of people.<sup>21</sup> He further reiterated that we should not allow politics to be relegated to trivialities chosen precisely because they salve the consciousness of the rich and powerful, and conceal the plight of the poor and powerless.<sup>22</sup> One of the notable

things that Nelson Mandela did was that he mobilized his government to fight for the citizens languishing in need and poverty.<sup>23</sup> It is the poor and the exploited landless people that Nelson Mandela would urge that they should get immediate rescue hence it is pathetic to see that in Africa the gap between the rich and the poor widens every day and things like unemployment and inflation are on the increase.<sup>24</sup> These are some of the problems that Nelson Mandela was concerned about as he spoke much about the consequences of discarding the traditional African way of communal living which includes equal sharing and communal commitment.<sup>25</sup> In other words, the current socio-cultural and economic-political problems in Africa are the result of violating what South Africans call ubuntu, defined by Mandela as “that profound African sense that we are human only through the humanity of other human beings.”<sup>26</sup>

### **Pan-African Commitment and International Involvement**

Nelson Mandela can further be called a Christian martyr because he never stopped being involved in matters that were beyond the borders of South Africa as he continued to fight for the rights and more especially the respect for human life. In 1990, at a congress in Washington DC, Mandela called for the respect of human rights as he uttered that “...to deny people their human rights are to challenge their very humanity.”<sup>27</sup> The UN secretary general, Antonio Guterres reported on the Centenary of the birthday of Mandela as he said that Mandela also spoke about poverty on an international level as he said that overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity, it is an act of justice and it is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life, therefore while poverty persists, there is no true freedom.<sup>28</sup> Nelson Mandela International Day in 2018 marked 100 years since the birth of Nelson Mandela and this centenary was an occasion to reflect on his life and legacy, and to follow his call to “make the world a better place.”<sup>29</sup> Hence according to the United Nations exhibitions that were done were to honour Nelson Mandela’s contributions to the main areas of work of the United Nations more especially on peace and security, human rights, and sustainable development and illustrates initiatives taken by the United Nations General Assembly in recognition of the South African leader’s legacy on

conflict resolution, reconciliation, gender equality, the rights of children and other vulnerable groups, and the fight against poverty.<sup>30</sup>

### Conclusion

In conclusion, this essay was meant to identify one character who can be labelled a Christian Martyr and to justify the reasons why one could be labelled that. In doing so, one has presented Nelson Mandela as a modern Christian and various reasons were put forward including being an icon of forgiveness and reconciliation, the love for the poor and the ability to engage the international community for peace's sake. These are the reasons which one opined that they can very well support the cause of the martyrdom of Nelson Mandela, although this will not be understood in the context of red martyrdom but rather in the context of white martyrdom, for Mandela suffered for what he loved most, that is, freedom and peace to humanity.

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<sup>1</sup> Okojie, J. Christian Life as Sacrifice: Martyrdom in the Church, Available at: [https://www.academia.edu/29271230/Christian\\_Life\\_as\\_Sacrifice\\_Martyrdom\\_in\\_the\\_early\\_church](https://www.academia.edu/29271230/Christian_Life_as_Sacrifice_Martyrdom_in_the_early_church) Accessed 27 October 2020., 4.

<sup>2</sup> Okojie, J. Christian Life as Sacrifice: Martyrdom in the Church., 5.

<sup>3</sup> McLarty, J. D, Early Christian Theologies of Martyrdom. (New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons, 2020) 52.

<sup>4</sup> McLarty, J. D, Early Christian Theologies of Martyrdom, 56.

<sup>5</sup> McLarty, J. D, Early Christian Theologies of Martyrdom, 59.

<sup>6</sup> Abogado, J. Persecution and Martyrdom in the Early Church. History, Motives and Theology, Available at: [https://www.academia.edu/15901803/Persecution\\_and\\_Martyrdom\\_in\\_the\\_Early\\_Church\\_History\\_Motives\\_and\\_Theology](https://www.academia.edu/15901803/Persecution_and_Martyrdom_in_the_Early_Church_History_Motives_and_Theology) Accessed 28 October 2020., 5.

<sup>7</sup> Benson, M, Nelson Mandela. The Man and the Movement. (New York: W. Norton & Company, 1986) 67.

<sup>8</sup> Benson, M, Nelson Mandela. The Man and the Movement, 68.

<sup>9</sup> Mandela, N, Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1994), 43.

<sup>10</sup> Benson, M, Nelson Mandela. The Man and the Movement, 70.

<sup>11</sup> Benson, M, Nelson Mandela. The Man and the Movement, 75.

<sup>12</sup> Benson, M, Nelson Mandela. The Man and the Movement, 78.

<sup>13</sup> Harwood, R. Mandela. (New York: New American Library, 1987) 48.

<sup>14</sup> Harwood, R. Mandela, 90.

<sup>15</sup> Hughes, L, Nelson Mandela. Voice of Freedom. (New York: Dillon Press, 1992) 37.

<sup>16</sup> Hughes, L, Nelson Mandela. Voice of Freedom, 39.

<sup>17</sup> Davis, T. O'Loughlin. Celtic Spirituality. (Paulist Press, Classics of Western



## **Ethical Medical Research: An Imperative for African Countries** *Swithern Chinhema*

### **Introduction**

The argument of this article is that developing, strengthening, and sustaining comprehensive and ethically sound medical research through prioritisation, local funding and increased investments is an imperative for African countries. The basis of this argument is that there are pressing health needs in Africa and a significant gap in medical knowledge necessary for the development of the much-needed medical solutions. Thus, the proposed research makes it possible to generate knowledge and other related initiatives necessary for prevention and cure of diseases as well as improving human health. Through the same research, medical innovation, drug discovery and testing, development of medical technologies, new and improved diagnostic and therapeutic interventions can be systematically and ethically done. Informed by the values enshrined in ubuntu, I propose that the new knowledge obtained from research and other discoveries must be translated into health system improvements, innovations, and development. To make this a reality in Africa, there is a need for breaking the cycle of dependence (which brings complacency and hampers innovation) through ownership and adequate sponsorship of the research agenda. This entails a significant shift from foreign funded and owned medical research to African designed, owned, and controlled research which are contextually relevant and informed by local needs.

### **What and Why Medical Research in Africa?**

As suggested by its title, this paper argues for the necessity of developing, strengthening, and sustaining a comprehensive and ethically sound medical research in Africa and importantly by African researchers. Two questions are key for the development of this argument. First, what is the nature of such research and why is it necessary for Africa? Second, how can it be realised given the present situation in Africa? I devote the following paragraphs to answering these two questions in their respective order.

To begin with, this article subscribes to Stefanie Rokosz's definition, which takes research as "a systematic investigation, including research development, testing and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalisable knowledge"<sup>1</sup>. Medical research in particular produces generalisable knowledge through systematic investigation including but not limited to the human body and its functioning; viruses and bacteria; diseases both communicable and non-communicable; developing, improving, testing, and evaluating existing and new medical products, diagnostic and curative interventions among others.

In the midst of known and unknown diseases and other health related problems, medical research is necessary in Africa. Solving a problem requires rightly identifying it in terms of its causes, factors sustaining it and its effects. The same is true of the health problems facing African countries. Research brings empirically obtained evidence of what, why and how health challenges such as diseases affect humanity and points to some possible medical and non-medical responses to them. Given the health state in Africa, medical research is not only essential but urgently required.

### **The Current Situation in Africa.**

The available literature shows that: African countries are constantly facing life-threatening diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, HIV and AIDS, among others. The prevalence of these transmittable diseases coupled with the ever-increasing non-communicable diseases such as cancers, blood pressure, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes among others account for reduced life expectancy, high morbidity, and mortality in many African countries. In addition to these, African countries also face some ravaging pandemics such as Ebola and current COVID-19.

According to a research by Harmonization for Health in Africa, sub-Saharan Africa accounts for 49 percent of global maternal deaths, 50 percent of under-five child deaths and 67 percent of HIV/AIDS cases.<sup>2</sup> Further, the 2019 Global Health Security Index noted that sub-Saharan Africa has the weakest health systems in the world. This is evidenced by, for example, Africa's lower capabilities to prevent the emergence and release of pathogens, and an inefficient capacity for patient treatment and

protection of health care workers.<sup>3</sup> Further, the absence of diagnostic tools and preventive equipment poses a major risk to health care workers in their fight against diseases, especially highly contagious ones. For example, a significant percentage of health workers lost their lives in the fight against Ebola in West Africa.<sup>1</sup>

Despite these alarming statistics, there is a huge knowledge gap in Africa due to lack of proper medical and scientific research. For example, research into the factors that facilitate the increase in non-communicable diseases and the best therapeutic measures that can be taken to respond to them. No meaningful investments (both public and private) are channelled towards the development of medical research. Kasprovicz et al noted with concern that despite the fact that Africa bears 25% of the global disease burden, Africa produces only 2% of the world research output.<sup>4</sup> Simpkin et al also argued that the pharmaceutical industry in Africa (which could possibly compliment government efforts) remains limited in terms of its capacity. As a result, the production and manufacturing of drugs relies much on importation of active ingredients.<sup>5</sup>

### **Effects of Lack of Investment into Medical Research.**

The prevalence of diseases coupled with the lack of proper medical research has resulted in Africa becoming the supplier of raw materials, including human subjects for research and a market for finished products, substandard and counterfeit medical products included. For example, in Ghana, drug inspectors found counterfeit antimalarial tablets in a rural dispensary.<sup>6</sup> A similar incident occurred in Cameroon where falsified chloroquine was found in pharmacies and hospitals with claims that it will cure Covid-19.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, as argued by Morel et al, the deficiency in research results in inability to develop solutions to critical healthcare challenges.<sup>8</sup> This creates a vacuum in Africa which is then fielded with medical researchers from the developed world who flock in to do research

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<sup>1</sup>See, World Health Organisation, A preliminary Report: Health Worker infections in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. 21 May 2015, WHO.

especially human experimentation in the form of clinical trials.<sup>9</sup> It is despicable that African countries are not benefiting much from these research projects but suffer exploitation as many of them do not follow strict ethical and legal standards.

Khalid Mahmood shared the same view as he noted that there has been a significant shift of focus for medical research from the global North to the global South. He explains that medical research, particularly clinical trials have become so difficult to carry in the developed world due to high literacy rates, awareness of human rights, strong ethical and legal systems, strong Institutional Review Boards among other reasons.<sup>10</sup> Impeded by these factors, medical researchers and pharmaceutical companies are flocking to developing countries where there is not only an unexploited market for testing new medical products but also less restrictions to conduct research and medical experiments. The danger is as Ndebele et al rightly observed, the growing medical research in Africa (mainly, those funded by organisations from the developed world) has not been accompanied by improved research oversight.<sup>11</sup> As a result, the African continent is vulnerable to potentially exploitative research.<sup>ii</sup>

### **Has Africa Learnt Any Lessons?**

Primarily, the global pandemics have exposed gaps in African health systems, for example, the huge medical infrastructure deficit in many African countries. This makes it hard not only for medical practice but worse still for research and innovation which is mostly needed especially in times of highly infectious diseases. A clear example of the lack of proper health care facilities is Zimbabwe where, during the peak of the COVID-19 disease, schools and other non-health facilities were unsuitably used as quarantine and isolation centres. The African response to health disasters is also hampered by lack of capacity for isolation, testing and treating patients. More so, there is a serious dependency syndrome on externally sourced medical products and expertise. Maintaining this

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<sup>ii</sup>Focusing on East Africa, Melisa Graboyes gave a detailed account of some of the abusive medical research projects done in and on Africa(ns). See Graboyes, Melisa. "Incorporating Medical Research into the History of Medicine in East Africa." *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 2014, Vol. 47, No. 3 (2014), pp. 379-398.

will see the continued domination and exploitation of African people by external researchers. Therefore, there is an urgent imperative for developing an African model of ethically sound medical research which will see effective medical solutions to the medical problems facing many African countries today.

### **Way Forward: Ubuntu Based Medical Research.**

African governments, people, medical research, and training institutions need to acknowledge the following: First, medical research and ethics is an undeniable priority. The cost of ignoring is unbearable. Second, it is practically possible for medical research to be done in such a way that respects and promotes the dignity of persons as enshrined in ubuntu. The *ubuntu* philosophy gives us the ideals to strive for and the method of attaining them. With its core values of love, solidarity, communality, interdependence, respect, responsibility and above all human dignity,<sup>iii</sup> *ubuntu* can make a positive impact on how we prioritise and do medical research. The *ubuntu* society is interconnected and inclusive such that what affects one member necessarily affects the community. We exist with and because of the other. The pandemics have further shown the connectedness of humanity as they affect all humanity despite differences in colour, creed, or race. As a result, our response to them must further show this interconnectedness without which we cannot adequately underwrite who we want to be and respond to the challenges that face us.

Significantly, *ubuntu* demands that we protect and promote humanity from any form of danger. Since diseases and other health disasters are dangerous to the physical, emotional, and mental wellbeing and integrity of persons, then the spirit of *ubuntu* calls us to adequately respond to them. In this regard, the inclusiveness of *ubuntu* is necessary in doing

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<sup>iii</sup>A detailed explanation of some of these is given by Himonga, Chuma (173ff). "The Right to Health in an African Cultural Context: The Role of «Ubuntu» in the Realization of the Right to Health with Special Reference to South Africa." *Journal of African Law*, Vol. 57, No. 2 (2013), pp. 165-195

medical research. For example, including areas such as mental health, sexual reproductive health, maternal complications, and other neglected areas of medical research into the African research agenda. Inclusivity can also be in terms of people who participate in ethically sound medical research for example, the inclusion of prisoners, women, and children.<sup>iv</sup>

### **How Can this Imperative Be a Reality? Bridging the Gap Between The ‘Ought’ And The ‘Is’**

As already indicated, two key questions are driving this paper. The above paragraphs have answered the first one which asks, what and why medical research in Africa. In what follows I will answer the second question, how can medical research be developed and strengthened in Africa given the present situation? I propose a three-fold strategy towards the development of the African owned, funded, and controlled ethically sound medical research. Without claiming that these strategies are sufficient in themselves, I am convinced that they can be a starting point for further reflection and action. The first, relates to funding and financing of medical research where I propose increased local investments. Second is about education and training of researchers who are ethically motivated and goal oriented. The third is formulating and strengthening ethical and legal systems for adequate protection of the African population. The proposed strategies shall be understood in consideration of actual and potential challenges to be faced in implementing them.

#### **First Strategy: Robust Funding of Medical Research in Africa.**

Lack of funding has been identified as one of the major setbacks to the development of medical research in Africa. As a result, researchers in Africa depend on conditional external funding which in most cases is directed towards the achievement of the agendas of the funders and not the local needs. Realising this problem, Morel et al argued that there is need for funders to support individual approaches that contribute to expansion of a local research workforce with the capacity to develop

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<sup>iv</sup>Most of these are vulnerable to abuse especially in human experimentation, hence the emphasis on the ethical soundness of medical research projects.

contextually relevant solutions and advance national health priorities.<sup>12</sup> I agree with Morel et al on the need for capacitating local research and developing context relevant solutions. However, their solution seems to rely much on external funders which in my view is problematic. African countries need to move away from dependence on foreign funded research and focus on internal investments. There is a need for breaking the cycle of dependence on external funders.

My proposal is this: Africa needs to take research as a profitable investment and move towards self-funded and sustainable research projects. Medical research must be viable and attractive, where researchers show to potential local investors and sponsors that research has an effect on real-world problems and is worthy of committing money to. Every investment must generate profitable returns. Investment in medical research is not an exception, it generates economic returns, reduced health care costs, increased productivity, to mention a few. For example, it is economically and humanly expensive to import medicine and medical expertise than to develop them locally. Governments can take initiatives of starting small but sustainable research projects which will generate more capital for expansion and growth. For example, in 2007, the African Union countries committed to invest at least 1% of their GDPs in research and development.<sup>13</sup> This was a commendable initiative, yet it remained an unattained dream with countries such as Cape Verde and Lesotho investing less than 0.1%.<sup>14</sup> There is, therefore, an urgent need to revive this and other similar efforts. Further, African governments need to engage the private sector. For example, engaging the pharmaceutical companies to fund and sponsor research projects. Attracting private investment demands reviewing of public policies, and creation of safe political and economic environments for business in Africa.

### **Second Strategy: Education and Training.**

One of the major impediments to the development of medical research in Africa is lack of the required expertise resulting in failure to translate obtained knowledge into tangible and practical solutions. How can this gap be bridged? It must be underlined that medical research is not an end in itself, it is a means for attaining results. Therefore, knowledge

obtained from research must be put into proper use for the development of preventive, protective, diagnostic and curatives techniques necessary for effective preparation and response to health challenges facing Africa today. What we know must be reflected in what we do. For this to happen, Africa needs to put in place policies and strategies for the effective utilisation of the available natural and human resources. This can be done through selection, training, retention, and motivating goal-oriented African based medical researchers.

In line with the above, African countries need to prioritise investments into skills development and motivation to do research. For research to take place, there is a need for competent researchers who are financed enough to do their job. In this regard, development of national and regional research personnel is key. By this I mean, training and capacitation of researchers, medical practitioners, (medical) technology developers who are willing to work in and for Africa. For this to be achieved, relevant and goal-oriented curriculums which stimulate inquiry and promote initiatives in students are to be adopted. Africa needs both knowledge proficiency and practical innovative abilities.

Further, Africa can take advantage of varieties of skills in its people through regional networking. My view is that cooperation and collaboration across the region is necessary if Africa is to develop and strengthen productive and sustainable medical research. There is a need for regional collaboration between researchers, for example in terms of authorship and publications of research findings. Apart from this there is also need for what Simpkin et al call, cross-sector collaboration where medical researchers join forces with researchers and experts from other fields of study such as sociology, philosophy, social work to mention a few. This can foster knowledge generation, implementation, transfer, and alternative funding channels.

It is key for prospective researchers to establish a good relationship with the ordinary people. Based on the oneness of *ubuntu*, it is possible to reduce the gap between researchers and participants. In dealing with engineering in Africa, Mavhunga rightly observed, one major obstacle to its success is that the engineers design *for*, not *with* the society. The point that he makes is that engineering reduces the society to a spectator when

it should be a comrade-in-arms in research and problem solving.<sup>15</sup> I think the same argument applies to medical research and ethics where researchers do research for and not with the society. This is reflected in the way in which researchers deal with their participants who are generally taken as objects to experiment on, without giving them room to contribute their skills and knowledge to the success and progress of research projects. This has to change, as there must be more professional engagement and cooperation between researchers and participants and inputs from both must be valued. In such a way, as Mavhunga argued, solutions will emerge organically from and with the people affected with the problem.<sup>16</sup>

### **Third Strategy: Strong Ethical and Legal Frameworks.**

The social, emotional, physical protection of the people is of undeniable value in medical research hence the vital role of ethics. Africa needs not only progressive research but ethically sound one. I acknowledge that in medical research especially research on human subjects, there is a possibility of abuse of unsuspecting participants by researchers. Richardson gave two common abuses. First, intentional, and deliberate misconduct by some researchers who do experimentation on people without their knowledge. Second, purposeful failure to disclose to the subjects some obvious and known risks of participating in an experiment. Richardson further explains that though these are criminal acts they usually go unpunished due to the exalted status of medical researchers and the value attached to their work.<sup>17</sup> The danger of such acts is that they directly violate the dignity of persons and eliminate their right to make informed choices.

I agree with Richardson that offenders in medical research often escape the sanctions of the law. However, this cannot go unnoticed for the dignity of people is irreplaceable and cannot be overridden by the social benefits of medical research. After all, research is meant to promote health and wellbeing of people such that oppressive medical research is self-defeating. In my view, abusing people is detrimental to the very essence of medical research. *Ubuntu* can make a difference in this regard since there is no gap between, first the researchers and the participants, and second between moral reasoning and moral action. It is an ethic embedded in

practice. Therefore, basing on *ubuntu* and without violating the freedom of scientific inquiry, there is need to develop and enforce strong ethical and legal guidelines for adequate protection of research subjects from potential abusers.

One way of ensuring compliance with the ethical guidelines is strict registration, licencing and accreditation of medical researchers and their respective research projects.<sup>v</sup> This helps to keep a record of who is conducting what type of research during a particular period of time. A strong guideline enforceable by law must be in place differentiating permissible from non-permissible medical research and stipulating the punishment that a researcher is liable to in the event of culpable misconduct. For example, the law can sanction that grave misconduct attracts the cancellation of a research licence. For this to work there is a need for a regional law which makes it impossible for a researcher banned in one country to operate in any other African country.

### **The Projected Outcome**

If the proposed approach is implemented, it will yield commendable results. First, it will see the development of strong and sustainable health systems, with a healthier people. This is achieved through the creation of a vast pool of knowledge, practical skills and technical innovation for effective preparation, prevention, and response to health challenges. If African countries invest in medical research, Africa will be better prepared to tackle national, regional, and global disasters and pandemics such as the COVID-19 and reduce their human cost. Africa can also make considerable progress in reducing preventable diseases especially the major causes of mortality such as HIV and AIDS.

Second, the development of medical research will ensure informed health policies based on justifiably obtained evidence. Research gives suitable knowledge on how to plan, prepare and respond to existing and possible challenges to human health. As a result, governments can budget and make policies that are relevant and effective based on the knowledge

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<sup>v</sup>Institutional Review Boards must be formed and armed with the legal and financial power to do their work.

and discoveries in medicine. In addition, research will also see the development of the capacity for continuous monitoring and progress assessment of health systems. This will positively ensure adequate protection of the African population. Third, investment in skills training and capacitation will see the creation of problem solvers and employers other than employment seekers hence, reducing the number of job seekers in Africa.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, this article has argued for the practical necessity and possibility of investing and developing medical research in Africa. African countries need to shift from dependence on foreign research through funding, educating, and empowering the African based medical researchers. The article has noted that the challenges of funding, failure to implement policies, infrastructure deficiency, lack of relevant skills are the major challenges that obstruct progress of medical research in Africa. These challenges, it has been argued, can be overcome resulting in noteworthy progress of ethically sound medical research. Based on the values of *ubuntu*, medical research can make a meaningful contribution to the health and well-being of the African people. It is with clarity that medical research is an imperative for the African continent, thus, Africa must wake up and make medical research a priority.

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<sup>1</sup> Rokosz, Stefanie. "Assisted Reproductive Technologies." *Food and Drug Law Journal*, 68:2 (2013) 177-188.

<sup>2</sup> Harmonization for Health in Africa. *Investing in Health for Africa: The Case for Strengthening Systems for Better Health Outcomes*. (HHA, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Devermont, Judd and Marielle, Harris. *A Wake-up Call What Covid-19 Reveals about Elderly and NCD Care in Sub-Saharan Africa*. (Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 2020), 3.

<sup>4</sup> Kasprovicz, Victoria. O. *African-led Health Research and Capacity Building-Is it working?* (BMC Public Health, 2020), 6.

<sup>5</sup> Simpkin Victoria., et al. *Investing in Health R&D: Where we Are, What Limits Us, and How to Make Progress in Africa*. (BMJ Glob Health, 2019), 15.

<sup>6</sup> World Health Organisation (WHO). "WHO Global Surveillance and Monitoring System for Substandard and Falsified Medical Products." (WHO 2017), 23.

<sup>7</sup> African Union-3S Team. *An African-focused Report on Safety data of Covid-19 related products*. (AUDA-NEPAD, June 2020).

<sup>8</sup> Morel, Terra., et al. "Strengthening Health Research Capacity in Sub-Saharan Africa: Mapping the 2012– 2017 Landscape of Externally Funded

- International Postgraduate Training at Institutions in the Region” (BMC, Globalisation and Health, 2018), 2.
- <sup>9</sup> Sharma, Ajay K., et al. “Clinical Trials in India: A Scientific Approach for New Drug Development.” *Current Research in Pharmaceutical Sciences* 1 (2013) 1-6.
- <sup>10</sup> Mahmood, Khalid. “Forewarned is forearmed! Unethical drug trials in the developing countries.” *J Dow Uni Health Science* 6:3 (2012) 79-81.
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- <sup>12</sup> “Strengthening Health Research Capacity in Sub-Saharan Africa: Mapping the 2012– 2017 Landscape of Externally Funded International Postgraduate Training at Institutions in the Region”, 2.
- <sup>13</sup> African Union-3S Team. An African-focused Report on Safety data of Covid-19 related products. (AUDA-NEPAD, June 2020).
- <sup>14</sup> Investing in Health R&D: Where we Are, What Limits Us, and How to Make Progress in Africa, 2.
- <sup>15</sup> Mavhunga, Clapperton Chakanetsa. “Modelling an African Research University.” *Journal of Higher Education in Africa* 16 (2018) 25-50.
- <sup>16</sup> “Modelling an African Research University.” *Journal of Higher Education in Africa* 16 (2018) 25-50.
- <sup>17</sup> Richardson, Song. L. “When Experimentation is Criminal.” *The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 99 (2009) 89-134.

## **Information and Communication Technology (ICT): An Exploration of Online Child Abuse During Covid-19 Pandemic**

*Theresa P. Sanyatwe*

### *Abstract:*

*Covid-19 has prompted widespread school closures and physical distancing measures and made online platforms and communities essential to maintaining a sense of normalcy.<sup>1</sup> Children are turning to digital solutions more than ever for learning purposes, socialisation and play.<sup>2</sup> While online platforms provide huge opportunities for children to learn different things and to entertain themselves, these same platforms increase children's exposure to online abuses.<sup>3</sup> Digital media contain a high potential for addiction. Children and youth are more at risk compared to adults because it is more difficult for them to differentiate between the real and virtual worlds. When a smartphone vibrates [rings] one has to react as quickly as possible, no matter where one is.<sup>4</sup> For many it is difficult to endure not looking at their cell phone for the length of 10 minutes. One reason for such addiction is the desire of children and youth for recognition. Such recognition is noticeable through the number of "followers" and "likes" one gets which translates into the measure of one's popularity. To win the competition, they spend a lot of time in the search for something new.<sup>5</sup> Often unusual, such as sharing naked images which fall in the hands of some hackers/ offenders who then misuse them and exploit the young people.*

According to the United Nations Children's Fund, the internet and associated technologies have made images of children easier to create and distribute, and provide significantly new opportunities for abusers to access and make contact with children and young people online (UNICEF 2017). Therefore, it would be a big mistake to think and believe that child abuse, in which Information and Communication Technology (ICT) plays a role, is only an issue for the economically developed countries, societies or families (UNICEF 2017). It would be also a blunder to assume that all children and young people are equally adept or at home

in an online environment, or equally knowledgeable about the internet. It has been established that the level of use of the internet, the behaviours and vulnerabilities of young people online differ according to their age (UNICEF, 2017). The advent of Covid-19 pandemic has forced almost all the education systems to administer their learning material on the internet and online learning have become a new revolution in the teaching and learning field. This has also increased the chances of children to be abused online.

**Key terms:** Online Child abuse, Cyberbullying, Cyber-grooming, Sexual Exploitation, sexting and sextortion, Fake Profile and Fake Notices, Live-streaming.

### **Introduction**

Movement restrictions and closure of schools suggest that children spend more time online, thus increase their exposure to online bullying, pornography, sexual violence and exploitation.<sup>6</sup> Perpetrators are taking advantage of children spending more unsupervised time online and are seeking to groom and exploit children through sexual coercion and sextortion (SOS Children's Villages International et al. 2020). While the internet has been a positive catalyst for innovation, education, and economic growth, it has also enabled those who would harm children by making it easier for them to produce access and share child sexual abuse materials.<sup>7</sup> Bogdan-Martin, the Director of Telecommunication Development Bureau (2020) reported that, Covid-19 global pandemic saw a surge in the number of children joining the online world for the first time [...] The constraints imposed by the virus [Covid-19] not only meant that many younger children began interacting online much earlier than their parents might have planned, but the need to juggle work commitments left many parents unable to supervise their children, leaving young people at risk of accessing inappropriate content or being targeted by criminals in the production of child sexual abuse material (ITU, 2020). This article will explore some of the following online abuses which children are likely or experiencing during the Covid-19 pandemic. These include: grooming of children for sexual purposes, cyber bullying, the danger of Live-streaming platforms; contact with criminal players: cyber

grooming, fake profile and fake notices; sextortion: coercing and blackmailing children for sexual purposes. This article will also explain how some of these crimes are committed online in order to alert parents, caregivers, children and readers of this article about the dangers of online child abuses and the mechanisms which can be adopted in order to curb these crimes.

### **Statement of the problem**

As the Covid-19 pandemic has spread across the globe, we have seen an increase in violation of children on different internet platforms and social media which should make us worry about the future of our children. Children are encountering different types of online abuses such as Cyberbullying, grooming, sexting, sexual abuse, and sexual exploitation, among other abuses. Most children are not even aware that these are forms of abuses which are worth reporting. Worse, some parents seem not to be even interested in what their children do online or the sites that they explore, which makes it difficult for them to notice the abuses which they might be encountering. This study will then explain some of the online abuses which children might be experiencing so that they can be aware of them and be able to report these abuses. Again, on parents and guidance or any other caregiver to be conscious of these online abuses so that they can be able to monitor the activities of their children online or social media platforms so that together we can be able to curb these forms of abuses and safeguarding our children so that they can live their lives to the fullest. Failing to prevent and effectively respond to violations against children can have life-long impacts on children's health and well-being, educational attainment and development (SOS Children's Villages International, 2020).

### **Purpose of the study**

- To explore different types of online child abuses experienced by children during Covid-19 pandemic.
- To explore some international mechanisms set to curb online child abuse and how they can be adopted and adapted in our country by relevant stakeholders in order to protect children from online predators.

- To expose some of online behaviours that can expose children to criminals.

### **Methodology**

This is a qualitative study based on desk research and the analysis of available literature on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and child online abuse especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. Desk research is a term that is used loosely and it generally refers to the collection of secondary data or that which has already been collected.<sup>8</sup> Desk research helps the researcher to understand the research problem, generate hypotheses and determine the most effective methodology and sample for future research, and it also gives a basis for evaluation and allows for comparison over time.<sup>9</sup>

### **Implications for safeguarding children from online abuses during the Covid-19 pandemic**

Since the beginning of Covid-19 in Zimbabwe many children's learning experiences have been reshaped by the introduction of distance or online learning including-where available-technology and virtual platforms as a substitute for the classroom and schoolyard.<sup>10</sup> While children aged 10 years and above may already be familiar with social media and other online platforms, the pandemic has introduced younger children such as 5-year-olds and others to social networking tools that may not be designed for them and which they may have limited preparation.<sup>11</sup> This has heightened the risk of being abused online.

### **Online sexual exploitation**

The Global Threat Assessment done by WePROTECT GLOBAL Alliance and ground-breaking investigative reporting by New York Times shows that spending more time online may increase the likelihood that children come into contact with online predators.<sup>12</sup>

### **The danger of Live-streaming platforms**

According to Europol's 5 October 2020 Cybercrime Report, the main threats related to online child abuse exploitation have remained stable in

recent years, however, detection of online child sexual abuse material saw a sharp spike at the peak of the Covid-19 crisis. They also discovered that Live-stream of child abuse continues to increase, becoming even more popular than usual during the Covid-19 crisis when travel restriction prevented offenders from physically abusing children.<sup>13</sup> In some cases, video chat applications in payment systems are used which becomes one of the key challenges for law enforcement as this material is recorded.<sup>14</sup> Karakaya notes that, on YouTube or Musically, there is the possibility to review the video before it is made public to the internet community.<sup>15</sup> On most Live-streaming platforms, however, this is not possible. This leads to the posting of many unfiltered, unedited videos from classrooms, playgrounds, children's bedrooms or any other place. These images can be viewed by all and can no longer be deleted. Parents, Caregivers and children themselves should be aware of these realities in order to avoid situations which can endanger their privacy and lives in general. Children and youth should be aware that one cannot influence what happens with photos posted on the internet. Once on the internet, always on the internet! Even when a picture has been deleted, one does not know how many people downloaded it previously during the time it was available.<sup>16</sup> Children and youth should always ask themselves two questions when they think about posting photos or messages on the internet: i) Would I post the message or picture on an advertising billboard, where everyone could read it and see it? ii) Could I regret this action? One should know that even harmless pictures can be edited with graphics editing programs so that one can find oneself portrayed as naked or in other compromised situations on the internet. The Snapchat process that allows one to determine the time period after which a photo should no longer be visible, or when it should be deleted, offers no absolute certainty that this will be done. During the time when it is publicly seen, a screenshot can be taken of the image.<sup>17</sup>

**Once, on the internet, always on the internet!**

It is problematic that many photos can be uploaded onto websites which are hosted in countries outside of Africa. Neither Zimbabwean nor African laws apply in this case, which has a critical impact on data

protection. In this case children and youths have to be educated about the dangers of posting pictures on the internet because at the end of the day they do not have control over them and the servers of those pictures and videos sit in another continent and country. This increases the risks of being blackmailed or sexually exploited on the internet.

### **Children's online experience and exposure**

Covid-19 stay-at-home restrictions have made many children and youths to retreat on online entertainment platforms which have increased the risks of being exploited by online criminals. Many children take the internet as a platform for entertainment, rather than for educational purposes, this is portrayed in the research which was done in Zimbabwe by National Association of Social workers (2019). They found out that some explanations of children's internet use suggest that children are not entirely unaware of the many risks connected with internet use and they are not always ill equipped to manage cyber risks.<sup>18</sup> According to Dzoro, Chereni and Gwenzi, the study participants were five females and five males aged between 14 and 17 years old.<sup>19</sup> They each used sophisticated handheld devices including smartphones and tablets. They also found out that the social media platforms which children used were not different from those that adults ordinarily use: WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, Gmail and Facebook.<sup>20</sup> When asked to describe her online presence, Jennifer, a 17-year-old teenager girl retorted with a hint of pride: 'I have access to Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp almost all the time and I want to open an Instagram account.'<sup>21</sup> When online, Jennifer engages more in entertainment than educational tasks: 'I do less of school stuff...I download music videos.' Similarly, Mukudzei, a 16 years old male student, spends much of his time online to 'download music and videos and play games.'<sup>22</sup> Interestingly, the internet is a source of entertainment for many children, rather than for educational purposes. Many children are not aware that they can be in contact with criminal players when they explore online games.

Mukudzei, a 16-year-old boy when asked to describe some of the things he usually does online said: 'I download music videos and games. I have downloaded one porn video long back... I also watch them'.<sup>23</sup>

Rukudzo confessed that, ‘I download music videos, porn and games’ and added, ‘I am in a WhatsApp porn group.’<sup>24</sup> Children not only access sexually explicit content such as videos and pictures. They also share these within social media networks that exclude adults. Tonderai, a 17-year-old boy similarly revealed that, apart from online games, he accessed sexually inappropriate content.<sup>25</sup> Not unlike Mukudzei and Rukudzo, he belongs to a WhatsApp group within which members share age-restricted content. He disclosed that, ‘I download porn, games and music on the internet’<sup>26</sup> I am [a member of] two WhatsApp porn groups.’ (National Association of Social workers-Zimbabwe, 2019). It is alarming that children casually watch pornographic images and videos although such material is not only age-inappropriate but also unlawful in Zimbabwe.<sup>27</sup>

The three Statutes in Zimbabwe that presently exist to curb unwanted behaviour in the Cyberspace are:

- The Postal and Telecommunications Act [Chapter 12:05].
- The Censorship and Entertainments controls Act [Chapter 10:04].
- The Criminal law (Codification and Reform) Act [Chapter 9:23].

These statutes were enacted before the advent of the technological boom that saw the introduction of social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, among other platforms.<sup>28</sup> Considering the technology advancements in our country and communities there is a need to review these statutory laws in order to align them to the present technological advancements in the country and the world. Besides the above Statutes there is also a Cyber Security and Data Protection Bill, 2019 which was produced in order to respond to the current needs for cyber security and protection for children and all people in the country. As such:

- Clause 164 B Cyber bullying and harassment deals with any data message which is sent to coerce, harass or intimidate.
- Clauses 165 and 165A deals with pornography involving a child or exposing pornography to children.

### **Cyber-Grooming: Contact with Criminal Players**

In the game one can explore the world of a movie star, become famous, shoot films, or try out to be a singer or a model. The game is a simulation

and therefore created so that one can interact with other children, who are also pretending to be other characters, via chat. However, criminals can also pretend to be such characters.<sup>29</sup> When criminals approach children on the internet, it is called cyber-grooming. The procedure is: first, the offenders build trust with the underage victims and then they sexually molest them. They know exactly where children can be found on the internet, especially in certain computer game apps or in social networks. In the games, they offer the children whatever they need to continue to play, similar to the pay-to-play option in the games. These gifts are given only under conditions connected to the desire for more material: when the children need more material, they must send photos of themselves in their underwear or naked. The offenders usually pretend to be the same age. In addition, it is also well-known that terror organisations participate in computer shooting games to recruit children and youths by promising to teach them how to use real weapons.<sup>30</sup> According to Laylee Moshiri, “this is evidence that it is more important than ever to teach children how to be informed digital citizens. Parents can do this by fostering open communication with children about how technology can and should be used and by setting clear expectations and boundaries”.<sup>31</sup> It is essential to keep communicating with children in open and honest ways and let them know that they can always approach parents or caregivers if something online makes them uncomfortable or it is potentially dangerous (Moshiri).

### **Fake Profile and Fake Notices**

It is important to make children and youth sensitive to the fact that they should have a healthy distrust of things happening on the internet. They need to know that their chat partners may not necessarily be the persons they say they are. Most probably, many of the profiles that can be found on the internet do not even exist. If one has a bad feeling in the stomach during a chat, then one should know that one should stop the communication immediately. It is also important that children should be able to confide to an adult at any time, especially a parent or a caregiver. The first reaction by the person of their choice is important.<sup>32</sup> One needs to take the shame away from the child and communicate that he or she has done well by reporting the case.

### **Online child sexual exploitation and abuse (Sexting and Sextortion)**

Online child sexual abuse and online sexual exploitation involve the use of information and communication technology as a means to sexually abuse and/or sexually exploit children.<sup>33</sup> Child sexual exploitation involves child sexual abuse and/or other sexualised acts using children that involve an exchange of some kind of, for example, food, affection, drugs and shelter (UNODC, 2015). According to ECPAT International (2017), sexting is producing and/or utilising sexual images and/or videos depicting a child, for the purposes of sexual, financial or other personal gains. Offenders can be adults or peers of the victims-and sometimes the child sexual abuse material is self-produced through manipulation of the victim.<sup>34</sup>

Here is a real story which depicts online child sexual exploitation which happened in one of the High Schools in Zimbabwe. One of the school girls was added in a WhatsApp group by her friends from the same school to play a game of 'dare'. According to Plan International blog, "everyone was asked to post a random number and given a corresponding challenge which they had to complete. Chipso was asked to upload half-naked photos to the group. She felt obliged to comply because not participating in the game meant that her dare turn would not be complete and that also meant losing her friends".<sup>35</sup> Soon after uploading the pictures, her mother discovered the photos on her phone and banned her from using it again.<sup>36</sup> For a few weeks everything seemed alright, but one day at school things began to take another form. Some of her classmates were laughing at her whenever they looked at her. Some of them stopped talking to her and tried to avoid her whenever she wanted to join their group. She felt deserted and ashamed. One of them called her a name, and it dawned on her that the photos had been circulating on social online. During break time, she discovered that one of her classmates had printed her photos and was selling 50 cents to other children.<sup>37</sup> They were buying for fun to show their friends who were somewhere else. The pictures began circulating on social media, going beyond her school. She saw mocking memes of herself, other children calling her all kinds of names.<sup>38</sup> She was emotionally and psychologically disturbed from

betrayal of her friends. Guilt, shame and sadness grabbed her. As she looked at her WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter messages she saw grown men posting sexual comments about her.<sup>39</sup> Some were making appointments to meet her face-to-face promising to give her whatever she wanted and to take her to her favourite places. When Chipu got home she broke down in tears and her mother saw her crying. She asked her why she was crying but she could not reveal it to her immediately. After some hours of insisting is when Chipu unveiled to her mother all what had happened. Her mother was shocked and approached the school authorities where her child was learning. She reported the case to the school head who then handled the case in collaboration with the police. Chipu was taken to the psychologists who journeyed with her.<sup>40</sup>

This story meant to conscientize parents, caregivers and children on how one can be exploited online through what looks like a simple behaviour or action. Chipu willingly uploaded her half-naked pictures on WhatsApp group without reflecting on the consequences of doing that.

“International Conventions, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989, and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography of 2000, enumerate children’s rights and clarify the obligation of the states to protect children from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.”<sup>41</sup>

### **How children, parents and caregivers should respond to online dangers**

- The first recommendation is always to listen to your gut. This is our best form of firewall. If one has the feeling one is being blackmailed or deceived, the contact should be immediately broken off.<sup>42</sup>

- If parents or caregivers suspect child online violence or when a child reports about any online misconduct or abuse, they should call Childline (Zimbabwe) and report the case on 116 or message on WhatsApp on +263 716 116 116 or +263 732 116 116.

- In the case of online child abuse the case can also be reported to the Victim Friendly Unit or any police station close by.

- There are also some organisations which help children such as

Justice for Children Trust. These Lawyers offer free services to children who have been abused in any form of abuse: +263 242 778474 or +263 242 741782.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The following recommendations can help parents and caregivers to safeguard children from online predators and what to do when a child reports an online abuse to them. In addition, the recommendations also inform parents and caregivers on the right procedures to take when they suspect or a child reports to them about online abuse.

- Keeping children informed and engaged and empowering them with the skills to use the internet safely is a critical line of defence (UNICEF, 2020).

- Child-serving agencies in the government of Zimbabwe and civil society should design and implement educational programmes to improve parents' and caregivers' knowledge about safe online presence and safe online presence for children.<sup>43</sup> Topics may include internet risks for children, children's risk-taking and risk-making as well netiquette and cyber ethics. Such educational interventions should aspire to make parental and adult involvement in children's internet use a part of non-authoritarian parenting approaches that recognises children as internet users in their own right (National Association of Social workers, 2019).

- Parents, guardians, and educators spend most of the time with children, hence, they should be educated in digital literacy to understand the online environment and be able to protect children and teach them how to protect themselves (ITU, 2020).

- Parental control should be set on family internet and gadgets used by children in order to safeguard minors from online perpetrators.

- Children should be informed about different types of online abuses and where to report abuses.

- Government and legislature should come up with effective mechanisms to ensure that network providers in Zimbabwe develop the right tools that parents and caregivers use to safeguard children from online predators, and for children to protect themselves from online criminals.

- Parents and Caregivers should be well informed about the

Statutory Laws in our country (Zimbabwe) which safeguard children from online abuses, for instance:<sup>44</sup>

- i) The Postal and Telecommunication Act [Chapter 12:05].
- ii) The Censorship and Entertainment Controls Acts [Chapter 10:04].
- iii) The Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) [Chapter 9:23].
- iv) Cyber Security and data Protection Bill, 2019 [Clauses 164B, 165 & 165A].

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## **An Evaluation of Sex Education in School Curriculum on Moral Grounds**

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### **Introduction**

Education is an integral aspect of human life. It is vital that school curriculums include the subject of sex education. On moral grounds, sex education in school curriculum is plausible as it helps the school children to understand all the aspects of human sexuality and their implications. In itself sex education is broad and covers a whole range of topics which have to do with sexuality. Topics such as teenage pregnancy, abortion, masturbation, sexual intercourse, sexual exploitation and abuse, sexually transmitted infections and diseases (STI/D) marriage, relationships, mensuration, contraceptives and many others, which are subjects to sex education, clearly indicates the moral importance of sex education in school curriculum. However, on the other hand, including sex education in school curriculum means exciting in the students the desire to experiment on sexual intercourse among other things. Having said this, the article shall in detail, evaluate on moral grounds sex education in school curriculum.

### **What is morality**

In order to understand better the moral grounds for evaluating sex education in school curriculum, it is of a paramount idea to start by a simple definition of morality. According to Lohkamp:

What is “moral” has to do with goodness or badness that I am now aware of and freely decide upon. Morality, therefore, is a condition or quality of my actions: there are good or bad because of what they are as my choices.... Morality is a way I respond to God and to other people, in view of all I know about God’s love.<sup>1</sup>

Following this line of thought, sex education in school curriculum shall be evaluated on the grounds of how it can be good or bad to the students in so far as they relate to God and to one another.

### **Sex education**

After defining morality, it is important to get to know what is sex education. What is it all about? What does it involve? In general terms, sex education in school curriculum is all about teaching the school children about all that has to do with sex bearing in mind their level of understanding and the needs proper to their age. According to WHO Regional Office for Europe and BZgA:

Sexuality education means learning about the cognitive, emotional, social, interactive and physical aspects of sexuality. Sexuality education starts early in childhood and progresses through adolescence and adulthood. For children and young people, it aims at supporting and protecting sexual development. It gradually equips and empowers children and young people with information, skills and positive values to understand and enjoy their sexuality, have safe and fulfilling relationships and take responsibility for their own and other people's sexual health and well-being.<sup>2</sup>

In line with this definition, one can clearly grasp the details involved in sex education in school curriculum. On moral grounds it is crucial that, children be taught about sex in schools since throughout earthly life, a human being lives his or her sexuality.

### **Moral evaluation of sex education in school curriculum: the positive side**

In considering the moral grounds for evaluation of sex education in school curriculum there are positives elements that can be drawn. These positive elements favour, and are inclined towards good morals. According to UK Essays, "Most definitely, sex education should be implemented in schools because sex education can reduce teen pregnancy, it's better for the teenagers to get information about sex and sexual protection methods from right sources (schools) rather than from the media and sex education in schools can also protect children and teenagers". Sex education at this point takes note of the fact that students are to be helped to clearly understand sex and sexuality with all the implications that comes with it. Emphasis is placed on why different sex related actions can be evaluated as morally wrong so as to teach the right things to the students from the

word go.

### **Teenage and unwanted pregnancies**

The issues of teenage and unwanted pregnancies are found everywhere in the world. In most cases the lack of sufficient knowledge and understanding of sexual implications is always central to these pregnancies. According to Allen, “sexual practice without sexual knowledge is more likely to lead to negative consequences such as ‘unplanned pregnancy’ or the contraction of a sexually transmissible infection”.<sup>4</sup> In the same light, Beaumont has it that:

Experts have argued in numerous studies and reports that a flawed or insufficient sexuality education leads to an increase of teenage pregnancy rate and a higher amount of people suffering from AIDS and STIs. Sexuality education of young people must therefore be regarded as an appropriate means to prevent these negative effects.<sup>5</sup>

In this line of thought, one would appreciate sex education in school curriculum as a way of curbing sexual immorality resulting in teen and unintended pregnancies. In moral terms, premarital sex is regarded as a bad thing to do and out of God’s plan. Zimmerman notes that, “Using models and metaphors from the animal world, sex education sought to communicate “the facts of life” while simultaneously discouraging human sexual activity outside of marriage”.<sup>6</sup> Having sex education in school curriculum can raise a moral awareness among children on the need for self-control and moral uprightness and therefore, has a higher chance of decreasing the problems associated with these kinds of pregnancies noted here.

### **Sexual abuse and exploitation.**

At any stage of life, it is important to bring to the children’s understanding according to their age, the realities of sexual exploitation and abuse. UK Essays has it that, “Sex education has only recently become important in these past few years but child sexual abuse has existed throughout human history. Thus, implementing sex education into schools can decrease the rate of child sexual abuses and thus providing a way out for children and teenagers”.<sup>7</sup> From a moral perspective sexual exploitation

and abuse go against the moral norms and have to be always prevented. Incorporating sex education helps children to know and understand the evils involved especially when such exploitations and abuses happen, so that they know how to report about such things. According to UNESCO, “Few young people receive adequate preparation for their sexual lives. This leaves them potentially vulnerable to coercion, abuse and exploitation....”<sup>8</sup> From this perspective, in morally evaluating sex education in school curriculum, one can see clearly that, it is very crucial and critical as far as addressing the issues of sexual exploitation and abuse are concerned.

### **Pornography and masturbation.**

In the realm of morality, pornography and masturbation are in themselves intrinsically evil. According to Zimmerman, “In particular, young people are flooded with a constant deluge of sexual imagery and messages from fashion, film, and other forms of popular entertainment”<sup>9</sup> It is therefore important for schools to include in their curricula the teaching of sex education. The end to which sex is designed by God is mainly procreation in marriage, outside this sphere all sexual activities are to be understood as evil. The Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith notes that:

... both the Magisterium of the Church - in the course of a constant tradition - and the moral sense of the faithful have declared without hesitation that masturbation is an intrinsically and seriously disordered act. The main reason is that, whatever the motive for acting this way, the deliberate use of the sexual faculty outside normal conjugal relations essentially contradicts the finality of the faculty.<sup>10</sup>

In light of this teaching therefore, sex education in school curriculum has the moral grounds of helping the students to grasp the insinuations of things such as masturbation and pornography before they venture into them and be addictive, as in most cases it tends to become.

### **Prostitution and sexually transmitted diseases**

The Church, following the Sacred Scriptures and Tradition strongly advocates for no sexual intercourse outside marriage. According to the

Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, “the use of the sexual function has its true meaning and moral rectitude only in true marriage”.<sup>11</sup> Things such as prostitution are therefore condemned, since, they are not in line with moral principles advocated for by the Church and even society at large. Sex education in school curriculum should help the children to understand the immorality involved in prostitution. More often than not, the immorality of prostitution is always accompanied by sexually transmitted diseases. It is therefore plausible moral grounds, for schools to include in their curriculums the subject of sex education for as to caution students about the dangers of engaging in things such as prostitution.

### **The negative side**

Sex education in school syllabus cannot be completely evaluated on ethical grounds without looking into the negative side of it. Its history suggests that when it was first introduced in various countries and places, it was met with resistance from different angles. Zimmerman has it that, “Too much sexual information harmed innocent children, critics said, all in the guise of protecting them. “We cannot bear those haughty wise children who look upon their pregnant mother with a knowing glance,” one spokesman wrote”.<sup>12</sup> From this understanding, it is clear that if the content taught in sex instructions is not extremely selected to fit the age group to which it will be transmitted, it might have wrong moral consequences

### **Learning and doing**

The problem that often comes with the sex education in school curriculum is that of students who want to experiment on what they would have acquired at school. In other words, sex education then promotes sexual immorality among students. A good example is teaching about the use of artificial birth control methods or contraceptives. Even more, teaching the students about the use of women infertile periods as well as pre-ejaculation removal of penis during sexual act, may all have consequences on sex experimentation which is entirely judged to be morally wrong. Zimmerman noted that, “...sex education was equally fraudulent ...especially in its claim that knowledge would deter immoral practices;

instead, it would more likely promote them. Sex education “is one of the most dangerous causes of that evil which it hopes to destroy”<sup>13</sup>. From this point of view, using moral grounds for evaluation, one can clearly see the negative influences of sex education in school curriculum.

## Conclusion

From the above evaluation, it can be deduced that, sex education in school curriculum can be evaluated on moral grounds as to its ‘rights’ and ‘wrongs’. Sex education in school curriculum has positive effects as far as ethical grounds are concerned. Given that it is taught to the right group at the right time it can reduce all problems that have to do with immoral issues. Nevertheless, critics to this sex education have often accused it of arousing the desire to experiment sexually among students and thus promoting sexual immorality which it seeks to end.

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<sup>1</sup> Lohkamp, Nicholas. *What’s Happening to Morality?* (Ohio: Saint Anthony Messenger Press, 1971).

<sup>2</sup> WHO Regional Office for Europe and BZgA. *Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe: A Framework for Policy Makers, Educational and Health Authorities and Specialists*. Bologna: Federal Centre for Health Education, BZgA, 2020. pdf. 10 02 2021. <[https://www.bzga-whocc.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/WHO\\_BZgA\\_Standards\\_English.pdf](https://www.bzga-whocc.de/fileadmin/user_upload/WHO_BZgA_Standards_English.pdf)>. Accessed: 8 February 2021.

<sup>3</sup> “Sex Education in Schools Argumentative Essay”. UK Essays. ukessays.com, November 2018. Web. 14 February 2021. <<https://www.ukessays.com/essays/young-people/should-sex-education-be-implemented-in-schools-young-people-essay.php?vref=1>>. Accessed: 10 February 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Allen, Louisa. *Sexual Subjects: Young People, Sexuality and Education*. (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005.) 57.

<sup>5</sup> Beaumont, Karolina. *Policies for Sexuality Education in Europe*. Ed. Marcia Maguire. Brussels: European Union, 2013. 10 02 2021. <[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/note/join/2013/462515/IPOL-FEMM\\_NT\(2013\)462515\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/note/join/2013/462515/IPOL-FEMM_NT(2013)462515_EN.pdf)>. Accessed: 7 February 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Beaumont 25.

<sup>7</sup> UK Essays

<sup>8</sup> UNESCO. *International Guidelines on Sexuality Education: An Evidence Informed Approach to Effective Sex, Relationships and HIV/STI Education*. Paris: UNESCO, 2009. Document. 05 02 2021. <<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/8556521DD-9D4A9E64925762000240120-UNESCO-Aug2009.pdf>>. 2. Accessed: 8 February 2021.

<sup>9</sup> Zimmerman, Jonathan. *Too Hot to Handle: A Global History of Sex Education*. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2015.) 38.

<sup>10</sup>Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Declaration on Procured Abortion. Rome: Vatican Press, 1974. html. 10 02 2021. <[http://m.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19751229\\_persona-humana\\_en.html](http://m.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19751229_persona-humana_en.html)>. ix. Accessed: 10 February 2021.

<sup>11</sup>Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. v.

<sup>12</sup>Zimmerman 45.

<sup>13</sup>Zimmerman 47.

## **A Commentary on John Paul II's Assertion: "Contraception and Abortion are Fruits of the Same Tree, and are Hallmarks of a Culture of Death"**

*Jean Benjamin Yavo Doffou, ofm.*

### **Introduction**

In these modern days, more and more methods and techniques are developed by science and medicine about birth control. Among these methods are contraceptive methods and abortion that have become normative in many parts of the world. Many people argue that contraception reduces the rate of abortion. However, John Paul II mentioned that "contraception and abortion are fruits of the same tree, and are hallmarks of a culture of death". This article will be a commentary on John Paul II's assertion. It will be divided into three main parts. The first part will be about definitions of some key terms of John Paul II's assertion. That is to say what is meant by the "culture of death", abortion and contraception. The second part will try to elaborate on contraception and abortion as "fruits of the same tree". And the last part will point out how to understand contraception and abortion as "hallmarks of a culture of death".

### **The Culture of Death**

The expression "culture of death" is found in the encyclical of John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*. This encyclical might be seen as the source of this phrase. It says:

"..we are confronted by an even larger reality, which can be described as a veritable structure of sin. This reality is characterized by the emergence of a culture which denies solidarity and, in many cases, takes the form of a veritable "culture of death". This culture is actively fostered by powerful cultural, economic and political currents which encourage an idea of society excessively concerned with efficiency. Looking at the situation from this point of view, it is possible to speak in a certain sense of a war of the powerful against the weak: a life which would require greater acceptance, love and care is considered useless, or held to be an intolerable burden, and is

therefore rejected in one way or another”<sup>1</sup>

The context in which this phrase “culture of death” was mentioned, points out that it refers to abortion, euthanasia, contraception and other similar practices in this modern culture of ours that understand human life as ‘a means to some other end and not solely an end itself’<sup>2</sup>

### **Abortion**

Karl Peschke defines abortion as ‘the removal of the non-viable human being from the mother’s womb by human intervention, whether by killing him before removal from the womb, or whether by exposing him to a certain death outside the womb’.<sup>3</sup> There is what is called direct abortion and indirect abortion. On the one hand, abortion is direct ‘when the ejection of the non-viable fruit or the destruction of the offspring in the womb is intended as the aim of an action or as a means to achieve this aim’<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, it is indirect ‘if the death of the foetus is merely permitted as a concomitant effect of a directly willed end’.<sup>5</sup>

Concerning abortion, the Catechism of the Catholic Church highlights that ‘direct abortion, that is to say, abortion willed either as an end or a means, is gravely contrary to the moral law’<sup>6</sup> because ‘human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception’

### **Contraception**

The word Contraception literally means ‘against (contra)-(con) ception’ (cf. Respect of life). More precisely, ‘this refers to all the various ways in which male-female sexual intercourse can be prevented from resulting in the conception of a new life. Specifically, contraception means all the ways in which the male seed can be stopped from fertilizing a female egg’.<sup>7</sup> Some of the means to prevent conception are ‘physical (condoms), chemical (pills) and surgical (vasectomy, hysterectomy, tubal ligation)’.

By its definition, one can see that contraception and abortion are practically different. Actually, ‘contraceptive acts and the means employed in them seek to prevent a life from being conceived’. On the contrary

‘abortive acts and the means employed in them seek to terminate the life that has already been conceived’.

### **Contraception and Abortion: Fruits of The Same Tree**

This part will try to show that contraception and abortion are both fruits of the same tree because there are both unlawful birth control methods; there are both evil and both unwilling to accept responsibility in matters of sexuality.

### **Contraception and Abortion: Unlawful Birth Control Methods**

John Paul II concerning contraception and abortion shared the same idea with his predecessor Paul VI. As a matter of fact, Paul VI basing himself on the Christian doctrine of marriage affirmed in *Humanae Vitae* that ‘the direct interruption of the generative process already begun and, above all, all direct abortion, even for therapeutic reasons, are to be absolutely excluded as lawful means of regulating the number of children’.<sup>8</sup> More than that, he reaffirmed that contraception especially ‘direct sterilization, whether of the man or of the woman, whether permanent or temporary’ or ‘any action which either before, at the moment of, or after sexual intercourse, is specifically intended to prevent procreation—whether as an end or as a means’ are all considered as unlawful methods concerning birth control.

### **Contraception and Abortion: Both Evil**

People usually argue that a lesser evil is to be preferred to a greater one. Hence, they justify contraceptive used in sexual intercourse, compared to abortion. However, it is never lawful, even for the gravest reasons, to do evil that good may come of it—in other words, to intend directly something which of its very nature contradicts the moral order, and which must therefore be judged unworthy of man, even though the intention is to protect or promote the welfare of an individual, of a family or of society in general.<sup>9</sup>

Consequently, it is a serious error to think that a whole married life of otherwise normal relations can justify sexual intercourse which is deliberately contraceptive and so intrinsically wrong’.

It is true that contraception and abortion are morally different but they are both evils. While contraception ‘contradicts the full truth of the sexual act as the proper expression of conjugal love’ and ‘is opposed to the virtue of chastity in marriage’, abortion ‘destroys the life of a human being... and is opposed to the virtue of justice and directly violates the divine commandment «You shall not kill»’.

### **Contraception and Abortion: Both Unwilling to Accept Responsibility in Matters of Sexuality**

John Paul II explained in *Evangelium Vitae* that both contraception and Abortion come from a ‘hedonistic mentality unwilling to accept responsibility in matters of sexuality’.<sup>10</sup> These two unlawful methods of birth control ‘imply a self-centred concept of freedom, which regards procreation as an obstacle to personal fulfilment’. As a result, it is clear that ‘the life which could result from a sexual encounter thus becomes an enemy to be avoided at all costs, and abortion becomes the only possible decisive response to failed contraception’

### **Contraception and Abortion: Hallmarks of A Culture of Death”.**

In this part, it will be pointed out on the one hand contraception and abortion are not in favour of life. On the other hand, some figures will show how they rapidly lead to death.

### **Contraception and Abortion: Both Against Life**

One of the reasons why Contraception and abortion are ‘hallmarks of a culture of death’ is that they are both against life. ‘In fact, God, master of life, has entrusted to men the noble ministry of life, and man must discharge it in a manner worthy of him.’<sup>11</sup> Yet ‘the contraceptives and sterilization and abortion ‘deny the God-given fertility of men and women’ (cf. Respect life). Moreover, they ‘are certainly part of the reason why in some cases there is a sharp decline in the birth-rate’.

Another reason is that instead of preventing abortion as many could think, contraception rather leads easily to abortion. This is explained when one considers that ‘Contraceptives can be abortifacient, preventing the implantation of the fertilized egg and the removal or expulsion of the

foetus or embryo from the uterus’ (cf. Respect life). In fact, ‘when this «prevention» fails, many contraceptives act as abortifacients and destroy the newly created person. And when contraceptives fail completely and the contraceptive mindset is already in place – abortion is often the resultant remedy’ (cf. Respect life).

Therefore, John Paul II would say ‘the various techniques of artificial reproduction, which would seem to be at the service of life and which are frequently used with this intention, actually open the door to new threats against life.

### **Facts & Figures**

As a form of contraception, it has been shown that:

The “pill” increases the risk of breast cancer by over 40% if taken before a woman delivers her first baby. If taken 4 or more years before the woman’s first child is born, the increase for breast cancer is 70% more. The pill can also increase the risk of liver and cervical cancer (cf. Respect life).

Furthermore, ‘Forty-eight percent of women with unintended pregnancies and 54% of women seeking abortions were using contraception in the month they became pregnant’ (Respect life).

These figures actually point out that the use of contraception in many cases induces the users in a state of disease leading easily to death. Hence contraception, like abortion is a hallmark of the “culture of death”.

### **Conclusion**

This article has tried to comment on the assertion of John Paul II that says “contraception and abortion are fruits of the same tree, and are hallmarks of a culture of death”. It is worth to mention that ‘the transmission of human life is a most serious role in which married people collaborate freely and responsibly with God the Creator’ (HV #1). Therefore, contraception and abortion ‘are a supreme dishonour to the Creator’ (EV#3). On the one hand, they are all unlawful birth control methods, both evil, and unwilling to accept responsibility in matters of sexuality. On the other hand, they both ‘deny the God-given fertility of men and

women' and lead directly or indirectly to death, whether by not allowing the birth of a baby or leading the mother to death.

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<sup>1</sup> John Paul II. *Evangelium Vitae*.

<sup>2</sup>Your dictionary, *The Culture of Death*: <https://www.yourdictionary.com/culture-of-death>. Accessed 28 January 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Peschke, Karl. *Christian Ethics. Moral Theology in the light of Vatican II*. Vol. II. Warwickshire: Goodlife Neale, 1993.

<sup>4</sup> Peschke, Karl. *Christian Ethics. Moral Theology in the light of Vatican II*. Vol. II. Warwickshire: Goodlife Neale, 1993.

<sup>5</sup> Peschke, Karl. *Christian Ethics. Moral Theology in the light of Vatican II*. Vol. II. Warwickshire: Goodlife Neale, 1993.

<sup>6</sup>*Catechism of the Catholic Church*. London: Geoffrey Chapman-Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1999.

<sup>7</sup> Hanigan, James. "Contraception". *The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia*. Glazier, Michael and Monika Hellwig, eds. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1994.

<sup>8</sup> Pope Paul VI. *Humanae Vitae*

<sup>9</sup> Pope Paul VI. *Humanae Vitae*

<sup>10</sup> John Paul II. *Evangelium Vitae*.

<sup>11</sup> Paul VI. *Gaudium et Spes*

## **“Social Progress is only Possible on the Basis of a Sound Christian Morality.”**

*Guidance Mungazi, ofm.*

### **Introduction**

Human experience and facticity attest to the fact that, no matter what it takes, nobody absolutely lives as an island. Instead, we are in one way or another, globally connected to the effect that what happens in one part of the world yields a virtuous or pernicious effect on the rest of the world. Accordingly, it is legitimate and necessary to have an established set and system of morals and values to guide our social life in order that every individual and the society at large progresses toward the good. However, the topical question which preoccupies us is how can we foster this social progress. As a result, this paper endeavours to explain whether social progress is only possible on the basis of a sound Christian morality or not. Yet in order to substantiate this, we shall begin by understanding Christian morality and then see if it can be the only necessary condition for social progress or not.

### **Definition of Terms**

Will and Ariel Durant, define morals as the rules by which a society exhorts its members and associations to behaviour consistent with its order, security, and growth.<sup>1</sup> Social morality is then understood as the set of social-moral rules that require or prohibit action or a moral philosophy, which sees the fact that we live in a global-society with all of us being connected, and as such, we have an effect on others, and others have an effect on us.<sup>2</sup> Subsequently, Pope Paul VI expresses Christian morality as a personal sense of right and wrong which is fully informed by one's individual Christian beliefs and faith.<sup>3</sup> Comprehensively, these definitions seek to point out that we ought to do the right things which we know by our natural reason and conscience in order to foster social progress by way of living together in cooperative, mutually beneficial, social relations where everyone is an end and not a means.

### **On Whether Social Progress is only Possible on the Basis of Sound Christian Morality or Not?**

Christian morality fundamentally acknowledges the reality that a human person is essentially a social being who must be accorded the fundamental right and a duty to participate in society, seeking together the common good and well-being of all, especially the poor and vulnerable.<sup>4</sup> Not only that, but Christian morality also respects both the sanctity of human life and the priceless divinely endowed dignity which merit human persons have their rights protected. In that vein, Christian morality emphasizes on the aspect of human solidarity to promote the welfare of the poor and vulnerable so as to create a favourable world in which the love our neighbour, justice and peace reign supreme.<sup>5</sup> To that end, Pope Paul VI, argues that Christian morality encompasses a considerable number of factors and values, but all culminate in establishing a just society in which all people live a purposeful life in relationship with all creation as willed by their creator.<sup>6</sup>

Having stated these main Christian moral tenets, we turn back to our question to see if they can actually suffice to effect social progress. In order to socially progress, we must re-examine what we believe. According to Shapiro, Christian morality makes us believe that freedom is built upon the twin notions that God created every human person in His image, and that human beings are capable of investigating and exploring God's world.<sup>7</sup> These twin notions, Shapiro maintains, are the diamonds of spiritual genius which have built our civilization, and built us as individuals.<sup>8</sup> They have taught us therefore that the government has no right to intrude upon the exercise of one's individual will, one is bound by moral duty to pursue virtue, human beings are capable of bettering our world through use of our reason, and that we are bound by higher purpose to achieve all these.<sup>9</sup> Contrary to the USSR, Nazis and Venezuela who attempted social progress without Christian morality and respectively starved and brutally slaughtered tens of millions of human beings, shoved children into gas chambers, reduced citizens of their oil-rich nation to eating dogs; Shapiro hails Christian morality which has built prosperity, peace, human rights, ended slavery, defeated the Nazis and the Communists, lifted billions from poverty, and has given spiritual purpose to billions of people.<sup>10</sup> As

a result, we cannot flatter ourselves to believe that we can abandon the Christian morality and somehow survive indefinitely.<sup>11</sup>

According to Ammerman and Davie, social progress requires that the society engages in moral deliberation and moral judgments in order to make a positive difference.<sup>12</sup> Social progress is not simply a matter of finding the right technological formulas but imagining what a society could become through reaching beyond oneself and the everyday world as it is.<sup>13</sup> Progress implies pursuing a sense of meaning and purpose which is fully found in a Christian morality. Ultimately, Christian morality and social progress are mutually implicated.

Although some attempt to rationalise that in every age people have been dishonest, governments have been corrupt and man has never reconciled himself to the Ten Commandments; Will and Ariel Durant hold that for sixteen centuries, the Christian world maintained its continuity and internal peace by a strict and detailed moral code, almost without help from the state and its laws.<sup>14</sup> The two historian philosophers champion that even the sceptical person develops a humble respect for Christian morality, since he sees it functioning, and seemingly indispensable, in every land and age.<sup>15</sup> Will and Ariel further notes that to the unhappy, the suffering, the bereaved, the old, Christian morality has brought supernatural comforts valued by millions of souls as more precious than any natural aid.<sup>16</sup> As such, Christian morality has conferred meaning and dignity upon the lowliest existence, and through its sacraments has made for stability by transforming human covenants into solemn relationships with God.<sup>17</sup> In a like manner, Thorsteinsson appreciates that despite that Christian morality have been expressed, understood, and actualized differently in different social settings, it has so far proven to be the driving force of social progress with its deep natural reservoir of human warmth and social consciousness.<sup>18</sup> Succinctly, the novelty and uniqueness of Christian moral teaching is what it takes for a society to progress.

By and large, Pope Paul VI uphold that Christian morality played crucial roles in reducing slavery, family feuds, and national strife, extending the intervals of truce and peace, and replacing trial by combat or ordeal with the judgments of established courts.<sup>19</sup> In fact, a sound Christian morality managed to soften the unforgettable penalties exacted

by Roman or barbarian law, and vastly expanded the scope and organization of charity.<sup>20</sup> As a matter of fact, the French Revolution reminds us that rationalism cannot solely govern the world without regard to the religious needs of the soul.<sup>21</sup> Renan therefore adds that Christian morality is necessary because a natural ethic is too weak to withstand the savagery that lurks under civilization and emerges in our dreams.<sup>22</sup> To this end, there is no significant example in history, before our time, of a society successfully progressing without the aid of sound Christian ethics.

According to Pope Paul VI, social progress is not limited to economic growth only as a big deal of Marxists think.<sup>23</sup> Of the many factors, it is instead a sound Christian morality that makes an economy integral, complete and promotes good of every man if not the entire human family as willed by God initially.<sup>24</sup> Thus, a sound Christian morality teaches that patriotism unchecked by a higher loyalty can be a tool of greed and crime.<sup>25</sup> This proves that when Christianity grows weak, virtue is lost and the society becomes a menace.

The impact of Christian morality extends to a wide variety of fields without which social progress is possible like family, gender, sexuality, diversity and democracy, conflict and peace, everyday wellbeing and care for the earth.<sup>26</sup> Ammerman and Davie argue that economic wellbeing, education, and healthcare are social progress goals shared by Christian morality. Admittedly, researchers and policy makers pursuing social progress will benefit from careful attention to the powerful dictates of Christian morality which shape, mobilize and effect positive social change.<sup>27</sup> Thus, the pursuit of social progress and human flourishing is inevitably intertwined with Christian morality since where social and political life is most precarious, Christian morality provides key protections and forms of self-help and solidarity.<sup>28</sup>

The Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, holds that human beings and the environment form a seamless garment of existence, a complex fabric that we believe has been fashioned by God.<sup>30</sup> It follows that to commit a crime against the natural world is a sin and our relationship with nature resonates ours with God. In the encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis stresses that the gift of creation requires a strong sense of responsibility toward both humans and non-humans. Pope Francis maintains that

dominion over nature is not free rein to indulge in exploitation but instead a responsibility to protect divine creation which Christians understand as a gift to all humans, including future generations.<sup>31</sup>

However, some recusants have doubted that Christian morality has ever promoted social progress, since social progress has flourished even in ages of no Christian morality.<sup>32</sup> Remarkably, not so much of a sound Christian morality was witnessed during the industrial revolution but the society still progressed. In fact, the Christian morality is often advocated by people who frequently prove biasness, venal, and extortionate.<sup>33</sup> Sadly, while preaching peace, Christianity has fomented religious wars in sixteenth-century France and the seventeenth-century Germany.<sup>34</sup> In point of fact, the French Revolution which revolted against Christian morality, resolutely became successful in its aimed goals. Even in a more radical manner, Karl Marx, maintains that social progress is possible only through abolition of Christian morality which he considered the narcotic drug of the people. Marx contended that Industrial Revolution brought about democracy, feminism, birth control, socialism, the liberation of literature from dependence upon aristocratic patronage, and the replacement of romanticism by realism in fiction-and the economic interpretation of history, without Christian morality and the society progressed.<sup>35</sup> In fact, the Christian idea of hell gains its entire morality for it accommodates contradiction in the sense that a God who created billions of men and women, regardless of their virtues and crimes, are all predestined to everlasting hell.<sup>36</sup> Laconically, in Marx's view, Christian morality hinders social progress because it maintains the status quo.

Further from the above, the role of technological progress which gives humanity some supremacy, is the source of social progress witnessed in increasing our standard of living over the past two hundred years.<sup>37</sup> Ammerman and Davie argue that Christian morality as a system of belief based on supernatural assumptions, stands in natural opposition to empirical, scientific, and political ways of understanding and ordering the world.<sup>38</sup> In other words, the forces of the modern world remove the necessity of supernatural explanations on morality as a powerful force shape to determine progress of the secular public world. Today the rising power of law and government permits the decline of the Christian

morality without basically endangering the stability of the state.<sup>39</sup> In their view, Ammerman and Davie, underscore that a sound secular morality is a necessary path to progress.<sup>40</sup> To this end, Gibbon said that the period during which the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous, is that which elapsed from the accession of Nerva to the death of Marcus Aurelius of which it was not shaped by any Christian morality.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, what moves society is merely the progression of all of the various forces at play in the universe, channelled into action in a particular moment and not only Christian morality. Will and Ariel conclude that social progress is a broad enterprise, and only a fool would try to limit it to the soundness of a Christian morality.<sup>42</sup>

### **Conclusion**

To sum up, upon a close scrutiny of the arguments forwarded in this essay, one can arrive at the realization that the main points affirm that social progress is only possible with a sound Christian morality at play. Actually, it is only a sound Christian morality that upholds life and dignity of every person in every move and action he or she makes because it focuses much on the recognition of every person as an end and not a means to some dehumanizing endeavours. Certainly, when people treat each other as ends, social progress is inevitable. Although some have opposed this stand on the perspective that society, like a body composed of many parts, needs not only a sound morality to progress, we have in turn argued that Christian morality is all encompassing and its necessity knows no boundary. As a result, a society devoid of Christian morality retards, if not die, in its effort to progress.

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<sup>1</sup> Will and Ariel Durant. *The Lessons of History*. (New York: Simon And Schuster, 1968.) 37.

<sup>2</sup> Mugomba, Sheunesu. *Class Lecture. Social Morality*. (Holy Trinity College. Harare. August 2020.)

<sup>3</sup> Pope Paul VI. "On the Development of Peoples (*Populorum Progressio*)" in *Social Ethics: Issues in Ethics and Society* by Gibson Winter ed. (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1968.) 108.

<sup>4</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Washington, D.C. Publication No. 5-3152005.) 1.

<sup>5</sup> Pope Paul VI. "On the Development of Peoples (*Populorum Progressio*)" in

- Social Ethics: Issues in Ethics and Society by Gibson Winter ed. (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1968.) 109.
- <sup>6</sup> Pope Paul VI. "On the Development of Peoples (Populorum Progressio)" in Social Ethics: Issues in Ethics and Society by Gibson Winter ed. (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1968.) 111.
- <sup>7</sup> Shapiro Ben. *The Right Side of History: How Reason and Moral Purpose Made the West Great*. (New York: Broadside Books-HarperCollins Publishers, 2019.) 23.
- <sup>8</sup> *The Right Side of History: How Reason and Moral Purpose Made the West Great*, 23.
- <sup>9</sup> *The Right Side of History: How Reason and Moral Purpose Made the West Great*, 24.
- <sup>10</sup> *The Right Side of History: How Reason and Moral Purpose Made the West Great*, 25.
- <sup>11</sup> *The Right Side of History: How Reason and Moral Purpose Made the West Great*, 27.
- <sup>12</sup> Ammerman N T and Grace Davie. «Religions and Social Progress: Critical Assessments and Creative Partnerships.» *Rethinking Society for the 21st Century: Report of the International Panel for Social Progress*. (Cambridge University Press.) 12.
- <sup>13</sup> *Religions and Social Progress: Critical Assessments and Creative Partnerships.» Rethinking Society for the 21st Century: Report of the International Panel for Social Progress*, 12.
- <sup>14</sup> Will and Ariel Durant. *The Lessons of History*. (New York: Simon And Schuster, 1968.) 37.
- <sup>15</sup> *The Lessons of History*, 45.
- <sup>16</sup> *The Lessons of History*, 45.
- <sup>17</sup> Pope Paul VI. "On the Development of Peoples (Populorum Progressio)" in Social Ethics: Issues in Ethics and Society by Gibson Winter ed. (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1968.) 110.
- <sup>18</sup> Thorsteinsson Runar M. *Roman Christianity and Roman Stoicism: A Comparative Study of Ancient Morality*. (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 2010.) 3.
- <sup>19</sup> Pope Paul VI. "On the Development of Peoples (Populorum Progressio)" in Social Ethics: Issues in Ethics and Society by Gibson Winter ed. (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1968.) 110.
- <sup>20</sup> *The Lessons of History*, 50.
- <sup>21</sup> *The Lessons of History*, 54.
- <sup>22</sup> *The Lessons of History*, 55.
- <sup>23</sup> Pope Paul VI. "On the Development of Peoples (Populorum Progressio)" in Social Ethics: Issues in Ethics and Society by Gibson Winter ed. (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1968.) 108.
- <sup>24</sup> Pope Paul VI. "On the Development of Peoples (Populorum Progressio)" in Social Ethics: Issues in Ethics and Society by Gibson Winter ed. (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1968.) 108.
- <sup>25</sup> Pope Paul VI. "On the Development of Peoples (Populorum Progressio)" in Social Ethics: Issues in Ethics and Society by Gibson Winter ed. (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1968.) 50.
- <sup>26</sup> Ammerman N T and Grace Davie. «Religions and Social Progress: Critical

- Assessments and Creative Partnerships.» *Rethinking Society for the 21st Century: Report of the International Panel for Social Progress.* (Cambridge University Press.) 1.
- <sup>27</sup>Ammerman N T and Grace Davie. «Religions and Social Progress: Critical Assessments and Creative Partnerships.» *Rethinking Society for the 21st Century: Report of the International Panel for Social Progress.* (Cambridge University Press.) 5.
- <sup>28</sup>Religions and Social Progress: Critical Assessments and Creative Partnerships.» *Rethinking Society for the 21st Century: Report of the International Panel for Social Progress,* 5-6.
- <sup>29</sup>Religions and Social Progress: Critical Assessments and Creative Partnerships.» *Rethinking Society for the 21st Century: Report of the International Panel for Social Progress,* 21.
- <sup>30</sup>Religions and Social Progress: Critical Assessments and Creative Partnerships.» *Rethinking Society for the 21st Century: Report of the International Panel for Social Progress,* 20.
- <sup>31</sup>Religions and Social Progress: Critical Assessments and Creative Partnerships.» *Rethinking Society for the 21st Century: Report of the International Panel for Social Progress,* 20.
- <sup>32</sup> Will and Ariel Durant. *The Lessons of History.* (New York: Simon And Schuster, 1968.) 49.
- <sup>33</sup> *The Lessons of History,* 49.
- <sup>34</sup> *The Lessons of History,* 51.
- <sup>35</sup> *The Lessons of History,* 56.
- <sup>36</sup> *The Lessons of History,* 51.
- <sup>37</sup> Stiglitz Joseph E. and Bruce C. Greenwald. *Creating a Learning Society: A New Approach to Growth, Development, and Social Progress.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014.) 2.
- <sup>38</sup> Ammerman N T and Grace Davie. «Religions and Social Progress: Critical Assessments and Creative Partnerships.» *Rethinking Society for the 21st Century: Report of the International Panel for Social Progress.* (Cambridge University Press.) 7.
- <sup>39</sup> *The Lessons of History,* 52.
- <sup>40</sup>Religions and Social Progress: Critical Assessments and Creative Partnerships.» *Rethinking Society for the 21st Century: Report of the International Panel for Social Progress,* 8.
- <sup>41</sup> *The Lessons of History,* 52.
- <sup>42</sup> *The Lessons of History,* 53.

## **Shona ecology: A viable alternative?**

*Mark Chikuni, CSSR.*

### **Introduction**

Traditionally, at least in the West, ethics was exclusively concerned with human action in relation to other human beings and has generally considered non-human creatures to be mere means to human ends, not ends in themselves. This view was recently challenged and this formed the primary goal of environmental ethics. It seeks to rethink moral philosophy and reformulate ethical theory so that it may include direct moral consideration to non-human creatures. This article seeks to show that business is inextricably tied to environmental issues. It will critically analyse some moral dilemmas in environmental responsibility by forwarding three distinct moral theories concerning the environment. A fourth “theory,” Shona ecology, shall be considered to see whether it can be a viable alternative.

### **Business and the environment**

The anti-business ethics camp assumes that values that interfere with the effectiveness and efficiency of work processes and their objectives should be set aside. This view, however, is mistaken because its supposition depends on business’ actual separateness from the rest of life. As pointed out by Robert Larmer, “the workplace is not isolated from the rest of life, since it does interact with it in very many and thorough going ways.”<sup>1</sup> Larmer notes that work activities affect others in society and eventually involve large amounts of organic resources that we both live and rely on. In addition, business (especially corporate business) has its lion’s share in many of the environmental problems.

### **Some economic and moral dilemmas: Pollution**

Although business is inseparable from environmental issues, choices pertaining to environmental conservation are difficult to make. Put otherwise, there are some difficult economic and moral dilemmas to be solved. In order to demonstrate this point, let us focus on pollution control. Shaw and Barry reckon that weighing costs and benefits involves

controversial factual assessments and value judgements.<sup>2</sup> In pollution control, some favour the cost-benefit analysis whereby a project's direct and indirect costs and benefits are evaluated, the difference being the net result for society. The problem is that assessment of costs and benefit is subject to various factual uncertainties.<sup>3</sup> For example, in determining whether it would be worthwhile to initiate more stringent air pollution standards for a particular industry many factors are to be considered. On the one hand, potential expenses involve reduced business earnings, increased consumer costs, and unfavourable effects on employment. On the other hand, anticipated benefits might be that the reduction in air borne particles over urban areas would reduce illness and premature death from lung cancer and other respiratory diseases by some determinate percentage. The estimates would have to be estimated along with projected savings and increases in productivity and so on. This example suggests the extreme difficulty of making reliable estimates of actual costs and benefits.

The other problem is that any assessment of costs and benefits "will be significantly influenced by values one holds".<sup>4</sup> Benefits, for instance, numerous types are taken, including fitness, convenience, comfort, recreation, leisure, and so on. They are also difficult to calculate because they take an aesthetic form. Larmer talks of Wilbur the pig who was owned by Zuckerman.<sup>5</sup> Wilbur's Instrumental worth cashes out in sausage and ham hocks. He wins ribbons and the county fair for his artistic merit. The value which he has in and with himself is his moral value. In making a choice about Wilbur's fate Zuckerman finds conflicting values at stake.

The other dilemma of environment protection has to do with determining who should pay the cost. One answer is that big business ought to pay because they are the chief polluters. The problem is that "not all of a firm's wealth results directly in treating the environment as a free gift".<sup>6</sup> In fact, some would argue that consumers are primarily to blame for pollution and therefore should pay the bill for its control. It is argued that consumers ought to pay since they are the ones who create the demand for products whose production eventually impairs the environment.

However, Shaw and Barry prefer to move from blame shifting. They argue that the causes of pollution are manifold including overpopulation

and rapid urbanisation. These, for instance, have an ever-increasing demand for goods and services, natural resources, energy and industrial production. And these in turn have increased air, water, space and noise pollution.

Some people think that those who will benefit from the environment should pay the cost. The trouble is that every individual and every institution stand for profit from environmental improvement, albeit not to the same degree: “we all share the blame for pollution and collectively stand to benefit from environmental improvement”<sup>7</sup>

### **A deeper approach: Business in the light of environmental theories**

The preceding paragraphs highlighted some moral and economic dilemmas raised by pollution control. At this juncture, a clear distinction should be drawn between environmentalism and environmental ethics. The latter is “a topic of applied ethics which examines the moral basis of environmental responsibility”<sup>8</sup> Unlike environmentalism, it aims not at convincing anyone that they should be concerned with the environment. It is true that there is environmental degradation, overpopulation, and depletion of the ozone layer, but the question is “Do we have a moral basis for our responsibility towards all creatures?” Environmental ethics also seeks to establish how far environmental responsibility extends.

One theory in environmental ethics, anthropocentrism, claims that environmental responsibility stems from human desires alone. Only human beings are considered to be morally significant and to deserve moral consideration.<sup>9</sup> Human beings can only have indirect duties towards non-human creatures simply because they are crucial for their well-being and survival.

Although many including Aquinas, Descartes and Kant advanced this view, it is widely associated with early Western tradition.<sup>10</sup> Critics often refer to the Old Testament book of Genesis which contains the following verse: God blessed them (people) saying to them, ‘Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and conquer it...’ (1:28-29). Early Greek philosophers share the same view. Aristotle, for example, taught that nature does everything for a purpose, and so just as plants exist to provide food for animals, animals exist to provide food and other aids for humans.<sup>11</sup>

Businesses influenced by the anthropocentric view deemed the environment to be a free, nearly unlimited good. As a result, water, air, land and some other natural resources were seen to be eligible for business to use as it considered necessary.

The anthropocentric view was largely criticised by the animal rights view. The latter was propounded mainly by the utilitarians. For them, if at least some animals count as individuals of moral value, then, they deserve moral consideration. Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill argued that morality is fundamentally a matter of seeking to promote happiness and prevent suffering.<sup>12</sup> Bentham argued that we should not limit moral concern to human suffering because some animals suffer too. For him “The question is not, can they *reason*? Nor Can they *talk*? But, can they *suffer*?”<sup>13</sup>

Peter Singer advanced the animal rights view by popularising the idea of “speciesism”. Speciesism means “prejudice or attitude of bias in favour of the interest of members of one’s own species and against those of members of other species”.<sup>14</sup> It is analogous to racism and so must be condemned. Just as racists unreasonably assign more weight to the desires of the members of their own species, human beings unjustifiably discriminate against animals. According to Singer, there is no difference between the humans and the non-human animals in their ability to suffer, enjoy or be happy hence non-human animals merit moral consideration.

The animal rights view has a bearing on business because business affects the welfare of animals very substantially. It does so through experimentation and testing of products on animals. In addition, the business produces numerous animal related products such as meat. In view of this, the animal rights view raises a profound and challenging question for business and consumers alike. However, it is accused of leaving out creatures such as trees, soil and water because they do not suffer. Because of this some have proposed a holistic approach which calls for concern to the rest of the natural world: ecocentrism.

According to ecocentrism, non-human creatures deserve direct moral consideration and not one which is merely derived from human (and animal interests). This view was sketched by Aldo Leopold (1887-1948) and developed by Baird J. Callicott. Leopold proposed what he

calls the “Land ethic”. The Land ethic further enlarges “the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land...it implies respect for ...fellow members and also respect for the community as such”.<sup>15</sup> Leopold persisted so far as to find out that ecology portrays human beings not only as members of different human societies, but also as participants of the ‘natural ecosystem’. Land is not a commodity which belongs to humans but a commodity to which humans belong.

Callicott agreed with Leopold’s land ethic and asserted that non-humans have ‘intrinsic value’ hence they deserve moral consideration”.<sup>16</sup> He further argued that human beings have the same capacity for moral sentiments. For him, an individual whose cultural and academic horizons are limited, with regard to a restricted collection of persons or the whole of society, to be necessarily desirable or worthy of moral consideration.

More precisely, ecocentrism argues that the value of nature does not derive from human interests. Nature, aside from human beings, may have meaning in and by itself. A construction company does not have the right to pull down mountains to construct a road or houses. Ecocentrism, then alters the global perspective of viewing nature and our perception of moral responsibilities to protect and honour the natural environment. Some, however, doubt that nature has intrinsic value or that it merits moral consideration on the basis of intrinsic value. For them, having interest is a precondition of something having rights or of our having moral duties to that thing. In view of this challenge, one wonders whether Shona ecology can provide a viable alternative.

### **Shona ecology: A viable alternative?**

The modern Shona ecology, like everything else in Shona culture, is inseparably connected to religion. The Shona believed that the preservation of the environment had been approved by God the creator and guardian ancestor of the earth. The environment, therefore, was considered sacred. For example, while birds and other animals were considered legitimate food resources for the human kind, strict laws have been set down for the safety and reproduction of all animals. Certain birds and animals were considered to be direct emissaries from the spirit world to the community of the living.<sup>17</sup>

Water supplies were also covered by a ban on riverbank agriculture and specific regulations on the wise use of swamplands, springs and fountains. In the case of violating a supernatural relationship may be expected: wildlife predators or snakes attacking human life. There were also traditional “nature reserves” which were the holy groves (madamba kurimwa). According to Daneel “the close proximity of chiefs’ burial sites and surrounding tracts of sacred land – sometimes passing large mountain slopes - epitomised the sanctity of creation and the guardianship of apical ancestors, mandated by the creator deity over all-natural resources”.<sup>18</sup>

Trees as well symbolised ancestral protection and were protected as sacred. According to Gelfand “The Shona believed that their spirit elders lived for some time in trees as well as in other spots such as the bottom of pools and rivers, in the woods and mountains, in open space or even above the atmosphere or sky”.<sup>19</sup> Different varieties of trees, such as muhacha, muzeze and mubvumira, have their own religious overtones. Again, fruit trees such as Muzhanje were cultivated cautiously for fear of attracting the attention of the vadzimu and the loss of their own food resources.

It may be questioned whether traditional Shona ecology has any relevance at all in today’s world. This is in view of population increase (leading to excessive strain on communal lands), depletion of traditional influences, Christian deterioration of conventional faith, modern land domestication, and the declining position of the chief as the custodian of the environment. Although this is true, the view of nature “as sacred” can be a valuable heritage for the present generation and businesses. Of course, appeal to myths and taboos to validate this view can no longer hold. New sources of legitimating “the sacred nature” of nature will have to be invented.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, it was shown that business has moral responsibility to the environment. Citing pollution as one dilemma, it was further revealed that environmental ethics presents us with a variety of views with regard to our moral responsibility. Some of these are anthropocentrism, human rights view and ecocentrism. These views, however, have their strengths

and weaknesses. Shona ecology, therefore, might provide a viable alternative if it is modified to suit the current environment. It is mostly valuable for its notion that “nature is sacred.”

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- <sup>1</sup> Larmer, Robert A. *Ethics in the Workplace: Selected Readings in Business Ethics*. Second ed. Australia: (Wadsworth, 2002), 585.
- <sup>2</sup> *Ethics in the Workplace: Selected Reading in Business Ethics*, 522.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ethics in the Workplace: Selected Reading in Business Ethics*, 522.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ethics in the Workplace: Selected Reading in Business Ethics*, 522.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ethics in the Workplace: Selected Reading in Business Ethics*, 588.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ethics in the Workplace: Selected Reading in Business Ethics*, 523.
- <sup>7</sup> Shaw, Willam and Vincent Barry. *Moral Issues in Business*. Seventh Ed. (New York: Wadsworth, 1998), 524.
- <sup>8</sup> Callicott, Baird, J. “On the Intrinsic Value of Non-human Species.” *Environmental Ethics: Divergence and Convergence*. Armstrong, Susan J. and Richard G. Botzler. (London: McGraw-Hill, 1993).
- <sup>9</sup> Godfrey-Smith. “The Value of the Wilderness.” *Social Ethics: Morality and Social Ethics*. Ed. Thomas Mappes and Janes S. Zembatty. (New York. McGraw-Hill, 1982).
- <sup>10</sup> The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. 2001. <<http://www.utm.edu/research/iep/e/environment.htm>. Accessed: 3 November 2005.
- <sup>11</sup> Rachels, James. *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. CD-ROM. 2000 ed. (London: Routledge, 2000).
- <sup>12</sup> Darwin, Charles. *The Illustrated Origin of Species*. Intro. Richard E. Leakey. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982).
- <sup>13</sup> Singer, Peter. “All animals are equal.” *Moral Controversies, Race, Class, and Gender in Applied Ethics*. Ed. Jay. (California: Wadsworth PC, 1992), 571.
- <sup>14</sup> “All animals are equal.” *Moral Controversies, Race, Class, and Gender in Applied Ethics*, 570.
- <sup>15</sup> Becker, Lawrence. *Encyclopedia of Ethics*. (New York: Garland Publishing Company, 1992), 313.
- <sup>16</sup> *Encyclopedia of Ethics*, 68.
- <sup>17</sup> Daneel, Marthinus L. *African Earthkeepers: Holistic Interfaith Mission*. (New York: Orbis Books, 2001), 90.
- <sup>18</sup> *Holistic Interfaith Mission*, 90.
- <sup>19</sup> Gelfand, Michael. 1962, 151.

## **Theodicy and Anthropogenic: A Theology of Disasters in the wake of COVID-19 Pandemic**

*Blazio Mahaso Manobo, SPB.*

### **Introduction**

History bears testimony to the revolutionary nature of disasters both natural and anthropogenic. As the adage goes, ‘necessity is the mother of invention,’ major ideological shifts and religious innovations emerged out of a crisis of necessity. When the COVID-19 Pandemic appeared in the last month of the year 2019, the World Health Organization Director-General, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus hinted that with the new virus, the world will never be the same again and people should brace for a new normal. This article interrogates the traditional understanding of theodicy in the light of modern anthropogenic studies. The argument in this article is in favour of a new systematic theology of disaster based on the contribution of human beings to natural evils.

### **Conceptual framework**

Disasters are as old as human beings. Despite their occasional occurrence, there seems to be no scholarly consensus on the definition of a disaster. Disaster technocrats have often tried to distinguish a disaster from a hazard. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines a hazard as “a natural or human-made event that threatens to adversely affect human life, property or activity to the extent of causing a disaster”. A disaster is defined as, “A serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society involving widespread human, material, or environmental losses and impacts which exceeds the ability of the affected community to cope using only its own resources”.<sup>1</sup>

A hazard becomes a disaster when it has disrupted the functioning of the community resulting in harm, death or injury to people or their livelihoods. However, a caveat needs to be put here. Hazards do not always affect people equally. The government has the sole responsibility to declare a state of disaster to a hazard like flood, accident, or disease outbreak. In 2008, Zimbabwe declared the 2007/2008 agricultural season, a national disaster. Apparently, despite the national declaration, there

were people within the country who were never affected by the disaster in terms of loss or damage to lives, property or livelihoods. This suggests that hazards become disasters when they interact with people's vulnerability. A person is vulnerable when he or she is susceptible to physical or emotional injury or attack.

Prior to scientific advancement, disasters precipitated by natural hazards like volcanoes, earthquakes, floods, were understood as 'acts of God'. With the growth of scientific studies, these hazards were renamed natural phenomena. Theology and philosophy would use the term natural evils as against moral evils.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, 'acts of God,' natural phenomenon, and natural evils, have been used interchangeably in literature on disaster and theology. Using the term 'natural' implies that man has no control over them and this has ignited controversy among disaster practitioners, as some feel, man may not be the cause of such phenomenon but has a role to play in exacerbating their occurrence.

The 2019 novel Coronavirus dubbed 'COVID-19' that emerged in Wuhan in 2019 was declared a global pandemic by WHO on 11 March 2020 after it was reported in 114 countries and had killed more than 4000 people.<sup>2</sup> This was the first time that WHO declared an outbreak a pandemic since the 2009 'Swine flu.' The International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, defines a pandemic as 'an epidemic of infectious disease that spreads through human populations across a large region, multiple continents or globally' and pandemics become disasters "when they cause large numbers of deaths, as well as illness, or have severe social and economic impacts."<sup>3</sup>

### **Theodicy and the problem of disasters**

The problem of evil continues to puzzle theologians, religious leaders, philosophers, and sages irrespective of their faith affiliation. This is more expressed among the three major monotheism of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.<sup>4</sup> The question is: Why does the supreme Being who is often conceived as omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient allow natural evil like disasters to befall human beings?<sup>5</sup> Innocent suffering is inconsistent

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<sup>1</sup>UNISDR.

with the concept of an all-loving God and makes it illogical. The Western world has been negatively affected by this seemingly illogical belief in a God who permits evil while perceived to be all-loving. Paradoxically, the existence of evil in juxtaposition with an all-loving God has been the source of strength for many people in the global South who claim that the answer lies in faith. Several scholars have attempted to proffer some justification and it is not within the scope of this article to present a comprehensive treatise on the matter. Nevertheless, a few individuals with promising modern approaches to the problem of evil are worth mentioning.

Alvin Plantinga uses the free will debate to justify why God allows evil to exist alongside his love for humankind. His starting point is that human beings possess free will and the use of free will to choose good is a value that outweighs the evil. In other words, for Plantinga, “a morally sufficient reason for God to permit evil is possible: the value of man’s possession and use of free will is a possible reason for God’s permitting moral evil, which is evil caused by man”.<sup>6</sup> Plantinga further asserts that, likewise, since the angels possess free will, it is morally sufficient for God to permit natural evil emanating from the free will of fallen angels. Plantinga’s arguments have invited several criticisms which he defends by arguing that his arguments are not about conviction but assumption that there could be such a morally sufficient reason in God.

Richard Swinburne builds on the philosophy of Plantinga’s moral sufficiency due to the possession of free will and adds the exercise of free will with a choice of destiny as sufficient to justify evil in this world.<sup>7</sup> Swinburne argues that natural evil is necessary as a stimulant for the right exercise of free will. In other words, natural evil as opposed to evil arising from our own free will, helps us to understand the consequence of our free choices. For example, floods in Chitungwiza will awaken us to the knowledge of building structures on solid elevations and not on wetlands. Hence God uses natural evil to stimulate our exercise of free will. Swinburne’s views were criticised by Stump for its simplicity in trying to justify the existence of evil.<sup>8</sup>

John Hick offers another promising philosophy on the problem of evil. He does not depart much from the other two. However, he introduces

the concept of soul-making. Hick's definition of soul-making is described by Stump as "the process by which human beings develop certain traits of character, such as patience, courage, and compassion, as a result of struggling with evils".<sup>9</sup> The existence of natural evil is justified by the role it plays in forming character. For example, using Hick's arguments, the persistence of drought as a natural evil in Zimbabwe is necessary in the development of character traits like kindness, generosity, sincerity, hard work, among others which are essential for our salvation. Like Swinburne, Hick's argument has been criticised by Stanley Kane for being too naive as character formation does not necessarily need natural evil to develop. There are other methods of building character outside natural evil.

The explanations raised above in response to the problem of theodicy, have sociological resemblance in what Morgan and Wilkinson calls 'sociodicy'.<sup>ii</sup> According to Morgan and Wilkinson, sociologists justify adverse circumstances by highlighting their hidden benefits and functions.<sup>10</sup> The sociologist Adam Smith has proffered the view that income inequality often stimulates hidden savings and investments. Karl Marx, the German sociologist has also suggested that increased exploitation of labour has a latent benefit of stimulating conflict that leads to transition to a socialist state. Put simply, a contextual sociodicy for Zimbabwe may look like: the persistent socio-economic deterioration of the Zimbabwean economy has latent benefits of stimulating innovation and creativity.

### **The anthropogenic nature of disasters**

Scholarly debates on whether disasters should be attributed to natural causes independent of the influence of human beings have increased in the last few decades. Several documents make references to 'natural' disasters when speaking of earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, tropical cyclones<sup>iii</sup>, floods, landslides, or bushfires.<sup>11</sup> For this article, we will use the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) framework often quoted which says a disaster is, "a serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society involving

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<sup>ii</sup>Social theodicy

widespread human, material, economic or environmental losses and impacts, which exceeds the ability of the affected community or society to cope using its own resources”.<sup>12</sup>

Disaster practitioners have made a distinction between natural<sup>iv</sup> and man-made hazards<sup>v</sup>.<sup>13</sup> Kumar classifies natural disasters into three groups of; geophysical<sup>vi</sup>, hydro-meteorological<sup>vii</sup> and biological<sup>viii</sup>. He also classifies man-made disasters under two categories of; technological disasters<sup>ix</sup> and sociological disaster<sup>x</sup>. According to Lakshmi and Kumar, “anthropogenic hazard results in the form of human intent, negligence, human error and involves a failure of a man-made system”.<sup>14</sup> In this case, natural disasters suggest that their occurrence is outside the influence of human beings.

Modern science has proved that human activities can influence the earth’s “lithosphere, atmosphere, hydrosphere and biosphere”.<sup>15</sup> In other words, contrary to his vocation as God’s co-creator and image-bearer, man’s actions can increase the veracity, occurrence, frequency, and intensity of natural evils. Not only do human actions exacerbate natural hazards, but they also commit sins of omission by failing to develop holistic multi-hazard frameworks to mitigate against natural evils. Gill and Malamud support this assertion by saying, “anthropogenic processes trigger the occurrence of particular natural hazards, these ‘primary’ natural hazards may in turn trigger secondary natural hazards, generating a network of natural hazard interactions<sup>xi</sup> with the anthropogenic process as the source trigger.”<sup>16</sup>

Gill and Malamud have listed several studies carried out throughout the world which bear testimony to the anthropogenic nature of disasters. While it is beyond the scope of this article to analyse the characteristics and effects of these anthropogenic activities, studies have shown that the

<sup>iii</sup> Typhoon, Hurricane.

<sup>iv</sup> Often referred to as a natural disaster.

<sup>v</sup> Often called anthropogenic disasters.

<sup>vi</sup> Volcanoes, landslides, earthquakes, among others.

<sup>vii</sup> Floods, temperature, wildfire, among others.

<sup>viii</sup> Epidemics and pandemics like COVID -19

<sup>ix</sup> Like poor engineering leading to collapse of infrastructure like bridges.

<sup>x</sup> Riots, wars, stampede.

following activities exacerbates the change in climatic conditions and natural disasters: ground water abstraction, oil or gas extraction, subsurface infrastructure, subsurface mining, deforestation or vegetation removal, agricultural practice change, urbanization, drainages and de-watering, chemical explosions, nuclear explosions, and fire, among others.<sup>17</sup> The curse of these activities is not so much on their profit motive, but the means with which human beings have tried to maximise profit. Based on this argument, the human intent, negligence, and human error, cannot be vindicated in the discussion on natural evils like disasters.

Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato si*, laments the culture of abuse inflicted upon the mother earth saying, “This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her”.<sup>18</sup> Pope Francis’ comments support the earlier exhortation by Pope Paul VI in the encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, in which the Pope referred to natural disasters as a tragic consequence of unchecked human activity. The Pope posited that, an ill-considered exploitation of nature, humanity runs the risk of destroying it and becoming in turn a victim of this degradation. According to the Popes, development has a moral character, which means it must be accompanied by changes in life’s styles.

Most disasters as natural evils are a product of man’s irresponsible and abusive exploitation of natural resources. Pope Benedict XVI observed this when he affirmed that the deterioration of nature is intricately connected to the culture which shapes human coexistence.<sup>19</sup> Nature, viewed as a mere source of profit and gain for human beings, has serious potential ecological consequences. While human beings have acquired immense power due to advances in technology, these advances appear to positively correlate with the rise in natural disasters. The recent “immense technological development has not been accompanied by a development in human responsibility, values and conscience which Pope Francis calls the undifferentiated and one-dimensional paradigm.”<sup>20</sup> Disaster preparedness, mitigation and prevention are elements of discipleship. As disciples, human beings are called to be stewards of creation.

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<sup>xi</sup> Cascade

### **Major views about disasters**

Like in the Old Testament, disasters raise questions about the nature of God. During a disaster, people question the theological truth of God's love, mercy and goodness. In secular language, we often hear phrases like 'acts of God' with reference to natural disasters. According to Weichselgartner & Bertens, the use of the phrase "acts of God paralyzed scientific arguments, prevention and technical measures".<sup>21</sup> This means the notion of 'acts of god' has derailed scientific progress in trying to find a solution to natural evils most of which are anthropogenic. A systematic theology of natural evils acknowledges that there are no easy answers to the question of why God permits such evil like COVID-19.<sup>22</sup> Three views have dominated studies on theodicy.

#### ***Disasters as punishment for sins committed***

The Old Testament bears testimony to disasters as punishment from God for sins committed. In the creation narrative, God punished humanity because of the sin of Adam.<sup>23</sup> According to this perspective, God appears like a vindictive God who does not tolerate any deviation from his moral precepts. The Bible claims that God in a show of anger, "blotted out every living thing that was on the face of the ground, human beings and animals and creeping things and birds of the air; they were blotted out from the earth".<sup>24</sup> The Bible also testifies that the people of Sodom and Gomorrah had become so wicked, that the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulphur and fire out of heaven and destroyed them.<sup>25</sup> Pharaoh became another victim of God's anger for enslaving the people of Israel and the Lord said to Moses, "When Pharaoh does not listen to you, I will lay my hand upon Egypt and bring my people the Israelites, company by company, out of the land of Egypt by great acts of judgment".<sup>26</sup>

In the book of Isaiah (45:7), the Lord declared Himself the cause of disasters when he said; "I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the Lord, who does all these things." It is said, the Lord will shut the heavens so that there will be disasters of drought and locusts until people turn away from their wicked ways.<sup>27</sup> It is God who designs natural evils, "for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope

that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.<sup>28</sup> And the prophet Amos also acclaimed, “Does disaster come to a city, unless the LORD has done it?”<sup>29</sup>

The view that when the gods are angry, they use disasters as punishment for people’s wrongdoings is shared among many religions of the world including African Traditional Religions.<sup>30</sup> In African traditional religions, nothing happens out of chance.<sup>31</sup> When the gods are not happy, they express it through a calamity. If an individual has not offended the gods in any way, then the problem is conceived to lie with his family or clan. In the book of Baruch, we hear how the people felt their parents’ guilty is upon them when they prayed, “O Lord Almighty, God of Israel, hear now the prayer of the people of Israel, the children of those who sinned before you, who did not heed the voice of the Lord their God, so that calamities have clung to us.”<sup>32</sup> The challenge that arises from the perspective of natural evil as punishment from God is the question of innocent suffering like in the book of Job. Job experienced suffering even though there is no mention of himself or his parents having offended God in any way. To view COVID-19 pandemic as a punishment for sins committed by this generation or our forefathers is rendered intelligible and unjust to the modern scientific community as it compromises the belief in God’s justice.

### *Disasters as manifestation of God’s power*

The second perspective in the understanding of disasters revolves around the belief that natural evils are God’s way of manifesting his sovereign power. In the Gospel of John, we meet Jesus encountering a man born blind and his disciples asks him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him.”<sup>33</sup>

According to Keller, the occurrence of evil suggests that God operates along general principles as against the belief that He has a specific reason for a single event. The logic of Keller’s arguments is, if God does not follow a general principle regarding interventions in natural evils, He

cannot be accused for not intervening in a particular event. If He has a different reason for each event, then He could be accused of not intervening in some events.<sup>34</sup> Following this argument, God follows a general principle that allows natural evils to demonstrate His might power. Hence, Keller argues, “Our knowledge of the way suffering occurs in the world makes this conclusion far more likely than the conclusion that there is some specific case reason why God permits each instance of suffering.”<sup>35</sup>

### *Disasters as failure to obey God’s natural law*

While we generally speak of disasters scientifically as natural phenomenon or philosophically and theologically as natural evil, studies have shown that human beings have a significant role to play in the prevention, mitigation and responding to such evils.<sup>36</sup> Current scholarly debate on whether there is anything called ‘natural disaster’ has generated international interest as disaster practitioners claim that hazards become disasters when they interact with human beings. This means human beings have a God-given responsibility to interact responsibly with nature to avoid disasters. Bakena further argues that inappropriate governance responses among nations can influence and exacerbate the movement from a hazard into a disaster. The International Council for Science (ICSU), argues that ample evidence suggests that “policy-makers may at times act in ignorance or disregard of the relevant scientific information and thereby significantly exacerbate damage resulting from natural hazards”.<sup>37</sup>

Speaking in the context of COVID-19 pandemic, the United Nations Environmental expert, Inger Andersen retorted that the Coronavirus and on-going climate crisis is a message that nature is trying to send to human beings.<sup>38</sup> In support of the same argument, Martinus de Wit adds:

The current ecological crisis is a reflection of our broken relationship with God, each other and the creation. We have failed to be good custodians of the earth. We have failed in the proper care of the earth and in our care for our fellow human beings. We have lost sight of how creation is God’s abundant gift and how interrelated, interdependent and interconnected we are. This negation has been to our and nature’s detriment. We are now living in a time of ecological crisis.<sup>39</sup>

When God created the earth, He blessed it with a natural order, which human beings have of late destabilized by their quest for economic profit. Pope Francis, in his 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si*, lamented how human beings have upset the ecological balance by uncontrolled destruction of animals and plant species including exploitation of natural resources.<sup>40</sup> Just as human beings contribute to the severity, frequency and intensity of natural evils, they also possess a God-given ability to prevent or mitigate them. As the ICSU noted, human beings can achieve this by “understanding how and where such hazards may occur, what causes them, what circumstances increase their severity, and what their impacts may be, will it prove possible to develop effective mitigation strategies.<sup>41</sup> Prevention and mitigation do not mean eliminating natural disasters but reducing the effect that natural evils have on people.

### **Towards a theology of disasters**

While scientific knowledge has contributed immensely to our understanding of the phenomenon of disasters, it does not explain why God allows such evils on his people. The outbreak of COVID-19 disease is not the first in the history of pandemics. Between 1918-1920, the Spanish flu outbreak left more than 50 million people dead.<sup>42</sup> The HIV and AIDS epidemic is so far estimated to have infected more than 100 million with more than 70 million deaths. Other epidemics like Ebola, Influenza, and cholera have forced people to question: Where is God in all this? Not only do people seek divine presence among pandemics, but whenever they encounter natural evils like earthquakes, volcanos, draughts, tornados, and hurricanes. How then can theology justify a loving God amid so many tears?

Theology is not about scientific truths, but the power of imagination. This is captured well in Mouton who defines theology as “the ability of the human imagination to *redescribe* reality, to *rename* experiences, to *retell* their stories from new angles”.<sup>43</sup> The story of God’s presence in the midst of disasters can only be told theologically using the power of myths and symbols, story and meaning, worship and human expressions in liturgy.<sup>44</sup> Disaster helps to grasp the truth that not everything that

human beings experience is known and knowable. It is in this ‘cloud of unknowing,’ that we find substance and meaning in our relationship with God.

Christian faith tells us that our lives are not acts of vainness, but rather filled with meaning. With St Augustine we can acclaim that; “Thou hast formed us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in thee”.<sup>45</sup> The purpose of our lives as image-bearers of God, is to fulfil the work of creation. We are stewards of God’s creation and as agency, our duty is to act on behalf of the creator. As agents, human beings are continuously a part of the making and unmaking of Creation.<sup>46</sup> A disaster like COVID-19 is a learning phase in the plan of God. True to Biblical wisdom, there is nothing new under the sun.<sup>47</sup> In the spirit of stewardship, humanity must learn from past experiences of pandemics and strive to live in harmony with creation.

Various faith traditions subscribe to the notion that disasters are products of angry gods who should be appeased through sacrifices. Analogically, God is brought into this equation because humanity has transgressed the ontological laws of nature and are receiving retribution in the form of disasters. Christians have often asked why the all-powerful, and all loving God should stop nature’s retribution.<sup>48</sup> At this point, it becomes necessary to distinguish between God’s judgement of a sinner and His justice. The Bible does not link disasters to God’s judgement for sinners but to His justice.<sup>49</sup> God’s justice co-exists with His love. He sacrifices His son on the cross for the atonement of the sins of humankind.

The view that God as a loving Father could have prevented a natural evil like COVID-19 on His people becomes unchristian when reflected in the context of God’s Justice. God gave human beings free will and preventing disasters which are products of human decision is synonymous with suppression of human free will.<sup>50</sup> With regards to the human free will, the Catholic Church teaches that;

The human person participates in the light and power of the divine Spirit. By his reason, he is capable of understanding the order of things established by the Creator. By free will, he is capable of directing himself toward his true good. He finds his perfection in seeking and loving what is true and good.<sup>51</sup>

The theology of disaster must then direct its reflection on the human contributions to natural evils which are often a product of man's disregard for the natural order of creation. John Paul II in his encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* affirms that development has a moral character and hence should, "take into account the nature of each being and of its mutual connection in an ordered system".<sup>52</sup> While scientific discoveries and change theories are necessary for a progressive life, Pope Francis warns that "change is something desirable, yet it becomes a source of anxiety when it causes harm to the world and to the quality of life of much of humanity".<sup>53</sup> In *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis develops a comprehensive theology of disasters. The urgent development of a theology of disasters will of necessity focus on environmental stewardship, climate justice, and disaster preparedness.<sup>54</sup> Theodicy understood from the man's contributions to natural evil has the potential to raise our human consciousness as God's stewards.

### Conclusion

This study has presented arguments in favour of the thesis that COVID-19 like most pandemics cannot be divorced from man's action or inaction. This conclusion does not suggest all-natural evils are man-made. It only acknowledges the God-given role of co-creation bestowed on human beings which in most cases has been abused. A theology of natural evil is theology of man's responsibility towards creation. As free agents, human beings have the capacity to build a better world where justice, reconciliation and respect for the environment can flourish. The study also argued that all disasters have an anthropogenic character and that man as God's co-creator has a responsibility to maintain creation in order. The view that disasters are punishments for sins committed, portrays God as a tyrant rather than a loving Father. Based on this observation, this study calls further theological research in the theology of disasters from an anthropocentric position.

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<sup>1</sup> Mathuna 28.

<sup>2</sup> Goats and Soda. Stories of Life in Changing World: The Coronavirus Crisis. <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/03/11/814474930/>

- coronavirus-covid-19-is-now-officially-a-pandemic-who-says. Accessed: 23 March 2021.
- <sup>3</sup> IFRC 2020. Major epidemics and pandemic diseases. <https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2018/11/12-EPIDEMIC-HR.pdf>. Accessed: 23 March 2021.
- <sup>4</sup> Pike 181.
- <sup>5</sup> Pryor 3.
- <sup>6</sup> Stump 393.
- <sup>7</sup> Swinburne 211.
- <sup>8</sup> Stump 396.
- <sup>9</sup> Stump 396.
- <sup>10</sup> Morgan and Wilkinson 199.
- <sup>11</sup> Petrucci, 109.
- <sup>12</sup> UNISDR 9.
- <sup>13</sup> Kumar 1.
- <sup>14</sup> 198.
- <sup>15</sup> Lewis and Maslin 2015.
- <sup>16</sup> 247.
- <sup>17</sup> 250-251.
- <sup>18</sup> #2.
- <sup>19</sup> Pope Benedict XVI 689.
- <sup>20</sup> 105.
- <sup>21</sup> Weichselgartner & Bertens 7
- <sup>22</sup> Uili et al 2
- <sup>23</sup> Genesis 3:16-19.
- <sup>24</sup> Genesis 7:17.
- <sup>25</sup> Genesis 19:24.
- <sup>26</sup> Exodus 7:4.
- <sup>27</sup> 2 Chronicles 7:13-14.
- <sup>28</sup> Romans 8:20-21.
- <sup>29</sup> Amos 3:6.
- <sup>30</sup> Reale, 2010.
- <sup>31</sup> Musana, 2018.
- <sup>32</sup> Baruch 3:4.
- <sup>33</sup> John 9:2.
- <sup>34</sup> Keller 84.
- <sup>35</sup> 84.
- <sup>36</sup> Bakena et al. 3.
- <sup>37</sup> ICSU, 25.
- <sup>38</sup> Carrington 1.
- <sup>39</sup> Martinus 1.
- <sup>40</sup> Pope Francis #33.
- <sup>41</sup> ICSU 7.
- <sup>42</sup> ICM 5.
- <sup>43</sup> Mouton 431.
- <sup>44</sup> Pityana, 1.
- <sup>45</sup> St Augustine, 1.12.
- <sup>46</sup> Pityana, 1.
- <sup>47</sup> Ecclesiastes 1:9.

<sup>48</sup> White 19.

<sup>49</sup> Mathuna 31.

<sup>50</sup> Lewis 21.

<sup>51</sup> CCC # 1704.

<sup>52</sup> John Paul 11, # 559.

<sup>53</sup> John Paul 11, # 559.

<sup>54</sup> Mitchell 52.

**Humanity Created in the Image of God: How do we Account for the Suffering in the World and what is our way out? A Paper on Christian Political Anthropology**

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This paper will look at the sacredness of humanity and to see the relationship between humanity and God. It also seeks to look at the suffering faced by humanity, a suffering which is by and large caused by fellow human beings and to provide possible recommendations to alleviating suffering. What can humanity do in the face of suffering? When will the cry of humanity end and what attitude should we take in the face of suffering? In writing this paper, some scholars will be considered including Karl Rahner (*God of my life: Encounters with Silence*), Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Theologiae*), M Shawn Copeland (*Enfleshing Freedom*) and other sufferings that are faced by humanity in this world mostly political. The problem of Covid- 19 is at the background of this suffering. The situation of Zimbabwe will be our focus. The paper will consider possible ways of alleviating suffering, invoking scholars like Sobrino, Shawn Copeland, Jonathan Sacks, Emmanuel Levinas and Viktor Frankl.

As we read through scripture, literature and other support systems, we are told and convinced that humanity is created in the image of God. In the *summa theologiae* we find very interesting questions including whether the image of God is in man and we find it well answered that yes, we are created in the image of God, the likeness is not of equality for there is in man a likeness to God though not perfect.<sup>1</sup> Christ is the only perfect image of God -the firstborn of all creation (Col 1:1-16). The image of God is perfect in Christ, but imperfect in us because of sin. We also hear that the image of God is found in man and not the other created things for it is humanity that is endowed with the intellect. We also see that angels are not more to the image of God than man, the image of God is found in all people male and female.<sup>2</sup> How does the image of God make humanity distinctive from other creatures? For Aquinas, human beings possess understanding and a mind. While all creatures bear some resemblance to God, only in a rational creature do we find resemblance to God in the manner of an image.<sup>3</sup> What makes humanity more is precisely

the intellect or mind.” This notion does not imply that God is like us, it only means we resemble God more than any other creature. Our existence is fully discovered through participation in the life of God in whom the human person finds the perfection of existence. This given rationality poses in us a moral aptitude by which we are capable of self-direction, we are responsible towards ourselves, others and towards the creator. The human person is endowed with an interior orientation, which is foundational for our “natural aptitude of knowing and loving God.”<sup>4</sup> We also understand what is morally good and bad and can distinguish between the two. The challenge is that, given this formation of humanity and rationality and our ability to transcend the physical and tap in rationality and morality, why do we cause suffering to others even amidst this pandemic which we can see the element of the human hand in it?

When we read the article: “encounters with silence”, Rahner is so much in awe about the marvels of God the creator. This is the God of our beginning and end<sup>5</sup>, the God of our joy and need, the God of my life. The God who is in trinity, the meaning of our life and the goal of our wanderings, the creator, the sustainer and pardoner. The one incomprehensible, God of my brethren, God of my fathers<sup>6</sup> the God who is a mystery to my life. According to the author, this is the God of my brethren, the God of my ancestors. This means we are one creation; we are one being. Why do we treat others badly? This is the God of my brethren. Why do we cause others to suffer? Cain, where is your brother Abel?

Given this understanding and seeing the reality of suffering in the world, how then do we account for the suffering? Yes, there are two kinds of suffering, one caused by humanity and the other one attributed to the omnipotent God. I want to look at the suffering perpetuated by people and not the suffering which is beyond humanity, one that we attribute to the creator with the question why does God allow or permit suffering. The paper is focusing on the suffering that is caused by humanity to the other.

Shawn Copeland recalls the importance of the body to which even God in Jesus Christ assumed. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.” Cf Jn. 1:1,14. The Word of God assumed

humanity that we might become God.<sup>7</sup> The teaching promotes the dignity and the value of the body. We see how brutally the body is undermined. For bodies are marked individual, particular, different, and vivid-through race, sex and gender, sexuality and culture.<sup>8</sup> We see in her writings showing how the black bodies suffered, especially women in America. Is it that we are different? Is the black person not equally human? Her goal was to set out themes that modulate the body.

Copeland writes that when black women are objectified, a serious problem arises for we know that human beings have a capacity for communion with God, they have a unique place in the world and are made in such a way that they commune with others, so slavery reduced or erased these basic convictions of Christianity.<sup>9</sup> There is a need to give back the dignity which black women deserve. Unfortunately, slavery made black bodies' objects, property or instruments for commercial plantations.<sup>10</sup> Black women were bought as objects of production. Enslaved women and men were objects of labour. Black women were also tools of reproduction. They were not allowed to go to school<sup>11</sup>, worship is one of those that consoled them as they prayed for life and freedom especially for their children. Some exchanged their lives for the freedom of their loved ones. Oppression assaults our interconnectedness by setting up dominative structural relations between social and cultural groups as well as between persons.<sup>12</sup>

We also encounter the suffering caused by humanity to others especially in Africa, where we have many challenges of political violence especially in Zimbabwe during and after elections. We see the death of many people during the war of liberation, both blacks and whites. After the independence, we see the massacre of the Ndebele people in a genocide: operation *gukurahundi* (clean up). We see people failing to express their democratic right to vote for the leadership they want. We see the poor having their houses demolished by the state especially during the clean-up campaign (Operation *Murambatsvina*). We see in Zimbabwe no employment and as such people go to South Africa so as to feed their families. As they go to South Africa, they are being killed brutally by the nationals identifying Zimbabweans as foreigners and hence different from us. All this is suffering created by humanity.

### **What should we do as we find ourselves in this suffering?**

Here I will employ five scholars who try to give solutions to this suffering:

#### **Dignity of difference**

Firstly, I will call for the dignity of differences to be employed as given by Jonathan Sacks. Most of these problems I raised above has to do with the issue of identity, whites enfleshing the freedom of black women, colonialism is the same, xenophobia in South Africa is the same and the Zimbabwean genocide between the Shona people and the Ndebele is the same story. We are living in a global village where politics, religion and so on affect us.<sup>13</sup> There are notable problems and conflicts emerging from religious beliefs and differences that those who do not share my faith are less human: their place is outside the doors of salvation. There is a call to universalism and particularism. The Hebrew Bible begins with universal humanity (Adam, Eve, Noah)<sup>14</sup>, and then proceeds to Particular (Abraham, Sarah, one wife, one people, Israel). Therefore, there is a need to think about others. We are all one creation regardless of the differences we have. Humanity should be taught to make space for difference. The understating of the Dignity of differences will help us respect the search for God in people of other faiths and reconcile the particularity of cultures and beliefs with the universality of the human condition.<sup>15</sup> Sacks suggested a radical solution. God, the creator of humanity, having made a covenant with all humanity, then turns to one person and commands it to be different, teaching humanity to make space for difference.<sup>16</sup> The unity of God is to be found in the diversity of creation.<sup>17</sup> Unity in heaven creates diversity on earth.<sup>18</sup> God is God of all humanity, but between Babel and the end of days no single faith is the faith of all humanity.<sup>19</sup> This understanding may end problems in the world.

#### **Activism**

The other solution to human suffering is to employ the principle of mercy as given by Sobrino. Focus on the great sin that crucifies and kills many people. Sobrino looks at the unjustly inflicted poverty which

produces both slow and violent death.<sup>20</sup> Sin is frequently transmitted through structures and the objective sin of Latin America is a destitution which marginalizes large human groups of people. Here we experience a situation of inhuman poverty in which millions of Latin Americans find themselves in and this really enslaves them, depriving them of dignity.<sup>21</sup> Here we find a society where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, a situation where the rich climb the ladder by stepping on others. Here we see people crying for justice. What faith demands first is liberation from this sinful reality and the humanization of the victims and then, by derivation, the rehabilitation of the sinner and the humanization of the offender.<sup>22</sup> Fighting against sin means, in the first place, like Jesus and the prophets, denouncing it, giving voice to the victims' cry and unmasking it. To eradicate sin, we must begin by denouncing the crucifixion and death of whole peoples; this is intolerable and the greatest evil.<sup>23</sup> We must fight against sin by destroying and building. We must destroy the structures of oppression and violence and build new structures of justice. Forgiving the sin of reality means converting it, setting up God's kingdom, a kingdom of justice, love and life.<sup>24</sup> It is a question of defending the poor like Oscar Romero did, the poor who live in a state of destitution. We seek justice in reality so that the poor can have life. These poor people who are suffering are the reasons why we should fight for remembering that even they are loved by God. Forgiving reality means loving-loving very much. In seeking this justice, we may face persecution and death and so we should be courageous. We need a fundamental spirituality of personal selflessness, radical self-giving, we need a faith rooted in God who defends the poor, God of liberation and resurrection for we know that outside the poor there is no salvation. When the poor are emancipated, we will then forgive the sinner. We have to face in all seriousness the Christian question of forgiveness of those who offend us.<sup>25</sup> Zimbabwe needs this approach too.

### **Eucharistic solidarity**

Another way of coming out of these sufferings is to employ the theology of M Shawn Copeland where she invites us to becoming one in the body of Christ. Copeland calls us to Eucharistic solidarity, a theology

which opposes racism, racism that divides people. Copeland tell the stories of lynching<sup>26</sup> : Copeland joins J. H. Cone's question: how could the Church not make the connection between the black bodies being lynched and the body of Christ on the Cross? "The idolatrous practices of slavery, lynching and white supremacy violate black bodies, blasphemes against God and defame the body of Christ." Such intrinsic evil threatens communion, the fruit of the Eucharist.<sup>27</sup> For her, the Eucharist is the counter-sign to the devaluation and violence done to the exploited and despised black bodies. As a community called Church, when we gather around the Eucharist, as Christ's body, we embrace with love and hope those who in their bodies have been despised and marginalized.<sup>28</sup> As Christ's body, we stand in solidarity to oppose all divisive and segregation of bodies. "Eucharistic solidarity teaches us to imagine, to hope for, and to create new possibilities."<sup>29</sup> Solidarity calls for the recognition and regard for exploited, despised poor women as they are God's own creation.<sup>30</sup> Solidarity preserves universality of love, without renouncing preference for these women of colour. In solidarity, the creator is worshipped, particularity is engaged and difference appreciated. Solidarity affirms the interconnectedness of human beings in common creatureliness.<sup>31</sup> Humanity is multiple, diverse, varied and concrete, yet one, whether black or white, male or female. Because that solidarity enfolds us, rather than dismisses others, we act in love, rather than refuse others, we respond in acts of self-sacrifice – committing ourselves to the long labour of creation, to the enfleshing freedom.<sup>32</sup> At the Lord's Table, we are re-ordered, re-membered, restored, and made one.<sup>33</sup> Zimbabwe needs this approach too.

### **The face of the other**

Another solution comes from Emmanuel Levinas who wants us to rethink the concept of the neighbour, the "other" through the encounter and the face of the other which leads to responsibility. Western philosophy has this understanding of the other as domination, totalization and mastery hence violence to the other through self-affirmation. Levinas wants us to understand that the other is dissimilar to and opposite of the self, of us and of the same. The characteristic of the other is a state of

being different from and alien to the social identity of a person and to the identity of the self.<sup>34</sup> The otherness refers to and identifies the characteristics of the who and what of the other. It is crucial according to Levinas that the self requires the other person for existence and in that way the self can be defined. This concept of the other is a basis for intersubjectivity. According to Levinas, the other is superior and prior to the self; the other is an entity of pure alterity (otherness). The other concerns me, and my relationship with the other as a neighbour gives meaning to my relations with all the others.<sup>35</sup>

According to Levinas, the source of moral ought is through the subjective, interpersonal encounter with the other. Ethics is born through encountering the other. From his understanding, encounter proceeds in two ways. One may encounter the ideal other or the real, but only the encounter with the real other in concrete life gives people the possibility of being. He challenges Western philosophy which reduced this encounter to the ideal. The other is perceived at the level of ideas, interactions of the mind. He wants people to encounter the real other in concrete life, live with the other so as to encounter rather than to have an idea of the other. With this encounter, there is inter-subjectivity based on the encounter on the level of sensibility, this inter-subjectivity based on the encounter with the real other is radical as opposed to encountering the ideal other rationally. Levinas posits that encountering the other ideally is exercising violence. When one encounters the other ideally, it leads to totalization because I look at the other, project myself and reduce the other to me. Husserl, like other Western philosophers, says the other is equal to me, and he is challenged by Levinas because of his reduction of the other to the same. I create the other within me; I see the other like me; therefore, I continue to reduce the other to self (totalization). Levinas challenges the Western philosophical notion which maintains people's equality saying that people are different. Accordingly, people should move from focusing on sameness to otherness.<sup>36</sup>

Levinas went on to challenge ontology in his article "Is Ontology Fundamental?" The reason he challenges that position is because of his awareness that "being" at the level of human existence is selfishness, for it is the affirmation of the self. For him this is not good for ethics.

Ontology for him rests on being. As we recall Levinas' admiration of the being of Heidegger, he soon goes on to criticize it. For him being is *conatus essendi*, meaning (an effort of striving to be, the tendency of being to persist); and it has a negative connotation. It is the affirmation of itself at the expense of the other. It is its effort to continue to be. To be is a survival instinct; to be myself; the origin of violence, all the wars, tears, bloodshed is caused by being. So Levinas wants us to go beyond being through metaphysics. Beyond being is the possibility of something other, devoting oneself to the other. Here, there is sacrifice, dying for the other and a responsibility for the other. Levinas does not live in the world of appearance, and so what is beyond being has to show it in the phenomena. The human face is the revelation of the other. In the face of the other, we see the traces of beyond being. According to him, responsibility to the other includes the denial of the self, the emptying of the self towards the other.<sup>37</sup>

He also brought some dichotomies to help us understand his position. The first is the "same" versus the "other". These two are opposites for the same is me and the other is not me; we are different. The challenge with the "same" is connected with knowing. If I see something different, I want to understand. What does that mean? I put all efforts to integrate the new, the other, with what I am already familiar with for we have acquisitive minds, minds with the intentionality of acquiring and integrating the other. I try to know or to comprehend the other. I dominate the other. For to know is a tendency of wanting to control and to dominate. Simply put, knowing is the imperialism of the self.<sup>38</sup> The other resists consumption. Is it appropriate to know the other? No, we imprison the other in our self. The other will say you do not know me. This is the existential resistance of the other to be taken over by the other. It is worth noting that we are able to know the other adequately within a certain horizon but never fully. Nevertheless, to know the other is not primordial; only the encounter is.

The other aspect he challenges is Truth. Traditional Western philosophy holds that truth rests in the same, where it becomes an instrument of mastery, where we refer the unknown to what I already know. If I see something different, other or new, I am likely to make every possible attempt to integrate this unknown into what is already familiar to me.

I try to reduce the otherness to the same. To know is to recognize. For example, a foreign language, I “master” it. I assimilate the otherness, I comprehend it. For Levinas, there is a form of truth alien to me, the one that I cannot understand. It summons me from outside me, and it requires me to settle under the rule of the other. There is also truth beyond me which I cannot even understand. Maybe it is God. The truth is not me. It is outside me. It summons me to leave myself and move towards the other.<sup>39</sup>

He also calls us to responsibility. According to Levinas, responsibility for the other is rooted within our subjective constitution.<sup>40</sup> Being ethical is being responsible for the other. This responsibility for the other is immediate and not only a matter of perception. As soon as someone comes into my life or looks at me, I quickly become responsible for him or her.

So, if we employ the philosophy of Levinas, the face of the other, understanding that the other is not the same, understanding the concept of truth and responsibility, suffering may be alleviated. Zimbabwe needs this approach too.

### **Logotherapy**

Now, in case we try all the possible means and yet we fail to remove suffering let us be helped by Victor Frankl. He believed that humans are motivated by a “will to meaning,” that is, a desire to find meaning in life. He argued that life can have meaning even in the most miserable of circumstances and that the motivation for living comes from finding that meaning.<sup>41</sup> He said “Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedom is to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances. This opinion was based on his experiences of suffering and his attitude of finding meaning through suffering. In this way, Frankl believed that when we can no longer change a situation, we are forced to change ourselves.<sup>42</sup> Logotherapy involves helping a patient find personal meaning in life.<sup>43</sup> Logotherapy that is, striving to find meaning in one’s life is the primary motivational force in people. So Logotherapy regards its assignment as that of assisting the patient to find meaning in his or her life<sup>44</sup>, here the patient can be anyone suffering even with this COVID 19. What matters is not the meaning of life in general but rather the specific

meaning of a person's life at a given moment.<sup>45</sup>

Frankl provided a brief overview of the theory in Man's Search for Meaning. He believed in three essential properties on which his theory and therapy were based. Firstly, each person has a healthy core, secondly, one's primary focus is to enlighten others to their own internal resources and provide the tools to use their inner core. Thirdly, life offers purpose and meaning but does not promise fulfilment or happiness.<sup>46</sup> These are the core properties according to him. To find meaning in life, he said it can be discovered in three distinct ways and these are: by creating a work or doing a deed, by experiencing something or encountering someone and by the attitude that we take towards unavoidable suffering.<sup>47</sup> Zimbabweans need this approach.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, suffering is real. It is to a greater degree caused by humanity. As addressed in the paper we need to alleviate suffering by fighting unjust structures (activism), embracing the dignity of differences, by employing the theology of Eucharistic solidarity and by considering the face of the other. However, if we do all this and yet we fail to achieve the ending of suffering, we need to consider the attitude with which we take in suffering. We should remember that we are created in the image of God, we have rationality which poses in us a moral aptitude by which we are capable of self-direction, we are responsible towards ourselves, others and towards creation. We should always remember that even those whom we subject to suffering, especially the poor, are loved by God. We should also remember that outside the poor there is no salvation.

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<sup>1</sup> Aquinas Thomas. *The Summa Theologiae*. 2nd and revised ed <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/1093.htm>

<sup>2</sup> *The Summa Theologiae*. 2nd and revised ed <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/1093.htm>

<sup>3</sup> *The Summa Theologiae*. 2nd and revised ed <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/1093.htm>

<sup>4</sup> *The Summa Theologiae*. 2nd and revised ed <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/1093.htm>

<sup>5</sup> Karl Rahner. "God of My Life" In *Encounters with Silence* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press. 1960), 3.

<sup>6</sup> Karl Rahner. "God of My Life" In *Encounters with Silence* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press. 1960), 3.

<sup>7</sup> M. Shawn Copeland. *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being*. (Minneapolis:

- Fortress Press, 2010),55.
- <sup>8</sup>M. Shawn Copeland. *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010),56.
- <sup>9</sup>M. Shawn Copeland. *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010),56.
- <sup>10</sup>M. Shawn Copeland. *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010),66.
- <sup>11</sup>M. Shawn Copeland. *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 67.
- <sup>12</sup>M. Shawn Copeland. *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 100.
- <sup>13</sup>Johnathan Sacks. *The Dignity of Difference*. (London: Continuum, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2003), 43.
- <sup>14</sup>Johnathan Sacks. *The Dignity of Difference*. (London: Continuum, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2003), 50-51.
- <sup>15</sup>Johnathan Sacks. *The Dignity of Difference*. (London: Continuum, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2003), 52.
- <sup>16</sup>Johnathan Sacks. *The Dignity of Difference*. (London: Continuum, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2003), 53.
- <sup>17</sup>Johnathan Sacks. *The Dignity of Difference*. (London: Continuum, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2003), 53.
- <sup>18</sup>Johnathan Sacks. *The Dignity of Difference*. (London: Continuum, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2003), 54.
- <sup>19</sup>Johnathan Sacks. *The Dignity of Difference*. (London: Continuum, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2003), 55.
- <sup>20</sup>Jon Sobrino. "Latin America: Place of Sin, Place of Forgiveness," in *The Principle of Mercy: Taking People from the Cross* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994), 59.
- <sup>21</sup>Puebla conference of bishops, 330.
- <sup>22</sup>Jon Sobrino. "Latin America: Place of Sin, Place of Forgiveness," in *The Principle of Mercy: Taking People from the Cross* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994), 60.
- <sup>23</sup>Jon Sobrino. "Latin America: Place of Sin, Place of Forgiveness," in *The Principle of Mercy: Taking People from the Cross* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994), 61.
- <sup>24</sup>Jon Sobrino. "Latin America: Place of Sin, Place of Forgiveness," in *The Principle of Mercy: Taking People from the Cross* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994), 61.
- <sup>25</sup>Jon Sobrino. "Latin America: Place of Sin, Place of Forgiveness," in *The Principle of Mercy: Taking People from the Cross* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994), 63.
- <sup>26</sup>M. Shawn Copeland. *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010),122.
- <sup>27</sup>M. Shawn Copeland. *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 109.
- <sup>28</sup>M. Shawn Copeland. *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 127.
- <sup>29</sup>M. Shawn Copeland. *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 128.

- <sup>30</sup>M. Shawn Copeland. *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 128.
- <sup>31</sup>M. Shawn Copeland. *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 128.
- <sup>32</sup>M. Shawn Copeland. *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 128.
- <sup>33</sup>M. Shawn Copeland. *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 128.
- <sup>34</sup>[https://ultimatepopculture.fandom.com/wiki/Other\\_\(philosophy\)](https://ultimatepopculture.fandom.com/wiki/Other_(philosophy)). Accessed on 23 March, 2021.
- <sup>35</sup>Emmanuel Levinas. *Otherwise, than Being or Beyond Essence*. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 159.
- <sup>36</sup>Peperzak Adriaan. "Philosophy and the Idea of the Infinite." *To the Other. An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*. (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1993), 98.
- <sup>37</sup>Emmanuel Levinas. *Entre Nous*. Trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 1-3.
- <sup>38</sup>Peperzak Adriaan. "Philosophy and the Idea of the Infinite." *To the Other. An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*. (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1993), 98.
- <sup>39</sup>Emmanuel Levinas. *Totality and Infinity*. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1961), 62.
- <sup>40</sup>Emmanuel Levinas. *Totality and Infinity*. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1961), 21.
- <sup>41</sup>Viktor E Frankl. *Man's Search for Meaning*. Revised and updated. (New York: Washington square, 1946), 120.
- <sup>42</sup>Viktor E Frankl. *Man's Search for Meaning*. Revised and updated. (New York: Washington square, 1946), 135.
- <sup>43</sup>Viktor E Frankl. *Man's Search for Meaning*. Revised and updated. (New York: Washington square, 1946), 121.
- <sup>44</sup>Viktor E Frankl. *Man's Search for Meaning*. Revised and updated. (New York: Washington square, 1946), 121.
- <sup>45</sup>Viktor E Frankl. *Man's Search for Meaning*. Revised and updated. (New York: Washington square, 1946), 131.
- <sup>46</sup>Viktor E Frankl. *Man's Search for Meaning*. Revised and updated. (New York: Washington square, 1946), 131.
- <sup>47</sup>Viktor E Frankl. *Man's Search for Meaning*. Revised and updated. (New York: Washington square, 1946), 133.

## **Homosexuality in the Light of Image and Likeness: A Christian Anthropological Approach**

*Marvellous Tawanda Murungu, O.Carm.*

### **Introduction**

The article discusses the Theology of the Body's concept of Man as created in the Image of God which can be traced from antiquity since it has a rich and long tradition. This is evident in the works of Patristics and doctors of the Church like Augustine and Aquinas, who devotedly wrote about "the body and its relation to the soul, created by God in his image and destined for bodily resurrection" (Pope Pius XI) although some promulgated doctrines are now understood erroneously in some way. Furthermore, the article examines the relevance of the pedagogy of this concept that man was created in the image of God in light of the challenge of homosexuality which can be traced from the Old Testament excerpts for example, Leviticus 18 and 20. To begin, it is worth familiarizing with the Theology of the Body to help one understand the scope of this project. John Paul II describes Theology of the Body as "a specific, evangelical, Christian pedagogy that unfolds and explains the revelation of the body by reflecting on human experience".<sup>1</sup> "Pedagogy seeks to educate man by setting the requirements before him, giving reasons for them, and indicating the ways that lead to their fulfilment".<sup>2</sup> Given that, this article's scope, will investigate in an in-depth manner the concept of Man-not in the literary sense as some have mistakenly interpreted-created in the *imago Dei* and examine the significance of that teaching to the modern-day challenge of homosexuality as understood by varied disciplines.

### ***Imago Dei (Image of God)***

The origins on which this symbol of image and likeness has been referenced is the Genesis account found in the Pentateuch. Genesis promulgates that God said "let us make man in our own image (*tzelem*) after our likeness (*demuth*)".<sup>3</sup> They were to have dominion over all creation for instance, over the birds of the air, the fish of the sea, cattle and every creeping thing on earth (Gen 1:26-27). There is a shift from

passive verb “let there be” in the previous verses which narrates other days of creation to a hortative “let us a make” which alerts one to anticipate something special and, in this case, it was the human beings created in the image of God. As a result, this gives human beings a prominent place because God now understood to be Triune made a deliberate action. However, this position is mostly likely to be abused at the expense of other creatures because there is the element of dominion and superiority above other creatures as evidenced over the centuries.<sup>4</sup>

It is important to note that this Genesis account has become the hinge of a tradition that has led the Theology of the Body to understand that God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them (Gen 1:26-27). Following from that first chapter of Genesis which is the point of departure, it means that humanity is created in the image of God “not only through the gift of our intellect and free will or through our ability to know and to choose, but it is also through our ability to possess ourselves and then give ourselves to another person, forming a communion of persons in love, since God who is love and also a communion of persons in the Trinity”.<sup>5</sup> This serves to help one to understand the image of God in terms of the holistic approach. The holistic approach dismisses views like that of Philo which emphasized the intellect and will. This tradition of Philo was even exacerbated by prominent doctors of the Church, for example Augustine who emphasized the power of the soul, intellect and will. However, the holistic approach understands the image of God to capture a human person as a whole that is body, soul and spirit. The Genesis account does not emphasize one aspect of God at the expense of the other. Thus, a human person is a psychometric unity-the corporeal animated man-, body and soul together that is the image of God. This takes one to another dimension of respecting the body as much he or she respects the soul. Henceforth, an abuse of the corporeal nature is a misunderstanding because we will be considering it not necessary and not making it fully functional yet it is the image of God.

### **The Function of the Image of God**

It is in that light that St John Paul II promulgates that “Man became the ‘image and likeness’ of God not only through his own humanity, but also through the communion of persons which man and woman form right from the beginning...Man becomes the image of God not so much in the moment of solitude as in the moment of communion. Right ‘from the beginning,’ he is not only an image in which the solitude of a person who rules the world is reflected, but also, and essentially, an image of an inscrutable divine communion of persons”.<sup>6</sup> In addition, “the human body bore in itself, in the mystery of creation, an unquestionable sign of the image of God”.<sup>7</sup> On this note the Theology of the Body opens up to the function of the Image of God that is relational. This aspect of relationality in the genesis account is developed until chapter 2. God is triune, relational hence human beings are called to be relational with God, other human beings and whole creation. To state that a human being is created as a being like God means that persons can enter into a relationship with the creator.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* concurs with the above assertion and summarizes God’s intention and work to his own image but also to all creation as it stated that “the Word of God and his Breadth are the origin of the being and life of every creature”.<sup>8</sup> In other words God created everything through his word and action (Gen 1:7-16). So, the *ruach*-breadth was the protagonist of creation which is expressed by the Psalm: “when you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breadth, they die and return to the dust. When you send forth your spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth” (Ps 104:29-30).<sup>9</sup> This affirms Pauline’s literature (Romans 8) that God created Him that he might be preeminent to everything. Henceforth, the affirmation that the Spirit sustains creation means that creation is marked by divine goodness. The Spirit becomes the eternal link between Father and the Son. Analogously, the Spirit acts in creation so that creation can experience the essential mystery of life that is the communion of human beings with God, with others and with all reality. This prompts the salvific meaning of creation: God creating with a plan that human beings participate in the divine will and contemplate the very life of the Trinity.<sup>10</sup>

As a result, it becomes plausible to state that humanity was created to be in communion with God, others as well as creation since everything resembles divine goodness and the spirit in us provides the link between creation and the Godhead.

Secondly, the other function is dominion. This suggests that humanity is created to represent who God is and execute authority. It is in the “nature of an image to allow what is represented to appear; so, where the person appears God also appears. In other words, humanity are stewards in creation, in the event that there are no stewards they dehumanize themselves”.<sup>11</sup> The duty of humanity is to co-create, not abuse. Following from the above role of the Holy Spirit in creation, it is evident from scriptures that the word of God was made into reality owing its existence to the action of the Holy Spirit.<sup>12</sup> Two important tenets that come clear, is that the universe began and is sustained through the Holy Spirit. So the world exists in virtue of the creator Spirit. In addition, the continuance is profoundly spiritual because everything is sustained in the Spirit. Therefore, the expression that “it is good” finds its relevance (Gen 1:10) in understanding creation. In other words, creation in the spirit becomes the manifestation of the Word through which the Father created the universe because All things came into being through Him (John 1:3).<sup>13</sup> Therefore, it is plausible to practice contemplation of creation understanding it in-terms of the divine traces hidden in each and every being that is the wisdom and goodness of God the Creator who created everything through His Word. *Laudato Si’* stated in the same line of thought that “the originally harmonious relationship between human beings and nature has become conflictual” because of anthropocentrism (Gen 3:17-19).<sup>14</sup> Humanity because of dominion over creation they have exploited the earth for their benefit to the extent that they have caused climatic changes like global warming and water pollution making the mother earth inhabitable. It is in this light that humanity ought to take care of creation because they are stewards of earth since creation is like an open book capable of making known God and his design of love.<sup>15</sup> It becomes all humanity obligation to use the earth’s goods responsibly, co-create because other living beings have a value of their own in God’s eyes: “by their mere existence they bless him and give him glory”<sup>16</sup> and indeed,

“the Lord rejoices in all his works” (Ps 104:31).<sup>17</sup> Thus, understanding creation that exists and is sustained by the Spirit, will help humanity to understand their second function as the image of God in creation.

### **Theology of the Body on Relationality between humans**

Moreover, the Theology of the Body develops on the facet of humanity’s function of relationality. It states that human beings ought to relate with others through their bodies which adds up to the discussion to understand the significance of the Imago Dei according to St John Paul II on the challenge of homosexuality. On the basis of the Genesis account, the exegesis highlighted that in the beginning, the naked body prompted Adam and Eve to live their call to love, their call to spiritual and bodily communion. This call to form a communion of persons was meant to be lived through their bodies. The ability of the body to show us our call to love is the nuptial (spousal/conjugal) meaning of the body. Their nakedness, far from being of less significance, carry with itself a lot of pearls of wisdom about their love for each other and about the purity of their hearts. Since shame is a result of being viewed as an object to be used by another person, Adam and Eve’s lack of shame demonstrates to us that they both saw and received each other as a gift and sought only to give themselves to one another, not to use the other. Therefore, we fulfil the reason for our existence by loving.<sup>18</sup> Our physical bodies were made precisely to show us this and be the means by which we accomplish this. Hence, for John Paul II “the human body includes right from the beginning...the capacity of expressing love, that love in which the person becomes a gift – and by means of this gift – fulfils the meaning of his being and existence.”<sup>19</sup> Given that, Adam and Eve understood their calling and as a result they beheld each other with God’s eyes, who “saw everything he had made, and behold, it was very good” (Gen. 1:31). They read in each other’s body, which was a sign of the other person, a language of love, which each welcomed and reciprocated.

### **Homosexuality vis-a-vis the Imago Dei**

Scripture as a source of theology highlights that homosexuality has been perceived as an abomination, a sin that invited God’s wrath for

instance, the account of Sodom and Gomorrah and Leviticus 18 and 20. It is plausible to understand it and possibly how it is challenged by the Theology of the Body. Homosexuality can be defined as a “persistent and predominant attraction of a sexual-genital nature to persons of one’s own sex”.<sup>20</sup> Predominant in sense that there might be a degree of erotic interest in the other sex and persistent is used to mean that erotic feelings toward someone of the same sex have persisted beyond the adolescent phase.<sup>21</sup> Varied theories have been postulated as to how it becomes a reality. For the sake of this discussion, I will propose two that are Moberly’s thought and Aardweg’s thought. Moberly states that depth psychology gives data that same sex love is a normal and legitimate developmental need. However, this valid and universal love need was not fulfilled on the usual developmental time table. In other words, a homosexual has been unable to meet the normal developmental need for the attachment to the parent of the same sex.<sup>22</sup> Homosexuality in this theory is a reflection of the past relationship difficulties that is the emotional unavailability of the parent, neglect, and this led to the repression of the child’s attachment to the parent of the same sex. So, homosexuality becomes a manifestation of the person trying to make up for the missing growth. Whereas, Aardweg promulgates transitory homosexuality which maybe a phase of development and chronic homosexuality which lies in one’s feelings, not in one’s manifest behaviour. For Him homosexuality is learned not innate.<sup>23</sup> Given that, one can have a sense how homosexuality come to manifest.

Although the theories have elucidated homosexuality, the theology of the body can be of significance to this challenge. However, it is plausible to state that the Sacred Scripture, particularly the genesis account, cannot be the only source that needed some elucidation. The theology of the Body as already highlighted emphasized the image of God that is God ordained as that between man and woman relationship. The Genesis 1 and 2 shows that the heterosexual relationship is both ideal and norm of sexual behaviour. Which implies that incorporating other social sciences like depth psychology theories, one can realise that homosexuality is a disability. Theology of the body informs the challenge of homosexuality that there is need for change of this sexual orientation. Even if the

hormonal feelings of a person are homosexual, it does not give the person the right to actualize it because it becomes a sin. Thus, in consultation with reported literature and pastoral care, theology of the body will help people change their homosexuality orientation. They are people who have been helped who are now physically and emotional heterosexuals in successful marriages.<sup>24</sup> However, this help will need self-motivation on the person who is homosexual, that he or she needs to change and find a skilled therapist who in turn fosters self-acceptance, self-insight and the spiritual dimension essential for the personal change. Unfortunately, this demands stable financial resources since this therapy is not affordable to many people which is a call for pastoral concern to ensure that the theology of the body relationality is put into praxis.<sup>25</sup> Given that, the essence of the theology of the body to this challenge is to inform the expected relationality and possibly inform the pastoral care for the need to attend to this challenge and curb it.

### **Conclusion**

This article has discussed in an in-depth manner the concept of the image and likeness from the Theology of the Body. It has been demonstrated that this concept is hinged on the Genesis account and the human person ought to be understood holistically, because giving priority to one aspect of this concept will endanger the other to more vulnerability and dehumanization of the person which is the hindrance to being fully alive. Furthermore, this concept was discussed in terms of functions that are dominion and relationality. This enlightened to the view that God intended that humans relate to Him rather, to other humanity and creation as well fuelling the aspect of co creation when understanding the dominion function. Theology of the body has been elaborated on the relationship of humanity in order to inform the challenge of homosexuality. Given the significance of theology of the Body, one can plausibly hold that homosexuality is an abnormality which pastoral care ought to consider to help those implicated in such regard. So, *Theology of the Body* informs humanity about the God ordained relationship so that those with this disability find necessary assistance.

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- <sup>1</sup> John Paul II. *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*. Trans. M. Waldstein. (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006.) 360.
  - <sup>2</sup> *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, 360.
  - <sup>3</sup> Hall Douglas, John. *Imaging God: Dominion as Stewardship*. (New York: Grand Rapids. Friendship Press, 1986.) 70.
  - <sup>4</sup> Manobo, Blazio. Class Lecture. *Christian Anthropology*. Holy Trinity College. Harare. August 2020.
  - <sup>5</sup> *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, 2
  - <sup>6</sup> *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, 46.
  - <sup>7</sup> *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, 113.
  - <sup>8</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. (London: Geoffrey Chapman-Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1999.) 703.
  - <sup>9</sup> Theological-Historical Commission for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. *The Holy Spirit, Lord and Giver of Life*. Trans. Bono Agostino. (New York: The Crossword Publishing Company, 1997.) 34-35.
  - <sup>10</sup> Edwards, Jonathan. "The Priority of Holiness". *Theological Journal* 7 (2013) 48.
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## **The impact of Covid-19 on the family, socio-cultural life and the transformation of spiritual life**

*Paul T. Tivenga*

When God created everything, He said “this is good” and indeed all that He created was good. (Genesis 1 vs 31) Man was put in charge of all these good creatures to keep them and take care of everything. When we read through the scriptures and come across these verses in the Book of Genesis, someone is tempted to ask, are the challenges we face today a creation of the same God who created wonderful and good things? One may ask, are these pandemics the good creations of God? Some may ask, where is God in all these pandemics? This is a million-dollar question. Life is made up of a mixture of both good and bad things, happy and sad moments, ups and downs, this is the journey of life. God is present in all these situations and He invites us to see Him in the calamities we encounter in our day to day lives. In this paper I am going to put my focus on the Covid 19 pandemic, how it has affected the world, and how the people are going through their lives faced with this pandemic.

When unexpected events visit human beings, we devise means and ways to deal with these events, and at times the path to finding solutions will be a rough path that requires self-sacrifice, selflessness as well as courage. The Covid-19 pandemic has changed the world in many ways and forced misery onto untold millions. It has become a thorn in the flesh to the global population. When it started no one expected it to last this long, people thought it was a fast-passing event, little did we know it was here to stay. It has now become a thing to live with, a new normal. Solutions are to be found, these include solutions to completely put the challenge to an end, or solutions to minimize the impact of the pandemic, it might also be solutions to embrace the challenge and live with it as a new normal.

Due to Covid -19, lives have been lost, families have been broken, social life has been affected and the spiritual life has been transformed. Many things are no longer the same and some permanent damages have happened in the lives of many people such that it will be a thing to remember forever in the lives of many people. Some wounds will take

forever to heal, but life has to go on, the major question is, “How?”

### **Family Life**

Since the start of the Covid -19 pandemic, most of the countries have been imposing lockdowns after lockdowns as a way of reducing the spread of the virus. Some of the restrictions at some point confined people in their homes with very minimal outdoor movement. Families would spend the entirety of their days indoors, and this brought its own share of problems within families, as well as some share of good moments for the same families.

Family union and togetherness was strengthened due to the spending of quite a reasonable amount of time together, spouses got ample time to understand each other better, as well and time to understand their children better. Before the pandemic, individuals had very busy daily schedules that could not allow them room to be together as these lockdowns had. Parents could spend the greater parts of their days at work, and children at school as a result school teacher could spend more time with the children compared to the children’s own parents. During these strict lockdowns, social media was blooming with shared photos of some spouses helping each other do the cooking, baking and other household chores. This was a sign that they were afforded an opportunity to share some quality time and build stronger marital bonds, and this is a very positive thing indeed.

On the other hand, parents had to replace school teachers in helping their children with school work, as a result they got a chance to observe their children’s performance at school, understanding their major strengths and weaknesses and this has a very positive impact in parent and child relationships. So, in other words the pandemic offered families some kind of opportunity to discover new things and unearth some hidden facts that were not visible to them for quite a long time in their families. It helped a lot that it pointed out to the families some of their family problems that needed urgent attention and some got time to solve such problems and build much better and successful families.

However, the confinement of people to their homes as a remedy to curbing Covid -19, has in a way caused a lot of suffering to quite a number

of people. Emotional stress, financial problems, anxieties especially among the young ones, as well as domestic violence and abuse among spouses. Due to spending time together, some partners could not manage to cope with their differences resulting in quarrelling and possibly fighting, leading to emotional abuse, as well as physical abuse. Some families were completely broken, because they could not manage it during the new setups which were caused by the pandemic. This is a very sad thing to note and it is very heart-breaking and some of the damages caused are irreparable.

At some point when I was listening to one radio program, I came across some very heart-breaking confession from one of the youths, who was sharing his lockdown experiences on air. He pointed out that, staying indoors for such long hours caused him and his little sister a lot of emotional stress to the extent that they resorted to watching movies containing explicit content, this led them into getting sexually intimate on a number of occasions and he confessed, they were doing this as a way of dealing with the emotional stress that was caused by staying indoors for too long, sadly the sister became pregnant. These are some of the bad situations that the pandemic brought to the families and it lives an indelible mark in the lives of the family. Some young people become drug abusers due to the pandemic, opting to take some intoxicating stuff as a way of reducing stress, and this has led most of them astray to the extent that finding them back will be a mammoth task.

Lives were lost, and this turned out to be the most unbearable situation resulting from Covid -19, we heard of people losing their dearly loved ones and in some instances many members of the same family lost their lives within a short space of time and this is a very difficult predicament to embrace for anyone. To make matters worse, funeral gatherings and burial processes were done in such a way that family members were not able to come together in the usual way, to mourn their loved ones. At such difficult moments, families need to be together so that they help one another to carry the heavy burden, unfortunately Covid -19 could not allow that to happen, it is so disheartening. This pandemic turned out to be a destroyer for many and the damages it caused are so severe.

## **Spiritual Life**

Since the start of Covid -19, a lot has changed, social gatherings banned or in some instances restricted to a limited number of people, religious gatherings not spared, same rules being applied to all. Congregations are now abnormal, rather is it the new normal? Only God knows. Where is the Church heading to in the face of these events? Will the Church be the same again after this pandemic? Many minds are spinning with such questions and they are probably searching for answers.

So, can we say Covid -19 has given us an opportunity to transform our faith, or it has negatively affected our faith? In my personal opinion this is a chance to work on our faith on an individual level, as far as communal gatherings have been affected, individuals and families have to take this time to build their small parishes in families. Giving themselves time to pray in order to strengthen their faith and that of their families. A family that prays together stays together, during this time where it is difficult to gather in large congregations for prayer, it is rather the time to gather and pray together within our families, thus transforming our families into our localized parishes, this is a chance to reflect and pray that God gives us the strength to keep on moving in the positive direction in as far as our spiritual lives are concerned.

As we sanitize our hands to protect our lives from the pandemic, it's also time to sanitize our hearts against the devil and his companions, who are after the destruction of our faith, we have to always sanitize our hearts to become purer and more contrite. It is time of introspection, gauging our level of faith to see if we are in a better position as far as eternal life is concerned. It is time to regularly wash our souls from sin as much as we wash our hands with soap to protect our lives from Covid -19. Keeping our souls clean from every evil is to be our priority, it is time to take good care of our souls such that when the time comes, we will be ready for eternal life.

It is time to social distance ourselves from every evil, a time to run away from anything that we suspect to be contagious to our faith. Anything that can separate us from the love of God, it is time to keep a distance from all these. This is the time to prepare as many home remedies as we can in order to protect our faith from contamination. A time

to design prayer schedules within our home, so that we keep watch in prayer. The pandemic has transformed everything, it is therefore a call for us to be transformed in our minds and device ways to keep us and our families focused on this journey to eternal life. No one knows how long this pandemic will stay with us; hence we have to find ways to continue with it amongst us. This will result in some permanent changes in the way we live our lives, and the spiritual way of living is not spared.

### **Socio-cultural life**

A human being is a social being, but Covid -19 has turned us into anti-social beings, the call for social distancing now means that people are being forced to stay away from their loved ones. It is a very tough situation to live in, however thanks to the advancement in technology people have resorted to using social media communication channels to keep in touch with their pears and families. Though this is does not have the same impact as people visiting each other sharing some special, as well as some bad moments together. According our cultural norms when one dies, people will visit the bereaved family to pay their condolences as well as grieving together with the family, but due to Covid -19 people had to pay their condolences over the phone or through social media, this being a diversion of our culture in a way, but this is not by choice but by situation. A lot of events like weddings, graduation ceremonies and many other celebratory events were postponed or even cancelled. I know of some couples who had to indefinitely postpone their weddings and went on to live together before solemnizing their marriages, these are all the impacts of Covid 19 on the socio-cultural life of many people.

### **Conclusion**

Challenges are part of people's lives and at some point, people have to embrace them and accept the challenges to be part of them, some challenges will get to the extent of completely changing the way people live, and this is the same thing that transpired because of Covid -19. It has transformed family life, socio-cultural life as well as the spiritual life for many. A lot of things may no longer be the same again, anyway it is part of life.

## **COVID -19 and the Vulnerability of Children (0-5 years): A Question to Medical Practitioners?**

*Sr. Ednella Muchingamwa, HLMC.*

What future generation will be there since the outbreak of COVID-19? Will those growing today be physically fit as nature without COVID-19 had intended it? How are we nurturing the young ones to make sure that as they silently fight the Corona virus disease no damage is done to their development? Will their cognitive development and memory be built up as it should be without COVID-19? What measures has there been to look at this?

These are some of the questions that have been going through my mind as we sail in the world of COVID-19. The Gestalt psychology that human attention is captured by all those phenomena known to human consciousness than those stimuli that are constant has been a reality for me today.<sup>1</sup> However, I do not intend to discard research on COVID-19 concerning children and babies that have been done so far. There is vast information from (UNICEF 2020), (WHO 2019 -2020) and other stakeholders who are dwelling mostly on secondary effects of COVID-19 upon children. In addition, recently the health researchers are saying “children are not currently eligible to receive the vaccine.”<sup>2</sup> Perhaps, one would ask a question whether the babies and children will not be affected in the near future. A minority have looked at how children are falling behind in their psychological and social development necessitated by the COVID-19 environment in which they are developing. My article is not meant to imply that the effect of COVID-19 can affect the health of uninfected babies and young ones nor is it meant to imply that the pandemic cannot be looked at by examining its current effects and infections as has been ably and tremendously done. I seek to present a pro-responsive perspective on the pandemic looking at children who are a vulnerable group in any circumstance. Consequently, this article seeks to raise an alarm to the readers to pay attention to this constant reality which is a fruit of my experience I had since March 2020. Possibly, it is focused in Zimbabwe, and probably Africa. I am concerned about children, especially the very young ones aged 0-5 years.

As I walk in the streets and in the country from March 24, 2020 to date, I see mothers carrying children on their backs, the child's mouth open, the nose not protected and the little one is innocently fast asleep. Fathers also walk around holding babies in their hands. Yes, babies should not put on masks. So far medical science is still researching and has so far with statistics proved that COVID-19 affects children and babies but to a lesser degree than it does to adults. Hence, as Gestalt puts it, can it not be that the medical practitioners and concerned stakeholders are relaxing a bit as we see mothers move around with babies at their back.<sup>3</sup> I would like to give reference to the 1918 – 1919 Spanish flu. It was in three waves. The infant mortality rate was different and increasing at each wave. If the COVID-19 is also coming in waves, are we waiting for it to affect children so that quick measures can be taken?

In addition, COVID-19 is a respiratory viral disease. Could there be any impact on the development and growth of the lung capacity and lung flexibility of these under-fives who are exposed to the COVID-19 environment and are constantly fighting this virus and remain negative. At present one can safely say probably their lungs are more resistant to COVID-19 than adults. Consequently, they are in the environment where at first the virus did not infect the under-fives. Now because of the increase in the number of adults infected, the children and babies are more exposed and prone to the virus hence the probability that the rate of them being infected may rise. Those infected are not of much concern to me but those who remain negative though they are in the environment of COVID-19. I am of the assumption that when the young ones are in an environment of COVID -19, they breathe it, but their developing system fights it in one way or another. My question and worry are, in this process of continuously fighting the virus is there no "damage or lagging behind" that may come as after effects to the natural development of the child?

Though lock down measures have been put in place, both at national and international levels, there are also circumstances in which the under-fives have to move with their mothers. What further measures can be put to protect them? Moreover, the development of the Coronavirus Vaccine research also presumes that since children and the young ones "have low rates of severe disease and deaths they will not be prioritized for

the vaccination during the early vaccine deployment.”<sup>4</sup> I also recalled Gelstat here when he alluded to the fact that our attention is captured by something moving rather than what is relatively still and that to all those phenomena that in this way attract our attention we attribute a higher degree of reality than the ones we do not know only because for the moment they are more important to us. I would like to imagine a ship’s radar scanner. It is a directional scanner used to scan objects in the space of the ship. However, the ship radar scanner is not able to see vast areas where there are no rocks. Hence with regards to COVID -19 and babies one can probably say human consciousness is prone to this myopic way of looking at things and temporarily screen away anything that is not immediately important to our scanning system based on sensing danger. In addition, a ship radar scanner does not see the state of the object whether it is empty or damaged. What it scans is that the route is not safe and can lead to collision. In reference to COVID – 19 and babies, is the Gestalt idea that human consciousness ignores constant stimuli and concentrates on troublesome things not an eye opener to the probability of setting up quick preventive measures for children and babies against COVID -19?

In conclusion, my experience of hearing the after effects of Covid 19 from those who have recovered is that there is loss of memory for some time and bodily weakness. If these are some of the after effects How assured are we as nations that the young ones WHOSE IMMUNE SYSTEM IS FIGHTING THE VIRUS HERE AND NOW AND REMAIN NEGATIVE, HAVE NO DAMAGE THAT IS DONE TO THEIR PHYSICAL FITNESS AS WELL AS TO THE GROWTH OF THEIR BRAIN ESPECIALLY THEIR MEMORY? WHAT GENERATION IS TO COME OUT OF THIS COVID-19 ERA?

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<sup>1</sup> healthline.com/health-news

<sup>2</sup> healthline.com/health-news

<sup>3</sup>Mads Soegaard, Gestalt principles of form perception, <https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/book/the-glossary-of-human-computer-interaction/gestalt-principles-of-form-perception> (accessed 8 February 2021).

<sup>4</sup> [adc.bmj.com/content/early/2021/01/04/archdischild.2020-321225](http://adc.bmj.com/content/early/2021/01/04/archdischild.2020-321225)

## **Coronavirus: A possible vehicle of paradigm shift in human consciousness**

*Lloyd H. Champiruka, O.Carm.*

“The greatest souls are awakened out of suffering and the most impressive personalities endure many scars”.<sup>1</sup> The great Paul was awakened out of a massive blow, likewise, a Happy Easter Sunday came out of Good Friday. Or, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (John 1: 46). In fact, “There is a season for everything, a time for every occupation under heaven...” (Ecc 3:1ff). There is a reason for everything! In the life cycle of the leaf, the leaf remains a leaf but with a different appearance in different seasons, and with a different mission at a particular given time. The question might be, is a leaf accepting the present moment, regardless of its status? Every stage can be more powerful if it accepts the present moment and also makes use of every stage of its life. I shall make use of this leaf-image as the article continues.

Now, the principal aim of this paper is a quest in trying to approach the reality of Covid-19 in a new prism. Thus, I think this deadly pandemic (Covid-19) can be a possible vehicle of a paradigm shift in human consciousness. To demonstrate this position, I have three points to present: (1) the deadly nature of Coronavirus particularly on the reality of death, (2) how this pandemic can be understood to be a vehicle of a paradigm shift, then (3) embracing the art of consciousness rather than compulsiveness. Does it mean we have to fight through the bad days in order to earn the best of ourselves? I think so! Thus, this article seeks to shift one’s consciousness from compulsiveness in these challenging moments of the deadly virus.

Covid-19 shall be understood as a deadly virus whose origin is still not clear and consciousness as a complete union of oneself with his/her intelligence. This shall be tackled in detail as the article unfolds.

### **The world gasps for breath**

To begin with:

...to live is to suffer, to survive is to find meaning in the suffering. If there is a purpose in life at all, there must be a purpose in suffering

and in dying. But no man can tell another what this purpose is. Each must find out for himself and must accept the responsibility that his answer prescribes. If he succeeds, he will continue to grow in spite of all indignities.<sup>2</sup>

Of course, life on this earth begins at B and ends at D, that is, at birth and ends with death. However, between these two letters, there is a letter C, which is the choice we make whilst we are still alive. Now, within our period of making choices, we are receiving a big blow from the deadly Coronavirus. And as the virus spread, new measures emerged, people donned face masks, sanitization of hands became a new norm, and staying in-doors has become a proper way to live but still, graves became our home. All these measures, however, seemed unsuccessful in curtailing the tide of the virus. The whole world has been threatened by death, families are broken up, every morning has brought shock and numbness.

In a simple sense, the world gasps for breath. Unfortunately, many passed on without making a choice that would have helped them to die peacefully. Who will comfort the living especially those who are concerned about their beloved ones who have died and were buried in a way that grieves them deeply? As this pandemic continues, it remains a pain beyond the cry, we can imagine those families who experienced the deaths of multiple family members, none of whom they were able to bury properly. Our absence during the death of our beloved ones can easily make our loved one's death feel unbelievable like it didn't happen at all. What we might expect from such an experience is simply a feeling of intense grief, instead of experiencing their absence in ambiguity. This has brought human intelligence into a cloud of unknowing.

### **Can this pandemic be a possible vehicle of a paradigm shift?**

Let us begin with the conversion of Saul. There are a few things we can reflect on about his life during conversion. And before his conversion, Paul lived a compulsive life, that is a life driven by ego, instinct and his uncontrollable desires. The Bible tells us that "It happened that while he was traveling to Damascus and approaching the city, suddenly a light

from heaven shone all around him. He fell to the ground, and then he heard a voice saying Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" (Acts 9: 3-4). The point here is not about who is behind the Covid-19, whether it is Divine cause or human inflicted, that is not the point. The point is that the virus is a blow to humanity and the reality is that people are falling down, and even some to the graves. Now, can anything good come out of the blinded Saul, fallen Saul, darkened Saul...? Inevitably, our exposure to pain, grief, and death due to this deadly pandemic calls us all to grapple with an unbearable question of why, and no one can answer this agonizing question. And behind this painful question there is perhaps a lamentation "Why, O Lord, do you reject me?" (Psalm 88:14), "Why have you rejected us forever, O Lord?" (Psalms 74:1).

What could be the secret behind Saul's falling, "For three days he was without his sight and took neither food nor drink" (Acts 9: 9). Imam Ali says, "Indeed you are in the days of expectation that is followed by death. So, he who works in the days of his expectation before death arrives will benefit from his work and will not be hurt by death".<sup>3</sup> With this in mind, I think the Coronavirus has taught us to be humble, it might be a call to a paradigm change in human consciousness.

Perhaps, the time has brought us sorrow and distress of conscience so that we can "Get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you are to do" (Acts 9: 6). In fact, "...we may feel satisfied with things as they are; we may have a good job, kind friends and a supportive family, but all things are subject to change".<sup>4</sup> My point is, this could be a dark night so that we can have time to rest, time to dream, time to reflect, a moment of realizing, discovering, examining ourselves... Could this not be the same time as with Saul? Could this not be a vehicle for our fundamental change in approach to our consciousness? If darkness, blindness, or falling down became a moment of Saul's change to Paul, then there is also a possibility for this pandemic to change from our compulsiveness to consciousness.

### **Embracing conscious life**

Perhaps some few questions to begin with; is this pandemic bringing us to the point where we examine our way of life, our relationships, our attitudes to life itself... what value do we place on life, and what could

be the invitation in this dark moment? Perhaps, “I do not understand my own behaviour; I do not act as I mean to, but I do things that I hate” (Rom 7: 15). Are we not in many cases led by our instinct rather than our intelligence? There are many times we live in darkness; we get used to it, and we see it as normal. Now, I suggest we increase a certain level of our intensity, increasing the voltage of our lights that we may dispel the darkness, and this I call conscious life. Locke explains this process as “That with which the consciousness of this present thinking thing can join itself, makes the same person, and is oneself with it, and with nothing else; and so, attributes to itself and owns all the actions of that thing, as its own, as far as that consciousness reaches, and no farther; as everyone who reflects will perceive”.<sup>5</sup> This is a quality of understanding life beyond the physical, understanding the significance of being human. In other words, consciousness is a level of being open to life so that we may understand everything as one energy from the same Source.

For me, birth is a marriage with the Mother earth including all that she has and death is another marriage with the Creator. It is simply a shift of life from one dimension to another, and this should help us to treat everything consciously. The leaf begins with a very small icon of itself, a quality of its humility as it embraces new life on earth. It is not small in itself, but it is a quality of openness to growth. When we see ourselves as small and nothing in this Universe, we create a quality of accepting growth within and a quality of treating every creature with dignity. Further, as the leaf grows, it occupies a large space. This I think is not just occupying a larger space than before, but it is a quality of involvement, a quality of being alive, and a quality of spreading who I am, a quality of raising a certain level of vibration. Its shade increases meaning there is also something that we can give to all those around us! Is our quality of life increasing to provide shade to other people? A thing to reflect! Further, the leaf changes its colours (e.g., from greenish to yellowish, or brownish), why? Perhaps, it is because of its generosity towards one another, or perhaps it is because of the surrounding conditions. Who knows? Only the leaf knows better! But above all, however, the leaf remains a leaf in all circumstances. What could be the meaning of this dark moment that we face in today’s life? Surely, if this virus fails

to make us wise, it might wound us for the rest of our life. Dr Akong Tulku Rinpoche tells us that “The remedy is to act as individuals to halt the harm and begin healing and balancing. The first step in this direction is to start taming the mind through some beneficial training such as meditation”.<sup>6</sup> The choice is ours!

Finally, the leaf dies! A good number of people are easily forgotten when they die and few of them keep on vibrating even when they are no more. Why? It is because of the quality of the life we live. Incredibly, many people are afraid of death and this is the reason why we have very few vibrant people on this earth. What they miss is that death should be encountered even before encountering natural death. I am now speaking of the death of our pride, the death of our selfishness, the death of our ego, the death of our jealousy, etc. In simple words, the death of a leaf might symbolize the death that we should encounter before natural death. And I wouldn't call it death because many people are still alive even when we buried their bodies. We know them! Death of a leaf is a manifestation of its quality, a quality to provide fertile soil for other plants, a quality to enrich the soil, a quality to dissolve into another dimension of life. So, the main idea is not thinking much about death in its strict sense but death to ourselves so that we can resurrect as Paul, and encounter Jesus Christ, our Saviour from Nazareth.

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<sup>1</sup> Macalino, Eric. *Fantasy World: Love and Madness*. (Amazon: Lulu. com, n.d.) 60.

<sup>2</sup> Igo, Robert. *Making Sense of Suffering*. (World Council of Churches-EHAIA, n.d.), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Rayshahri, M Muhammadi. *The Scale of Wisdom: A Compendium of Shi'a Hadith*. (London: ICAS Press, 2009), 40.

<sup>4</sup> Rinpoche, Akong Tulku. *Restoring the Balance; sharing Tibetan wisdom*. (Cape Town: Orchard Publishing, 2005), 20.

<sup>5</sup> Locke, John. *An Essay: Human Understanding*. (London: William & Tegg Co, 1689), 227.

<sup>6</sup> Rinpoche, Akong Tulku. *Restoring the Balance; sharing Tibetan wisdom*. (Cape Town: Orchard Publishing, 2005), 97.

**God, Science, and Covid-19: A Threesome at Work from a  
Nietzschean Perspective**  
*Jean Gaëtan Nyurahayo, S.J.*

**Introduction**

It is seemingly very easy to claim that God is dead given the view that many people nowadays have recourse to science when faced with pandemics and other calamities rather than to God. This is exactly what Nietzsche has prophesied when he claimed that God is dead.<sup>i</sup> However, Nietzsche is often misunderstood by some people who do not read him so closely. What he exactly said is that during his time science was more flourishing and providing more solutions to the problems of humanity than religion was doing. He did not say that God is dead to mean death in the strict sense of the word ‘death’ but death in the sense that people were no longer having recourse to God for the solutions of their problems. During this time of the novel Covid-19 pandemic, the so-called churches were closed and almost everybody including the Holy Father was forced to remain at home.<sup>ii</sup> Indeed, the Covid-19 pandemic has proven that the real church is not all about the buildings. It is instead a convocation or an assembly. In this respect, it «designates the assemblies of the people, usually for a religious purpose... In the Church, God is calling together his people from all the ends of the earth».<sup>1</sup> With Covid-19 Pandemic, there is a spirited dispute about where the solution to the Covid-19 scourge should come from. Many are those who are waiting for the solution to come from science. Many again are those who despise science and cling to their God as the ultimate respondent to their queries including the eradication of Covid-19 and other calamities. There also exist others whose views are mixt. For them, they believe that God can provide an answer to those problems through his people especially the scientists. As a result, their prevailing demand to God, via their prayers, is the discovery of a vaccine, indeed an efficient and effective vaccine, or simply a

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<sup>i</sup>Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*. Trans. Walter Kaufman. (New York: The Viking Press, Inc., 1966) 12.

cure for this pandemic. I cannot forget to mention that there are even other people who are neither waiting for the answer to come from God nor Science. Hence, the existence of the divisions brought about by the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, given that very many people have despised religion and God for not being able to eradicate both the covid-19 pandemic and its adversities, should we conclude that God is dead? This paper aims to provide an answer to this problem. It argues that the advancement of science does neither prove death nor silence of God during the calamities such as the Covid-19 pandemic because science is arguably a language of God. For God is a scientist par excellence. The paper posits that Covid-19 is a test to humanity to revisit the mirror in which they view one another.

### **Nietzsche and Death of God**

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) is a German philosopher deemed to be one of the most influential among modern philosophers. He has lived when science was beginning to flourish. That was the time of enlightenment. For Kant, enlightenment is "...man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's understanding without the guidance of another person." That is an understanding guided by reason. It is claimed to be a new intellectual movement whose teachings were about the capability of reason, thought and the power of individual persons to solve problems themselves. Enlightenment indeed is often understood as the age of reason. The advancement of science during Nietzsche's times came about as a result of man's insatiable desire for knowledge. Considering how things were turning upside down during his time, Nietzsche claimed that God is dead simply because most people

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<sup>i</sup>By churches, I mean the building inside which people come together to pray to God. However, the correct view of the church should be understood not as buildings but as visible and spiritual. The word 'visible' is meant to depict the community of faith, hope, and charity, as a visible organization through which Christ communicates truth and grace to all men [and women] (The Catechism of the Catholic Church 210). With this idea in mind, the Covid-19 pandemic has shown us that the Church, often mistaken to be the buildings, is not all about the building. One can stay at home and still pray to God and prayers in this regard should not necessarily mean attending the Holy Mass every Sunday because with Covid-19 there is more or less one year that people spent at home without attending any Mass and still pray to God.

of his time were no longer waiting for God to answer their problems or were leaving God to pick out other alternatives. The picked-out alternative is ex hypothesis, science and reason. These people began to trust their reason which led to the very many inventions in various fields of science and many others to that effect. For Nietzsche, there is no such thing as an answer outside what one's conscience can suggest to him or her, to begin with. He maintains that it is better to listen to one's interior self rather than appealing to the exterior forces such as God or another person.<sup>2</sup> For God remains silent when people cry out for support during hard times of their existence. The silence of God when the inventions and advancement in science and technology are busy attending to human's needs entails the death of God in the Nietzschean community. In his book *The Gay Science*, Friedrich Nietzsche forcefully argues that Gods undergo the process of putrefaction, just like any other organic matter such as human corpses. This means that "God, too, decomposes. God is dead. And we have killed him."<sup>3</sup> Nietzsche is not preaching the Gospel of the death of God. He is, in my understanding, simply suggesting that science has replaced God in terms of the sources of answers to humans' problems and the problems facing the universe in large.

### **Nietzsche's Idea of the Death of God Interpretation**

The death of God that Nietzsche talks about is totally different from the death of any person such as you or me. The death of God that he talks about symbolizes the taking over of God's responsibility to safeguard humanity against pandemics such as Covid-19 and natural disasters like Cyclones Idai and Kenneth, floods, landslides, to name just a few, to respond to people's daily needs by any other created thing or discipline. The killing of God suggests the impact of the age of enlightenment on the significance of the idea of God in the context of the western civilization which is deemed to be Christian in nature ever since the late Roman Empire. The Enlightenment as I alluded to earlier led to the triumph of science over sacred revelation for Nietzsche. Furthermore, the intellectual and philosophical movement of the Enlightenment period distanced itself from God. In claiming that God is dead, Nietzsche held that there could be some positive novel possibilities for humans to live in the absence of

God. He believed that this relinquishing in the belief of God would open up new ways for humans' creative abilities to become full-fledged. The death of God that Nietzsche talks about. Yes, the only begotten son of God has indeed died to save humanity from their sins for the hereafter. In this regard, «a great battle is fought between life and death, in which Christ, to break forever death's hold over mankind, allows himself to become mortal, and so act as bait for death to swallow. Christ's death, then, poisons deaths, and causes death to die.»<sup>24</sup> When Nietzsche is not closely read, it is *prima facie* tempting to pour scorn on the claim that Nietzsche made about the death of God. I do not know the feeling of Nietzsche when he decided to spring a surprise on his readers and his contemporaries that God has been buried and subsequently decomposed. My argument is that it is true that Christ came down on earth, born and died on the cross, killed. His death is an inflicted death. If Nietzsche is alluding to this death, then he is right. *Ex hypothesis*, it seemed to me that he is wrong in claiming that God has undergone decomposition because it is argued that his body was risen from the dead intact, to begin with. However, he was not meaning it in the sense that most people understand him. I suggest that this was a figure of speech, a metaphor in this regard, he was using to pass his message about the progress and ability of science to solve some of the puzzles which were facing humanity that God was not attending to. Let us suppose that God has died in the wrong interpretation of Nietzsche's argument. If he died, then he died to provide life to the world. It is the case that Christ has died. Therefore, he died for the world and the world's inhabitants to live and have life in full. Even if he underwent putrefaction, though I do not subscribe to this theology, he would still remain the giver or sustainer of life. For, according to science that Nietzsche preaches about, "far from being 'dead'...a rotting corpse is teeming with life. A growing number of scientists view a rotting corpse as the cornerstone of a vast and complex ecosystem, which emerges soon after death and flourishes and evolves as decomposition proceeds."<sup>25</sup> Hence the formation of the cadaveric ecosystem. We are energy, science tells us. This energy, science argues, cannot be destroyed. Instead, it is transformed into another form of energy and it is never lost. For, according to the laws of thermodynamics,

Energy cannot be created or destroyed, only converted from one form to another, and the amount of free energy always increases. In other words, things fall apart, converting their mass to energy while doing so. Decomposition is one final, morbid reminder that all matter in the universe must follow these fundamental laws. It breaks us down, equilibrating our bodily matter with its surroundings, and recycling it so that other living things can put it to use.<sup>6</sup>

### **Science Does Not Disprove the Presence of God during Calamities**

There have been several arguments to prove the existence of God and the non-existence of God. These are, for example, the cosmological arguments of Thomas Aquinas and teleological or design arguments to prove the existence of God. There is also an ontological argument attributed to Anselm of Canterbury. These arguments were evolved because, to philosophers, mere faith was not enough to believe in the existence of God. In this section, I am going to talk about neither of these. Rather, I am going to argue for the presence of God during the times of pandemics and other calamities such as natural disasters. It is often argued that science has disproved religion and God. However, though this view can be proven to be logically true, it can also be proven materially false. This is because, as a scientist, I do not see anything contradictory about claiming that science is the language of God spoken by God and God's creation, for those who believe in him. Far from disproving God and religion, science actually complements the two. In this regard, one of the main reasons for people abandoning religion and spirituality in the western world whose views influenced Nietzsche to claim that God is dead is arguably that science has disproved religion and the reality of Spirit. It is true that so many people who were committed to the spiritual path have or might be having doubts since both science and God are silent during the times of pandemics and natural disasters and other calamities. It is also true that their numbers have gone higher because the building in which the church would gather to pray has been closed to prevent the spreading of the Covid-19 pandemic. But it is also true that this view is false because the church is quite different from these buildings. That is why, thanks to technology and science, some people can follow the Holy Mass from

their televisions and radios. This novelty implies the Church, reading the signs of the times and finding new ways and methods of evangelization in a certain context without losing its identity. Despite this novelty and continuity that connotes the basic tenets of the Church, there are some other people due to their financial class who cannot afford any access to these means by which one gets to follow and attend Mass online. Some of these people have lost faith, but some others have not.

Coming back to the question of science being able to disprove religion and the reality of the Spirit, I would like to argue that God is a scientist par excellence. He is the origin of science. If it is true that God created everything that there is in the universe, then he also created people who claim to be scientists. If he created these people who claim to be scientists, then these people exist in the world and he also created science. If they exist in the world and that God also created science, then they are present even during the times of the pandemic such as Covid-19 and other calamities including natural disasters like Cyclones Idai and Kenneth, floods, landslides, among other calamities that awakened us from our slumber to realize our need and concern for another. If they are present in the world during such times, then God is also present not just in themselves but in his entire creation. Therefore, it follows that if it is true that God created everything that there is in the universe, then God is also present not just in themselves but in his entire creation. One objection to this argument would be to argue that if God is not only present during such times but every time because he is omnipresent, then he would not remain silent when his people are dying. The answer to this objection would be that the ways of God are utterly different from the ways of people. His time is not the same as ours. He has a different way of counting time because he cannot be understood or limited in our spatiotemporal understanding of him. He is boundless. It requires human patience and perseverance because when the right time to attend to his people's needs comes, he definitely acts. God is present and his presence can be demonstrated by the intelligibility of the physical world through laws of nature. These laws can be construed to be nothing more than originating from the creator God. In this regard, there are a bunch of scientists who are Christians and who are busy in the laboratories trying to discover a cure or a vaccine

to this pandemic of the covid-19 pandemic. It is God who is working through them. That is why it is the case that Christians cannot not “think rationally about the scientific enterprise without compromising their most cherished Biblical convictions” (Poythress 3).<sup>7</sup>

### **COVID-19 Pandemic Has Subjected Humanity to Test**

Before talking about its challenge to humanity, let me begin by explaining what it is. Covid-19 has been defined as a disease brought about by a new strain of coronavirus. In this regard, CO in the nomenclature of coronavirus stands for ‘corona’ whereas VI stands for virus and D for the disease. It is a pandemic disease that is formally referred to as ‘2019 novel coronavirus’ or ‘2019-nCoV’. As Lisa Benda puts it, the COVID-19 virus is a new virus linked to the same family of the “virus as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and some types of the common cold”.<sup>8</sup> Notice that 2019 in the name of this virus symbolizes the year in which its strain was discovered.

Today, as the numbers at a glance of the WHO show, there have been 113,315,218 confirmed cases. Of these, 2,517,964 are confirmed deaths.<sup>9</sup> COVID-19 pandemic does discriminate. It does not look at one’s height or one’s size and shape of the nose as those were some of the grounds upon which whoever was found to meet them was killed during the 1994 Genocide perpetrated against the Tutsi and moderate Hutu like Sr. Félicité Niyitegeka<sup>iii</sup> in Rwanda. Neither does it look at the origin nor the colour of one’s skin. Even age does not matter to it. It does not only target the rich, for even the worse-off contract it. It does not spare you because you have a disability or not. What I am trying to say here is that Covid-19 has seemingly and arguably equalized us. It has shown the world that these and so many other things on whose grounds some people claim to be superior to others are just accidents of life. This is because being white or black is an accident because nobody chose it, to begin with. When it attacks, it does not show any sign of exclusivity. In all inhabited continents, COVID-19 is there. Having said that, I argue that this pandemic is a call. It is a call to revisit the mirror and angle through which we treat one another. It is a call to bear in mind that the world is a global community.

### **The Socio-Cultural-Politico-Economic Impact of COVID-19**

In their nature, human beings are social animals. In this regard, Aristotle argues that “Man is by nature a social animal; an individual who is unsocial naturally and not accidentally is either beneath our notice or more than human. Society is something that precedes the individual” (qtd. in The Hindu 2012).<sup>10</sup> This idea was recently alluded to by the Holy Father in his encyclical letter entitled *Fratelli Tutti* (Brothers All). On his account, Pope Francis addresses fraternity and social friendships. Some of the ‘challenges thrown to us by the COVID-19 pandemic include but are not limited to soulless consumerism, the throwaway culture, inequalities exacerbated by the globalized economy, mass migration, human trafficking, as well as ongoing conflicts. He invites us “to move beyond ourselves so that we can dream together and create a community of belonging and solidarity worthy of our time”.<sup>11</sup>

For Reno,

One reason our political culture churns with anger is that the post-modern West tends toward atomization, not union. We are in the midst of a crisis of solidarity.... As we enter the third decade of the twentieth century, it is increasingly obvious that the signal need of our time is the fraternity and renewed social friendship.

Covid-19 has turned our culture upside down.<sup>12</sup> What used to be *prima facie* morally wrong, is what is done today. In some countries, some people have lost their family members but could not show them the respect they deserve in burying them respectfully. A friend of mine in Rwanda has recently lost an uncle who was in jail and none from his family went to his funeral. He was buried by the prison. This was due to the restrictions put in place to prevent the spreading of the COVID-19 pandemic by prohibiting the inter-district movement of people. In this regard, one would argue that such government officials who restrict people

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<sup>iii</sup>Rwandan Hutu Catholic nun belonging to the Abakobwa ba Musenyeri (the girls of the Bishop) religious congregation. She was killed with some Tutsi in a bid to provide a refuge and shelter to them in the western part of Rwanda [Gisenyi] in today's Western province of Rwanda.

from burying theirs by the mere fact that they are preventing the spreading of the pandemic are looking for the greatest good for a great number of people. However, I argue that even if it is one person's good that is violated for the sake of the greatest possible good for the greatest number of people, it becomes ipso facto morally wrong.

Some of our governments have indeed been trying their best to make sure that the spreading of this pandemic is slowed down. However, it is also the case that they failed in certain areas. Consider the case of a lockdown. Ever since the beginning of this outbreak, several series of lockdowns were imposed on people regardless of where they are and what they are doing. Some of these lockdowns are even imposed on people without any reflection at all on the consequences this would bring to people considering that their financial statuses are different. Imagine a poor person X who is living on his/her daily income by working in the garden of other people. Imagine again a person Y who is disabled and living on begging by waiting for generous people for his daily bread on the street. Furthermore, consider a well-off person Z who can afford anything during the rest of his/her life. Is it fair to impose the same level of lockdown on these three different individuals given their differences in financial statuses? Is it morally good to do that? In my understanding, it is morally wrong because, in the course of preventing the spreading of the pandemic, poor people would die, and more often than not their deaths would be confused with the death of the Covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, many governments impose this lockdown on people without any prior notice for people to wind up what they were doing and prepare themselves to go back home. This is not humane. When a government imposes lockdown, it should first of all think of what considered vulnerable people would be feeding on during an entire time of the lockdown. That is why there is an urgent need to revisit our social structures, our respective cultural values as well as our respective financial independences when we devote our energy to end the COVID-19 pandemic by the imposition of the lockdown and its similar treatments on people without any guarantee that it could be of any help in that regard. For it is *prima facie* wrong to adopt a one-size-fits-all measure given our above-mentioned differences and respective various contexts.

## Conclusion

This paper aimed to provide an answer to the question of whether God is dead during the hard times like those inflicted on us by the COVID-19 pandemic or not. It argued that the advancement of science does neither prove death nor silence of God during the calamities such as the Covid-19 pandemic because science is arguably a language of God. For God is a scientist par excellence. The paper posited that Covid-19 is a test to humanity to revisit the mirror and angle in which human persons view one another.

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<sup>1</sup> The Catechism of the Catholic Church. (Paulines – Mambo Press, 1994) 205.

<sup>2</sup> Kant, “Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?”

<sup>3</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Gay Science*. Trans. Walter Kaufman. (New York: Random House, Inc., 1974) 181.

<sup>4</sup> Von Der Luft, Eric. “Sources of Nietzsche’s God Is Dead and its Meaning for Heidegger.” *University of Pennsylvania Press* 2 (1984) 263-276.

<sup>5</sup> The Guardian Team. “Life after death: the science of human decomposition.” *The Guardian International Edition*.

<sup>6</sup> The Guardian, *Life after death*.

<sup>7</sup> Poythress, Vern S. *Redeeming Science: A God-centered Approach*. (Wheaton: Crossway Book, 2006) 3.

<sup>8</sup> Bender, Lisa. *Key Messages and Actions for COVID-19 Prevention and Control in Schools*. (UNICEF, March 2020) 1-12.

<sup>9</sup> WHO. *Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic: Numbers at a Glance*. (World Health Organization, 28 February 2021, 11:30 am). <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/> Accessed: 28 Feb 2021.

<sup>10</sup> The Hindu Team. “Man as a social animal.” (*The Hindu*: March 2012). <https://www.thehindu.com/features/education/research/man-as-a-social-animal/article2988145.ece/> Accessed: 28 Feb 2021.

<sup>11</sup> Reno, R.R. “Fratelli Tutti.” *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life* 308 (Institute on Religion and Public Life: Dec 2020) 64-67.

<sup>12</sup> Uwizeyimana, Claudine. “Impact of Covid-19 on Socials in Rwanda.” (*Oli Health Magazine Organization*: Sept 2020). [https://olihealthmagazine.org/impact-of-covid-19-on-socials-in-rwanda-claudine-uwizeyimana-from-university-of-rwanda-entry-63\\_H240.html/](https://olihealthmagazine.org/impact-of-covid-19-on-socials-in-rwanda-claudine-uwizeyimana-from-university-of-rwanda-entry-63_H240.html/) Accessed: 28 Feb 2021.

## **From Anthropocentrism to New Ecology, against Climate Disaster: An Appraisal based on Francis' Laudato Si`**

*Ashley Salima, O.Carm.*

### *Abstract*

*The history of the Church profusely records overwhelming evidence which points to the prophetic nature of the Church. Various Church documents also attest to the prophetic nature of the Church because they anticipated many of the socio-economic, political and religious phenomena happening in contemporary society. The Church's leaders and members are thus prophetic to the extent that the Popes down the centuries promulgate encyclicals which are deeply rooted in, and stem from the rich tradition of the Catholic Church and yet they are informed by the contemporary challenges arising from a varied spectrum of socio-economic and political spheres. Technological advancements and capitalist greed exacerbate the reductionistic view of God's creation. Creation, specifically the environment, is attributed an instrumental value, which means that its value is dependent on its usefulness to human beings. This anthropocentric view of the environment dominated the Church and even the world at large for a long time. However, Pope Francis promulgated a prophetic encyclical entitled Laudato Si, which advocates for ecocentrism instead of parochial one-dimensional eco-spiritualities which limit our worldview and diminishes humanity's respect of the environment hence the escalating problem of climate change (global warming) and associated incessant natural disasters like cyclones.*

### **Introduction**

Concepts are fundamental to human existence. They contain a tremendous invisible power which is incarnated and made visible in human actions, worldviews and thus affect human relations with each other and with the rest of God's creation. This paper uses a philosophical-theological approach to expose the despotic nature of one-dimensional eco-spirituality of anthropocentrism and its detrimental impact on human existence and the environment. It also investigates the unprecedented environmental issues of climate change and natural disasters

associated with anthropocentrism. It also advocates the eco-centric ethos of *Laudato Si* as a possible way to foster and enhance transformational environmental ethos and possibly to curtail the apocalyptic climate change, global warming and natural disasters. Although this paper limits its scope to anthropocentrism, it does not overlook the impact of other one-dimensional eco-spiritualities like biocentrism and eco-feminism, among others.

Ultimately it unravels the transdisciplinary and transformational ethos of *Laudato Si* (hereafter LS) which the paper recommends for humanity to adopt in order to curtail climate change disaster, human-made disasters like poverty and acid rain, and natural disasters like cyclones, floods and droughts. LS is a power par excellence because it kills two birds with one stone: it addresses environmental-based issues and thus delves into 'sustainomics' which is a possible way to eradicate capitalist greed, individualism, consumerism, materialism, as well as the associated human-made disasters like poverty, environmental degradation and the globally felt impact of climate change: global warming. The paper expounds that natural and human-made disasters made mockery of the divisions that we create politically and socio-economically to lay us. These disasters and even pandemics continually rub it on humanity that global interconnectedness is a reality which the fate of human existence majorly depends on.

### **Eco-spirituality**

Generally, spirituality is understood in the context of religion<sup>i</sup>. However, spirituality can be understood as divorced from religious tenets. O'Murchu affirms that spirituality in its holistic and general sense does not have any ties with religion, neither can it be merely be reduced to the context of religion of the day, rather it can be regarded as an attribute of inner experience which human beings can share with each other and yet remains unique to each individual.<sup>1</sup> Also, spirituality can be understood as the desire to ameliorate our personal disposition towards the world in order to make the world a better place through respecting the environment and all creation. Eco-spirituality is thus an ethos which elaborate on human relations with ecology and thus exhumes the deeper (spiritual)

connection between humanity and the environment. Ecological-based spirituality can be understood in terms of environmental ethics which stresses on the moral relationship between human beings and the natural environment.

### **A Philosophical-theological Analysis of Anthropocentrism**

Anthropocentrism is a human-based approach to any subject matter. Ecologically, anthropocentrism explicitly places human beings as the centre of the universe and thus regards human beings as the sole bearers of intrinsic value and all other living things, both biotic and abiotic members of the ecology, are there to sustain human existence.<sup>2</sup> For Korten, this human-based approach to the environment attributes the greater amount of intrinsic value to human beings only than to anything that is non-human.<sup>3</sup> This explains the centrality of human beings in our socio-economic and political decisions and policies.

### **Protagoras' Influence**

Protagoras views “man as the measure of all things” (Qtd in Mark). ‘Man’ is understood not in terms of gender-discrimination but in the broadest sense of it meaning human beings, despite their gender. ‘Things’ should as well be understood in the most general sense possible so as to capture all spheres of human existence and phenomena. This view places human beings as the focal point and epicentre of the universe to the extent that everything revolves and depends on human persons for value and moral judgement. On another note, abstractly, man may not be considered the measure of all things but personal experiences (with their preconceived ideas and prejudices) since it is on the basis of such human experience acquired over time that one can judge anything to be good or bad.<sup>4</sup> This still is based or involves a human individual as the subject, so it remains anthropocentric. Thus, this commands a great sense of the centrality of human beings as determiners of everything, on whom non-humans depend. Protagoras’ thesis: man is the measure of all things

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<sup>1</sup>Religion is understood as the worship of a deity, whereby a set of beliefs and creeds are put in place as a way of spiritual conduct towards the divine. exclusive to religions generally recognized as world religions.

profoundly influences the anthropocentric perspective of the environment. Although human beings are the only bearers of inherent worth, anthropocentrism assigns instrumental value to the natural world. Thus, anthropocentric approach to the environment holds that the biotic and abiotic members of ecology are destined to serve the needs of human beings, and therein lies the value of the environment. Human beings remain central in everything and thus takes precedence over every other creature in the universe. Moreover, Judeo-Christian tradition also reinforced an anthropocentric approach to the environment by postulating the dominance of humanity over every other creature, both biotic and abiotic.

### **The Cartesian Influence**

Descartes is an enlightenment philosopher, renowned as the father of modern philosophy whose rationalist philosophy gained momentum following the demise of the Aristotelian classical worldview. In his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Descartes' ontological (mind and body) dualism contributed to the primacy of human beings. They are the only creatures with a mind (soul) whilst other non-human creatures are merely pure bodies.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the Cartesian *cogito* reasoning emphasized the superiority of a human person, a "thinking thing," since a human person possesses the *logos* (reason) which other creatures do not have.<sup>6</sup> The Cartesian philosophy created the superior-inferior bifurcations and thus birthed the conceptual understanding of human beings as higher animals who deserve to dictate the direction, use, value and fate of every other creature. Moreover, since any creature but the human person does not have *logos*, it is the mandate of the human person since (s)he has *logos*, to assume supremacy, centrality and dominion over the natural environment. The value of the environment depends on human beings. For example, the anthropocentric view posits that the value of rivers, land and animals lies in them being the property of human beings. Even the preservation of wildlife is done not for the sake of the animals involved, but for the sake of future generations and tourism purposes in order to generate money which in turn serves the needs and wants of human beings.

## **The Influence of Abrahamic Religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam**

Anthropocentrism is also reinforced by the three major Abrahamic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam<sup>1</sup>. These religions profoundly influenced the anthropocentric approach to the environment and the earth at large. They give precedence to the human dominance over the natural environment, for instance land and the sea and all that dwells therein. The Judeo-Christian view asserts that human beings were created in “God’s own image hence making human life sacred” and thus the societal structures should preserve human life and “ensure that it is respected”<sup>7</sup>. Although this is indisputable, this does not give human beings the right and privilege to manipulate, exploit or disregard the intrinsic value of the environment. The second creation story (Gen.1:26-28) is usually interpreted as giving precedence and primacy to human beings. This alone places an instrumental value on the natural environment and has proven disastrous so that from Pope Francis to the scholarly world anthropocentric interpretation of scripture is ridiculed, disputed and thus regarded redundant and inadequate. The Abrahamic religions in a way succumb to the “danger of a single story”<sup>8</sup> and are thus impressionable in the face of the story of human dominion over other creatures. Their adherents like children are thus impressionable in the sight of a single story that has been told repeatedly and hence informed, shaped and dominated their worldview and relationship with the environment.

### **Laudato Si: Novelty in Continuity**

Laudato Si is an encyclical written by Pope Francis in 2015 on ‘the care for our common home’: the earth. The promulgation of this papal encyclical is in keeping with the long-standing tradition whereby Popes issue encyclicals addressing particular issues. In light of ‘continuity’, Pope Francis “stood on the shoulders of his predecessors, beginning with the seminal address on ecology by Bl. Paul VI, and moving through the

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<sup>1</sup>Known as Abrahamic religions because they are monotheistic religions which believe in one God who revealed Himself to Abraham. Also, the theological doctrines of this trio basically emanate from the Hebrew scriptures’ portrayal of the God of Israel.

letters of St. John Paul II and ending with the magnificent “*Caritas in Veritate* of Benedict XVI”.<sup>9</sup> Thus, Francis follows from the aforementioned three giants whilst identifying with the contemporary environmental challenges.

Moreover, Pope Leo’s 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum* “opened the door to a tradition of Catholic reflection on questions of social justice that extends to the 2006 encyclical of Benedict XVI (*Deus Caritas Est*)”.<sup>10</sup> Such a tradition Constitutes what is now known as the Catholic Social Teachings, hereafter CSTs). However, Markus Vogt asserts that “for the first time in the history of Catholic social doctrine, a papal encyclical deal with “the Complex issue of the environmental challenge in a systematic and comprehensive manner and in connection with the global development issue”.<sup>11</sup> This distinguishes LS from the previous papal encyclicals pertaining to CSTs.

The Church’s novelty in continuity is apparent in its ability to retain the traditionality of its character and nature throughout history and its capacity to marshal its discernment prowess in reading, interpreting and responding to the signs of times. In this regard, climate change is a global disaster. Hence, Pope Francis, with his LS, unravels the Church’s novel perspective rooted on tradition, to address climate change. In light of novelty, Pope Francis postulates an integrated and transdisciplinary environmental ethos which is informed with contemporary socio-economic and political spectrum of human existence and experience. This explains why LS commands much attention from people of all walks of life: both prominent and ordinary.

In keeping with the CSTs Francis invites Catholics and all people of good will (LS 3) to hearken the invitation to care for our common home, the earth. Francis, cognizant of the technological advancements, also challenges the technocratic paradigm which is exacerbating the already bad environmental crisis by infusing individualism, consumerism and reinforcing the attitude of placing instrumental value on the environment and even people. The placing of instrumental value on the environment objectifies it in the spirit of neo-animism and brutality.

### **Towards Transformational Epistemic Environmental Ethos**

The epistemology of environmental enlightenment can be understood philosophically and theologically as paradigm shift, and “hermeneutics of discontinuity”<sup>iii</sup> from epistemic and biblical ideologies and concepts which are detrimental to the environment to an integral and interdisciplinary ecology. For a reform (transformation) to happen, it is necessary that humanity should discontinue certain environmentally harmful human activities, despite their economic lucrativeness. As far as we reaffirm the inherent dignity of human beings, we should not view human beings as the centre of the cosmos. Anthropocentric view fosters and enhances the obsession for economic growth and development for the sake of human beings, and thus ignores the interconnectedness of various economic activities with the natural environment. It merely focuses on developing the economy to sustain humanity.

Moreover, economic growth and development has been reduced to numeric figures (numbers) in the form of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Gross National Product (GNP). The increase in GDP and GNP does not necessarily entail economic growth if they are accompanied by gross environmental degradation. Thus, Pope Francis’ *Laudato Si* is not a scam nor misleading, it resonates with such international conventions which focus on environmental sustainability like the Stockholm Conference 1972<sup>12</sup>. The preservation of human dignity should not be an excuse for human beings to exploit the natural environment for their selfish needs. However, these international conferences on environmental sustainability concentrated on such for the sake of the future generations. But that reason has anthropocentric undertones because the reason why they are vouching for environmental sustainability is for future generations of human beings. If we should at all advocate for environmental sustainability it should be done not for the sake of human beings but for its own sake, that is, for the sake of the environment. And in that sense, *Laudato Si*’s standpoint is plausible because it advocates for environmental sustainability for its own sake.

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<sup>iii</sup>Benedict XVI response to the Vatican II. See “Novelty in Continuity: Pope benedict’s interpretation of Vatican II” <http://www.americamagazine.org/issue/684/article/novelty-continuity> .

### **The Politics of *Laudato Si*: Human Beings and Climate Change**

The global politics of climate change affirms that climate change should be conceptualized in the context of the human beings' interaction with the natural environment. So, the accumulated effects of human activities over the centuries all add up to the new reality of climate change, which (in)directly caused and exacerbated natural disasters like droughts, cyclones and floods as well as their aftermath. The incessant emission of greenhouse gases, deforestation, population growth and industrialization constitute human beings' interaction with the environment, which has proven detrimental and disastrous. "A number of scientific studies indicate that most global warming in recent decades is due to the great concentration of greenhouse gases (carbon dioxide, methane, nitrogen oxides and others) released mainly as a result of human activity" (LS 23)

Speth and Haas affirms that "the ozone depletion issue also exemplifies the truth that the twentieth century brought us across a threshold to a fundamentally new reality".<sup>13</sup> This justifies the relevance of *Laudato Si* and its audience beyond the "catholic world". *LS* is addressed to "every single person on this planet earth" (LS 3). This global address of Pope Francis which goes beyond his flock is informed by the "unprecedented socio-ecological crisis affecting everyone and every creature on this earth."<sup>14</sup> Climate change resulting in global warming is affecting everyone and everything that dwells on the planet earth because "climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all" (LS 23). This causes glaciers to melt and sea levels to rise and hence the floods which some countries experience. Francis reiterates that the planet's capacity to sustain humanity is so strained to the extent "that our contemporary lifestyle, unsustainable as it is, can only precipitate catastrophes, such as those which even now periodically occur in different areas of the world" (LS 161). Thus, since "climate change is a global problem with grave implications" (LS 25), and since the earth is a common good, everyone should thus be involved in taking care of it.

### **The New Ecological Ethos of *Laudato Si***

Cognizant of the fact that climate change, human-made and natural disasters as well as pandemics make mockery of the divisions that we

create socio-economic and politically, Francis makes familial interconnectedness the bedrock of his encyclical. The personification of the earth as our “sister and mother” (LS 1), “establishes a kind of family intimacy with nature, something not seen before with such mystical nuances”.<sup>15</sup> Such ethos informs our attitude and relationship with the natural environment and thus alleviates any possibility of ill-treatment and perpetrating unwarranted violence on nature. If human beings maintain their superior-view over God’s creation then such familial interconnectedness cannot be achieved.

### **Humility: LS against Protagoras and Cartesian worldviews**

Whilst Protagoras postulates that human beings are the measure of all things, Francis reminds human beings that “we too are earth” (Gen 2:7). These are contrasting worldviews which exhibit in a sense a measure of untamed pride in Protagoras’ assertion and profound humility in Francis’ reminder. The universal proposition of Protagoras of ‘man as the measure of all things’ makes human beings the possessors of the full measure of maturity of all things and that enables human beings to judge the type of value attributed to other creatures. This is heightened by the Cartesian cogito ergo sum which establishes the primacy of human beings as thinking beings. For example, human beings in the spirit of anthropocentrism attributes instrumental value to the natural environment based on their capacity to reason, that is to judge (measure) all things.

Unlike the untamed pride of the view of Protagoras, the LS of Pope Francis contends that Christ is the measure of the maturity of all things. So, the new cosmological ethos of LS includes some measure of humility in order to relinquish the untamed pride and power which Protagoras’ worldview attributed to human beings. The fact that full maturity is found in Christ alone humbles human beings and also reminds them of the Hegelian argument that rationality is incipient, that is, evolves (develops) as one grows up. This explains why certain worldviews become obsolete and some gain momentum. So, anthropocentrism is one of those worldviews which has become so obsolete hence the need to adopt and engage LS’s new cosmology and ethos in order to curtail climate change disaster.

Here we can add yet another argument for rejecting every tyrannical and irresponsible domination of human beings over other creatures” (LS 83). For Francis:

the ultimate purpose of other creatures is not found in us. Rather, all creatures are moving forward with us and through us towards a common point of arrival, which is God, in that transcendent fullness where the risen Christ embraces and illumines all things. Human intelligence and love, and drawn by the fullness of Christ, are called to lead all creatures back to their creator.<sup>16</sup>

The fact that “everything is closely connected” is integral to ecology’s niche. Therefore, ecology and social justice are intrinsically united (LS 137 Qtd in Scarel). Opongo and Orobator buttresses that social justice is “an active concept” and thus it calls for action.<sup>17</sup> Although we should “recognize the individuality of everyone, our recognition of the individuality of persons does not necessarily translate into individualism since individuals should acknowledge that they belong to something bigger: a bigger reality. This connects to the issue of common good”.<sup>18</sup> Human beings are merely members of the larger community of ecology.

### **The need to humanize our narratives/worldviews**

Since LS engages everyone on the planet then it means it must be ready to speak the large that all ethnicities and cultures understand. In Achebe’s *Arrow of God*, Ezeulu propounds that “the world is like a mask dancing, if you want to see it well you do not stand in one place”.<sup>19</sup> This entails for one to unravel the reality about anything, there is a need to stand in various points in order to command new perspectives. In 2009, the Nigerian prolific Novelist, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie gave a TED talk titled “The Danger of a Single Story”. ‘The danger of a single story’ summarizes the endeavour of this paper because it brings out the peril which is inherent in holding to a single narrative, for example, the anthropocentric narrative.

Francis advocates for a paradigm shift from “the dominion mandate for humanity to universal fraternity with all fellow creatures”.<sup>20</sup> This denotes that the anthropocentric narrative which dominated humanity’s

worldview for centuries is now obsolete hence the need to change the narrative to that of “universal fraternity with all fellow creatures”.<sup>21</sup> In some sense, human dignity or humanity’s gift of intelligence and rationality is not downplayed nor diminished by advocating for a universal fraternity with all God’s creatures, rather it should be seen as the quest to humanize the narratives which inform our worldviews which in turn influence universal interactions as members of the universal ecosystem.

For Francis, humanizing our narratives and worldviews means emphasizing “the intrinsic value of every human being, every creature and the counter-intuitive intrinsic value of ecosystems”.<sup>22</sup> This means adopting an integral ecology which is not driven by one-dimensional spiritualities but by ecocentrism. Thus, all nature, both biotic and abiotic members of the ecosystem, is intrinsically valuable. This counteracts the Cartesian worldview which places intrinsic value on rational beings only on whose basis Protagoras acclaimed human beings as the measure of all things. So, LS is an encyclical par excellence in this regard. So, humanizing our narratives entails being open to alternative narratives (worldviews) which may be antitheses to the dominant narrative (thesis).

However, humanizing (fraternizing) our narratives and worldviews contests with the capitalist narrative and worldview of greed, maximum profiteering and insatiable amassment of material things. The alternative narrative of new cosmological ethos and global environmental governance threatens the economic, political and technological power of the third world countries because they are thriving on the plight of the poorer countries. This is an impediment to a successful dialogue because such countries cannot yield to a fraternized narrative because it threatens their selfish agendas. LS gives us a humane language to think and speak about climate in our own terms not in foreign terms dictated by capitalist countries like those which wield unparalleled economic power.

## **Conclusion**

This paper participated in the global and topical debate of climate change which is coupled with insidious impact of global warming, floods, rising sea levels, cyclones and acid rain. The paper traced the development of the anthropocentric view of the environment. It argued that Protagoras’

and Cartesian philosophies as well as the Abrahamic religions contributed to the development and wide acceptance and dominance of anthropocentrism. Considering the ability of *Laudato Si* to comprehensively address the global issue of climate change, the paper discussed about the need for a paradigm shift from anthropocentric narratives, ideologies and or worldviews, which foster and enhance environmentally detrimental human activities, to a new cosmological ethos of integral ecology, fraternity, humility and global governance.

However, the paper contended that there is a need to humanize our narratives and that humanity should not stand in one place in order to command new perspectives about the world and universal phenomena. It also postulated that humanizing our ideologies and narratives helps humanity to see the world better, and that human beings are not the centre of the universe or its masters but members of the bigger web, society and fraternity of God's creatures, whose responsibility is to lead all creatures to attain full maturity in Jesus Christ. A society which is driven by one-dimensional eco-spiritualities are not merely parochial and obsolete, but they are committing grave social injustice against the members of the society whom that particular one-sided eco-spirituality excludes. So, LS advocates for the establishment of social justice on the planet earth and this begins with fraternizing our narratives which in turn form dominant worldviews which shape and influence our universal interactions with the biotic and abiotic members of the ecology.

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<sup>3</sup> Korten, David. *Change the Story, Change the Future: A Living Economy for A Living Earth*. (San Franscisco: Benet Koehler, 2015) 7.

<sup>4</sup> Mansfeld, Jaap. "Protagoras on Epistemological Obstacles and Persons", *Kerferd*, 1981, 44-46.

<sup>5</sup> Descartes, Rene. *Meditations on First Philosophy*, translated by J. Veitch, (Toronto: Our Open Media, 2017), 50.

<sup>6</sup> Hatfield, Gary. *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Descartes and the Meditations*. (New York: Routledge, 2003), 53.

<sup>7</sup> Opongo O. Elias. *Agbonkhanmeghe, E. Orobator. Faith Doing Justice: A Manual for Social Analysis, Catholic Social teachings and Social Justice*, (Paulines Publications Africa: Kolbe Press, 2007), 29.

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- <sup>20</sup> Bals, Christoph. “A successful provocation for a pluralistic global society”. <https://www.germanwatch.org/en/12697>. German-watch, 2016. Accessed 14/02/2021, 8.
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## **Migration and Climate Change in the Horn of Africa: Mainly in Kenya, Ethiopia, Sudan and South Sudan**

*Michael Kyalo, SJ.*

### ***Abstract***

*The influx of migrants within the Horn of Africa or crossing international boundaries in search of stability and asylum seeking is largely propelled by climate change. Climate change is responsible for migration of people, conflict and palpable lack of economic stability. As a result, 17 million people are threatened by a severe shortage of food in the Horn of Africa. The Horn is therefore one of the regions that is highly affected by climate change. Environmental crisis and eco-imbalance in the Horn of Africa is epitomized by perennial droughts, unpredictable rains, desertification, flash floods and land degradation. As such, climate change and human life are coterminous.*

### **Introduction**

In the Horn of Africa, (mainly Kenya, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan and Djibouti) migration and climate change<sup>1</sup> are not an oxymoron. In this vein, perennial drought has been ravaging broad sections of Kenya, Sudan, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia and even Djibouti since 2018. According to the UN report, “a severe drought is affecting the Horn, with at least 17 million people facing hunger across eight countries, including Somalia, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Eritrea, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda.”<sup>1</sup> The drought has so far whipped up a colossal, cascade of humans both within and across international borders as indicated by the International Organization for Migration (IOM).<sup>2</sup> In the month of November 2019, flash floods impacted heavily on the strategic nation of Djibouti. The rain that pounded the country in a single

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<sup>1</sup>Climate change means “a change in the climate system which is caused by significant changes in the concentration of greenhouse gases as a consequence of human activities and which is in addition to natural climate that has been observed during a considerable period” (Kenya Gazette Supplement, Nairobi, 13th May 2016, N0. 68).” In his encyclical *Laudato Si'* Pope Francis defines climate change as a perturbing warming of the entire climatic organ. “In recent decades,” the Pope goes ahead to say “this warming has been accompanied by a constant rise in the sea level and, it would appear, by an increase of extreme weather events...” (20-21).

day was estimated as equivalent to two years rainfall in the semi-arid nation. According to a joint Djibouti–U.N. Statement: More than a quarter-million people are affected by flash floods on the Red Sea that is home to military bases of the United States, China, and others. Djibouti is known as one of the world’s most vulnerable non-island nations in the face of climate change as sea levels continue escalating.<sup>3</sup>

The article under discussion examines the impact of climate change in the Horn, climate change as a catalysing factor to migration in the Horn of Africa, climate change and migration related conflicts in the Horn of Africa and the response of the International Organization for Migration (IOM Conference on 7th December 2018) in Djibouti to the challenge of migration in the Horn of Africa. The essay begins with the impact of climate change in the Horn of Africa.

### **The Impact of Climate Change in the Horn of Africa**

Low-average rains, drought, conflict and economic crisis are currently the main drivers of food insecurity in the Horn with Ethiopia, Sudan and S. Sudan envisioned among the countries affected by severe food crisis in the region. The worst-affected countries with regard to acute food insecurity include Ethiopia (8.1 million), Sudan (6.2 million) and S. Sudan (6.1 million).<sup>4</sup> In South Sudan alone, 59 per cent of the population or six out of 10 people are in need of quick assistance to protect livelihoods, to reduce food consumption gaps and malnutrition.

In Somalia, more than one in five people (or 22 percent of the population) are threatened to suffer severe food insecurity. Due to this alarming food insecurity, the region is said to suffer palpable movements that usually encompass not only refugees and asylum-seeking individuals per se but also titans of migration cum pastoralists who embark on complex migration pathways in such “greener pastures.” Migration in this case thrives as a core means through which individual persons, a community or a family can employ as a survival strategy or as a disaster coping mechanism. Numerous others continue to storm international borders of neighbouring nations like a colossus.

According to the latest census posted by the International Organization Migration (IOM), arrivals oscillate between 200 in Ethiopia and 1,200

in Kenya. Ethiopia alone is currently accommodating about 1 million refugees from the war-torn Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen. That notwithstanding, Ethiopia with its generous open-door policy, accommodates over 900,000 people all trickling from neighbouring countries for multiplicity of reasons. Yet, more than 3 million of its nationals reel from conflict and climate-driven displacement.<sup>5</sup> Given the situation, therefore, it is of critical necessity to closely examine the link between migration and climate change in the Horn as the latter exacerbates the crisis in the region.

### **Climate Change as a Catalyzing Factor to Migration in the Horn of Africa**

In the Horn of Africa, issues related to environmental degradation and ecological imbalance contribute a lot towards migration of people en masse. Migration of people in humongous numbers can be pivotal towards causing an environmental crisis in their original habitats, in migratory routes and pathways and even in their intended destinies. Predictions related to climate change for the 21st century indicate that much more people are expected to migrate as a consequence of weather related-calamities which will become more common and intense due to anthropogenic global warming. Consequently, the Horn is currently susceptible to extreme weather conditions in relation to precipitation and drought as reported in a country like Somalia.

In Kenya, for example, climate change has increased the frequency and magnitude of unfriendly weather in the country hitherto causing rapid loss of lives, diminished livelihoods, minimized crop and livestock production and warped infrastructure among other dreadful effects. For instance, the heavy rains and flash floods from March to May 2018 that affected communities that were recuperating from a perennial drought. Climate change is likely going to affect Kenya's envisioned future development and the anticipated goals of Kenya Vision 2030, the long-term development blueprint-and the government Big Four agenda for 2018-2022<sup>6</sup> focus on ensuring food and nutrition security, decent housing, manufacturing and affordable health care.

Due to endemic drought patterns in Kenya, about 2.6 million people

are in need of relief food supplies. Of these, 623,000 are children (below five years) and 69,000 pregnant and lactating mothers, who are threatened by malnutrition as drought sweeps through the Northern part of the country.<sup>7</sup> Turkana is critically affected with 250,000 children below five years in Turkana North, Turkana South and Laisamis sub-counties. Other areas facing acute malnutrition as a consequence of perennial drought are Turkana West, Turkana Central, Baringo, Tana River, Samburu and Moyale.

According to the government spokesperson, “Eight of the 23 counties are severely affected by drought and require urgent enhanced relief food assistance. They include Garissa, Mandera, Wajir, Marsabit, Tharaka-Nithi, Isiolo, Embu and Kitui.”<sup>8</sup> To mitigate pangs of drought, the government has allocated Sh. 3.7 billion between September and December. Of the 3.7 billion, 2.9 billion will cater for relief food and the distribution of water and nutrition to the affected people. The drought has compelled the government to dispatch reserve stocks and make available Kshs 2 billion to facilitate the distribution and tracking of water in the affected areas. Food stuff including Maize, rice, beans and vegetable oil and supplements worth Kshs 1.7 million have already been distributed by the government between April and August.<sup>9</sup>

Drought and famine are said to play a pivotal role in the migration of people in the Horn of Africa. As stated by Halima, a 30-year-old mother of three displaced in Somalia, “Many people who were displaced cannot return home. The drought in Somalia is happening all the time. People have no way to recover.”<sup>10</sup> The link between migration and drought is quite plausible because drought propels to high levels of food insecurity and unanticipated change of diet hence compelling people to move.

In the Horn, climate change is blamed to cause scarcity of rain or floods that deplete massive acres of food hence leading to unexpected shortages of food and clean water for drinking. For instance, on March 14, 2019, Tropical Cyclone Idai hit the South east coast of Mozambique. The cyclone caused flooding that destroyed 100,000 homes, 1 million acres of crops, and flattened \$ 1 billion of infrastructure. As stated by the UN, “...at least 40% of the population in Somalia does not have enough food and children are affected. A million people are on the brink

of famine in South Sudan, as 20 million risk starvation in countries hit by poor harvests/conflict.”<sup>11</sup> More so the long rains which fall between October and December in many parts of the Horn are now reported to be 55 percent less compared to the early 80s. It was only after the El Nino of 1997-1998 when the impact of climate change became palpable. Besides the pronounced lack of sufficient clean water for drinking, persistent droughts are major stumbling blocks to support agricultural activities in large scales in Somalia, Kenya, South Sudan, S. Sudan and Djibouti.

Various parts of the world including the Horn of Africa have been experiencing periodic droughts in a row for the past few years. In Kenya, droughts are quite common. Droughts are blamed for the greatest of impacting negatively on Kenyan economy. Remarkable decline in GDP growth was observed in Kenya during the years of poor rains. The agriculture sector grew by 1.6 % in 2017, compared to 4.7% in 2016. This happened mainly because drought suffocated crop production consequently minimizing animal production.<sup>12</sup>

Recorded losses due to drought related losses in livestock, is estimated to have cost \$ 1.08 billion.<sup>13</sup> Depending on how water as a vital natural resource is managed, this alone can be a major determining factor on how tragic a drought can be. In Ethiopia, for instance, where drought is affecting about 4.5 million people, pastoralist communities require timely support to prevent their livestock from perishing. As indicated by IOM, “...their Cross-border movement in search of water and pasture for their livestock is creating a higher risk for resource-based conflict and further displacement, particularly in the drought-affected Northern Kenya districts of Turkana, Wajir and Mandera, where Global Acute Malnutrition now transcends 30% among children, pregnant and lactating mothers.”<sup>14</sup>

In addition, a sequence of devastating floods and severe droughts—some of the worst in decades—has also contributed highly to the total number of displaced persons inside Ethiopia. The number of displaced persons due to climate change is approximated to be about three million people.<sup>15</sup> Drought related migration is said to propel a complex situation of displacement and movement, triggered by conflict and instability and the returns of many Ethiopians and Somalis from Yemen.<sup>16</sup>

## **Climate Change and Migration Related Conflict in the Horn of Africa**

Environmental degradation in the Horn of Africa is argued to propel a myriad of effects that include conflict, migration, insufficiency (severe lack of basic needs like water and food) including degradation violence.<sup>17</sup> Environmental degradation has been pivotal in propelling people to migrate hence causing conflict. Migration related conflicts arise as a consequence of competition for resources, demographic characteristics and spatial fluctuating patterns of governance and administration. For H. Dixon, “migration is generally considered to be the intermediate stage which links environmental degradation and disasters to conflict.”<sup>18</sup> Due to a massive environmental crisis, people are forced to migrate in large numbers to other places where they opt to settle with the hope of a better life.

In the year 2012, the Horn of Africa was reported to have had the largest number of refugees globally. By March 2013, the number of refugees and internally displaced persons in the region was about 9 million (IOM). A number of critical factors have been blamed for this massive movement of people. These include: climate change and environmental degradation, lack of economic stability, armed conflict, political, economic and food crisis. Such factors created a dire need for a proportional response to provide food, shelter and security for the victims.

Migration in Somalia and South Sudan has mainly taken place as a consequence of armed conflict. Such a situation compelled people to abandon their homes and seek solace and protection in the neighbouring countries for the good part of 2012. As a result, the number of refugees in Ethiopia, Kenya, South Sudan and Uganda is said to have increased tremendously. However, currently Uganda has registered about 32% decline in the number of migrants in July 2019. From July 1st to 30th, a total of 8,295 new refugees crossed to Uganda, 6,490 from the D.R.C., while those from S. Sudan were 944 and Burundi, 861.<sup>19</sup> In reference to economic muscle, Kenya and Ethiopia are respectively ranked as the second and third leading host countries in the world for refugees although Uganda is currently hosting over a million refugees from S. Sudan much

more than Ethiopia and Kenya.

At present, Kenya has approximately 600,000 refugees making it the fourth largest host with the vast majority of refugees originating from Somalia.”<sup>20</sup> Since the political milieu in Somalia is ameliorating with supersonic rapidity, smooth repatriation of Somali refugees is apparently going to be plausible. Severe drought in Somalia alone has triggered an increase in the number of persons soliciting for help in Ethiopia and in Kenya where about 50,000 migrants were reported to have arrived in 2011 (IOM). In July, 2011 alone, over 11,000 migrants gradually arrived in Ethiopia while more than 8,000 arrived in Kenya.

Although Ethiopia is at a graceful transition juncture, sporadic ethnic conflicts are what Ethiopia’s disaster prevention chief Mitiku Kassa calls “the unfortunate effect of transitional periods.”<sup>21</sup> Besides ethnic based conflicts, climate change and disease has also contributed enormously towards migration and displacement of people in Ethiopia. In its efforts to adequately address this humanitarian challenge, “Ethiopia is appealing for 1.3 billion from the international community to assist 8.3 million displaced due to ethnic conflict as well as those vulnerable to climate shocks and disease.”<sup>22</sup> Ethnic-based conflicts and climate change are therefore a common phenomenon in the East and Horn of Africa. Such conflicts as well as climate change are frequently displacing people from their ancestral home-lands hence compelling them to seek asylum and resettlement in other unknown and undesignated places.

### **Migration Routes in the Horn of Africa**

Generally speaking, migration in the Horn of Africa takes place through three main routes: the first one is the Northern Africa route (Sub-Saharan Africa to North Africa and Europe); the second is the Gulf of Aden route (from the Horn of Africa to Yemen and eventually to Saudi Arabia). This well-trodden route is also popularly known as Africa via the Mediterranean route since many migrants from the Horn and other parts of Africa use the route to migrate to Saudi Arabia and other parts of the world. Close to 20, 000 migrants, mostly from Ethiopia, attempt the journey along this ancient and increasingly deadly route through Yemen’s war zone each month, according to the International Organization for

Migration (IOM).<sup>23</sup> The third migration corridor is the Southern route (from the East and Horn of Africa to South Africa).<sup>24</sup>

In February 2019, two migrant boats sank off the coast of Djibouti killing 58 people. The scenario of capsizing boats is quite common in Djiboutis' Red Sea coast area, as thousands of immigrants from the Horn of Africa traverse the deadly route to reach the Middle East via war-torn Yemen. The migrants target in most cases is to penetrate into Saudi Arabia through Yemen. According to IOM's Missing Migrants Project (MMP) current statistics, "More than 199 drowning have been recorded off the coast of Obock, Djibouti, since 2014."<sup>25</sup> MMP also unveiled incidents of three tragic shipwrecks that occurred in Obock a few days before the sinking of the two migrant boats off the coast of Djibouti. This is an indication that the route is a major conduit of migrants from the region attempting to reach Saudi Arabia. Similar incidents which have occurred since 2014 have been blamed for the deaths of hundreds of desperate migrants along the treacherous Bab-el-Mandeb strait. The strait which is located between Yemen on the Arabian Peninsula and Djibouti and Eritrea in the Horn of Africa, directly links the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden.

### **The Response of the IOM Conference (7th December 2018 in Djibouti) to the Challenge of Migration in the Horn of Africa**

What is the international community doing to guarantee safety for migrants striving to find asylum and stability most especially at the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) countries? On the 7th of December 2018, IOM co-hosted a Conference in Djibouti to respond to humanitarian needs of migrants in the Horn of Africa, Yemen and the GCC countries. The conference was attended by humanitarian organizations and delegates from Djibouti, Egypt, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Somalia, and Yemen. In their attempt to address the malaise, the attending officials together with humanitarian actors came up with six pivotal responses (listed below)<sup>26</sup> to address the impasse of humanitarian needs of the migrants. This was unanimously agreed upon to be achieved by:

- 1) Enhancing safe, dignified and voluntary return and sustainable reintegration;

- 2) Ensuring humanitarian access through the respect of humanitarian law;
- 3) Holding smugglers and human traffickers accountable for abuses inflicted on migrants;
- 4) Investing in long-term development and awareness raising initiatives and to address root causes of irregular immigration;
- 5) Providing migrant health interventions and enacting water, sanitation and hygiene measures to prevent and address out-breaks; and
- 6) Continuing to exchange information and best practices on migration management, among others.

In addition to other priority responses, the six points were highlighted in the Regional Migrant Response Plan for the Horn of Africa and Yemen. The stratagem was championed by IOM and other collaborators as a plausible approach in responding to the needs of migrants in this particular migrating corridor. In his opening address, the Chair of the meeting, Hassan Omar Mohammed Burhan, Djibouti's Minister of Interior Security, urged countries in the two regions to establish local policies to secure protection and respect of human rights of migrants, most especially for the large number of the unaccompanied minors in need of protection and special assistance.<sup>27</sup> Underscoring the same point, Da Vitorio (IOM's Director General) indicated that coming together to find concrete ways to protect all those who cross national borders, regardless of their migratory status or nationality was quite essential. He insisted that Safe and legal pathways for migration will ultimately prove beneficial to all the affected countries.<sup>28</sup>

The Conference appealed for profound cooperation and collaboration between governments and other willing organizations to consolidate efforts to guarantee, protect and safe-guard humanitarian response to the challenge of migrants heading to Yemen and other Gulf countries from the East and Horn of Africa. Da Vitorio reminded those attending the Conference that IOM remained committed to supporting their efforts to facilitate the following: voluntary humanitarian returns from stranded migrants; to assist those in destitute circumstances; to prevent and treat their health needs and provide dignified and sustainable opportunities for migrants to return home.<sup>29</sup> The Conference consisting of key political

and humanitarian agencies in Djibouti was applauded as timely and a commendable move in responding to the impasse of migration in the region. All facts constant, more can be done especially at the intergovernmental level through workable policies to minimize the movement of people in the region.

### **Conclusion**

Climate change is real and its lethal repercussions cannot be shunned. Preserving the Planet Earth therefore is a priority. This fact was highly underscored by the United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres during the 74th Session of the UN General Assembly in New York. Measures have to be put in place to mitigate the negative effects of climate change. An environment that is well taken care of propels to a balanced ecosystem that could be pivotal in mitigating migration of people due to climate change in the Horn and yonder. Governments in the Horn of Africa can come up with plausible strategies to create awareness about the urgent need for taking care of the environment by planting more trees, by preserving water catchment areas as sacrosanct as well as restraining the dumping of industrial waste into rivers and lakes. The move towards overcoming deforestation and the restoration of degraded lands will definitely restore economic growth, ensure food security and tame migration of people in the Horn of Africa.

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<sup>1</sup> Drought Crisis in the Horn of Africa: Millions of People Face Hunger and Illness. [dm.com/en/drought-Crisis-in-horn-of-Africa/a-38950292](https://www.dailymail.com/en/drought-Crisis-in-horn-of-Africa/a-38950292).

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- <sup>19</sup>J. Barigaba, "More Refugees From Burundi Enter Uganda," The East African-September 7th – September 2019, 3.
- <sup>20</sup>IOM UN Migration: <https://www.IOM.INT/Eastern-Africa-and-Horn-Africa>.
- <sup>21</sup>Press Digest, "Ethiopia Says \$ 1.3 Billion is Needed to Assist Displaced People," 9.
- <sup>22</sup>Press Digest, "Ethiopia Says \$ 1.3 Billion is Needed to Assist Displaced People," 9.
- <sup>23</sup>Such migrants risk deportation in case the police identify them as migrants. Majority of them are not privy to the tragic and devastating war in Yemen. They are not informed on the treacherous nature of the voyage not to mention the bodies washing along the shores of Djibouti and Yemen.
- <sup>24</sup><http://www.iom.int/East-Africa-and-horn-Africa>.
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## **Climate Change Education and Bringing about a Responsive Awareness to the Rural Settlers in Africa**

*Charles Tochukwu Ugwuonah, SJ.*

The problems of Climate change constitute the major threats in our world today. As a global problem, climate change affects both our present and future generations. It is quite unfortunate that in our world, some people do not see the need to address the issue of climate change. Such people see the whole climate change topic as an unnecessary issue on which we should not spend our time and energy discussing. Such people neither believe in the effects of climate change nor see its effects as worth the attention given to it. One of such instances is the United States National Security Strategy released in 2017, in which there is not even a mention of the climate change topic. This very action possibly suggests that the 2017 National Security Strategy does not see the issue of climate change as something dire enough to pose a threat to the United States. One can hardly deny that climate change has brought about frequent episodes of flooding, heatwave, environmental displacement of people leading to migration, poverty, and so many other problems around the world.

Yet, this global threat can only be solved by the collective effort of everybody living on every part of the planet. Some climate change researchers like Christine Wamsler and Ebba Brink, who address climate change approaches and adaptation, focus only on the urban areas and the city settlers while ignoring the rural areas. In affirming the necessity for a climate change policy adaptation in the rural areas, this article focuses on bringing about a responsive awareness of climate change to rural settlers in many African countries, through the engagement of an educational process. This, definitely, does not belie the importance of bringing about climate change awareness and response to the urban settlers around the world. However, it is essential to focus not just on the urban settlers but even more on the rural areas in developing countries because due to the “low adaptive capacities and the projected impacts of climate change, a consensus has emerged that developing countries are more vulnerable to climate change than developed countries”.<sup>1</sup> A case of such developing areas with low adaptive capabilities to the climate change impact

is Mokwa local government area of Niger state in Nigeria, but this is not limited to this case study as it can be seen in most other parts of Africa and the entire world.

When I speak of the concept of climate change in this article, I mean the negative alterations of the ozone layer in the atmosphere that are caused by the emission of greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, and ozone. In giving a clearer definition of climate change, the United Nations Framework on Climate Change (UNFCCC) defines its main characteristics, asserting:

Increases in average global temperature (global warming); changes in cloud cover and precipitation particularly over land; melting of ice caps and glaciers and reduced snow cover; and increases in ocean temperatures and ocean acidity due to seawater absorbing heat and carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.<sup>2</sup>

This concept of climate change by the UNFCCC not only gives a definition of what climate change is all about but also gives some details of its dire effects on our planet.

Now, some people may ask: Of what use is it to address climate change education to the rural communities in Africa and especially to the rural community in Mokwa local government area of Niger state, Nigeria? The main reason why this article focuses on rural communities in Africa and especially on Mokwa local government area of Niger state, Nigeria, is due to their ignorance of the environmental factors that contribute to climate change and its causes. This is the case because most of these rural dwellers are not aware of the causes of climate change to which they ignorantly contribute. A survey was conducted by Odjugo P. A. Ovuoyovwiroye, to analyse climate change awareness in Nigeria. This survey used statistical techniques like percentages and Chi-square to select a few random states, among which are Rivers, Imo, Lagos, Adamawa, Niger, and Zamfara. Within each of these states, a rural and an urban area were picked at random and analysed. The result of the awareness survey in Niger state showed that 29 percent of the population had never heard of climate change, 50 percent of the population knew little about it and only 18 percent knew well about the climate change concept while the remaining 3 percent of the population had nothing to comment

about the phenomenon of climate change. Also, combining the results in all the rural areas where this survey was conducted, 33.4 percent of the total population had never heard of climate change, 56.6 percent knew little about it and only ten percent knew well about climate change.<sup>3</sup>

Apparently, in parts of Eastern Africa, the awareness of climate change is quite commendable as the most percentage of Eastern Africans are aware of the effects of climate change and its contributing factors. In Kenya, a survey was carried out by Wairimu Macharia, et al. directed by the Institute for Development Studies at the University of Nairobi. The survey was conducted to find out the perception of climate change and its effects on the agricultural production in the country. The result of this survey showed that 65 percent of Kenyans had heard about climate change while 35 percent of Kenyans had neither heard of it nor knew what it is.<sup>4</sup>

A similar survey was conducted by Mvumi Moyo, et al. in “two districts of semi-arid Zimbabwe using participatory research techniques, to investigate farmers’ perceptions of climate variability”.<sup>5</sup> The outcome of the survey showed an insufficient awareness of the changing climatic conditions in these communities, especially on the part of the rural farmers.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, some of these farmers are aware of the changing alterations of their environment but do not understand the causative factors that lead to it. They end up misinterpreting these alterations, attributing them to different causative agents other than those of climate change. It is surprising to note that up to 53 percent of the rural farmers in this survey were not only misinformed but also believed that the alteration of the climate was brought about either by cultural and religious reasons or by political problems leading to the gods being angry with them.<sup>7</sup> The result of this is that, by not knowing the causes or the effects of these alterations, the solutions to the problem will remain far-fetched.

In juxtaposition to the above surveys, a two-year social marketing project was endorsed in Lusaka by the climate change secretariat of Zambia in 2016 and the contract given to BlackDot media to carry out a social project on assessing the knowledge of climate change and raising awareness of its effects as well as its impacts. This survey was carried out in three Agro-ecological regions of Zambia.<sup>8</sup> The result of the

survey showed a well-versed knowledge of not only the climate change phenomenon but also of the consequences emanating from it. Out of all the respondents, 75 percent detected the unpredictable weather events such as late rains; 65 percent mentioned, as pertaining to climate change, the increase and decrease in temperature; 56 percent detected drought as a cause of climate change; while 41 percent detected the increase in rainfall patterns and flooding.<sup>9</sup> On finding out about the use of social media to gain knowledge of climate change, 80 percent said they got their knowledge of climate change and its effects from their access to the radio, 58 percent from the television, 53 percent from their cell phones, 33 percent from access to newspapers and 17 percent got theirs from the internet.<sup>10</sup> When asked about how they felt about climate change and what should be done, 50 percent of the surveyed respondents acknowledged that an increase in public education and an awareness of impacts and issues on climate change were either “important” or “very important” to the community. Meanwhile, 68 percent of the surveyed respondents noted that the government should be responsible for educating the people on climate change.<sup>11</sup>

The results of these surveys, especially that of Nigeria and Zimbabwe, serve to explain the urgent necessity of climate change education to the rural settlers in Africa. The necessity of climate change education is even more important as most of these rural dwellers live in extreme conditions of poverty. This state of poverty makes them even more vulnerable to the negative effects of climate change as they lack the knowledge as well as the skills to withstand the climate change effects. As a matter of fact, an article written in Southern Eye Newspaper quotes the 2015 Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency survey as depicting Matabeleland North province to be the area with the highest poverty rate in Zimbabwe. In giving a precise figure, Mthandazo Nyoni, states: “In a report released yesterday, ZimStat said that Matabeleland North and South as well as Mashonaland West and Central were the poorest provinces in the country. But Matabeleland North topped the list with 85.7 percent poverty levels”.<sup>12</sup> Due to the poverty level in Matabeleland North province, the rural dwellers are more vulnerable and lack the intellectual as well as physical tools needed to withstand the effects of any climatic disaster than other parts

of Zimbabwe. These rural settlers become unaware of the climate change concept, partly because most climate writers focus mostly on the urban settlements. For uninformed agrarian communities, in poor places like the rural areas of Matabeleland North province, there is an increased risk of famine if a responsive awareness to climate change is not championed as soon as possible through the education of the people. Apparently, the high poverty rate and the vulnerability of these rural dwellers are due to the insufficiency of climate change awareness for these people to act differently.

As for the adverse effects of climate change caused by the ignorant contributions of the rural settlers in Mokwa local government area of Niger state, these contributions to the depletion of the climate, though little in comparison to the urban areas, have devastating effects when taken cumulatively. For example, some of these rural dwellers practice bush burning and use firewood for their cooking. The result of these is the emission of various greenhouse gasses into the atmosphere, hence, “The build-up of too much Carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) from fossil fuel burning and other sources now threatens to alter the planet’s climate and disrupt both ecosystems and human communities”.<sup>13</sup> This CO<sub>2</sub> as well as other greenhouse gasses, goes into the atmosphere and disrupts the ecological flow of the ecosystem, thereby bringing about the negative effects of climate change.

Tree felling around the world, and especially in Niger state, has adverse effects on the climate. It is a common practice, in Mokwa local government area, that people cut down trees in order to make charcoal for trade. Due to the constant felling of trees in Niger, the government has made a move to criminalize the indiscriminate felling of trees. In an interview conducted in August 2018, Lucky Barau, the general manager of The Niger State Environmental Protection Agency states: “We will not fold our arms and watch some people endanger the environment out of ignorance”.<sup>14</sup> This decision by the government makes for a reduction in deforestation within Niger state. The trees play a very important role of absorbing the greenhouse gas emissions that cause global warming. These trees also produce oxygen in exchange to the carbon dioxide, which helps to replenish and nourish the environment. By destroying the trees,

these rural dwellers indirectly destroy their sources of clean and purified air. Unsuspecting rural settlers cut down these trees and use them for cooking while some others cut down the trees in order to extend their farmlands. This practice of cutting down trees eventually results in such communities having fewer trees to absorb the carbon dioxide and other impure gases in the atmosphere. This will lead to a great risk of global warming and changing of the weather patterns in the rural settlements and around the world.

In order to achieve a long-term climate change response to the people of Mokwa local government area of Niger state and in Africa, the governments ought to consider engaging Climate Change education as a high priority. One important move will be the entrenchment of climate change studies into the education system at the primary and secondary school levels in these settlements and in the larger African society. This important step should be employed because, if climate change studies is taught at all levels of education, there will be widespread information about climate change, which will give people the knowledge to care better for the planet in order to prevent further depletion. Fortunately, some climate change scholars have addressed the integration of climate change into the secondary school agricultural science curriculum in Nigeria.<sup>15</sup> In their scholarship, Michael Ikehi et al, see the need to integrate climate change into the school curriculum when they state that “It will keep the students abreast with the challenges and mitigation strategies of climate change”.<sup>16</sup>

In regards to the entrenchment of the climate change curriculum into the educational system, there is need to look also at the tertiary institutions in Mokwa local government area of Niger state and Africa as a whole. The concept of climate change needs to be taught at every institution of learning. Due to the better understanding of teenagers as well as adults over pupils, it is even more important that the tertiary institutions of learning be well equipped for the dissemination of the climate change concept. According to the Nigerian universities commission, there are 165 universities in Nigeria, three of which are located within Niger state. Within all the universities in Nigeria, the National Open University of Nigeria is the only university which presently offers ‘Climate Change and Environment’ as a course within the faculty of science. This confirms,

even more, the need for a drastic move to entrench climate change education into the educational curriculum, not just in Nigeria but also in Africa as a whole.

There is never an age limit to the study of climate change just as there is never an age limit to learning. In concern for the integration of the climate change studies into the educational system, the One UN Climate Change Learning Partnership (OUNCCLP) has produced a resource guide. This guide serves as a blueprint for integrating climate change into the education system: “It provides an outline for resources and materials, which would enable for the study of climate change within primary and secondary schools”.<sup>17</sup> In aiming for a sustainable climate change response in Mokwa local government area, Niger state and in Africa, this guide could serve as a step in the right direction. Even though the guide is designed specifically for both formal and informal education programs, at primary and secondary level, it contains useful information for all those who have an interest in a sustainable climate change awareness and response.

The creation of an awareness and response to climate change should not be limited only to education within the classrooms. This is because there are various other means through which we can create a widespread awareness of climate change especially to those people who may not be able to access the institutionalized educational system. One very efficient way this can be done is through the use of the social media platforms and other media outlets at our disposal. As is seen in the above awareness survey of climate change in Zambia, the report, which shows a greater access to the climate change information from the radio, supports the competency of media outlets in the dissemination of climate change information and awareness. The airing of news and awareness programs on the radio as well as the television and other media apparatuses go a long way to reach out to most people especially those who live within the rural areas with the radio or the television as their only means to information accessibility.

Putting up of billboards and signs can also be a very practicable way of climate change awareness dissemination. The use of these roadside adverts can be very helpful as they serve as constant reminders of the

climate change discussion and concerns even when the media outlets do not constantly do so. These posters and signs can be carried out especially in remote areas where the access to the radios or televisions, by the people, are limited due to poverty, lack of electricity or other social amenities, and other reasons. Billboards and posters are even more helpful than the use of media outlets because of the consistency it has above the media in informing the people on certain issues and notices. It is also a better means of the climate change awareness campaign as it is more cost saving than almost any other means. Thus, the governments should see the creation of climate change awareness through this means as more of a priority if a long-term awareness and response of climate change is to be achieved.

Climate change should be seen as a global problem and treated as such. Thus, it might be foolhardy for one to focus the awareness and response to climate change only on one part of the globe without an attempt to take such awareness outside these rural communities and to the rest of the world. As such, the governments of Africa can take this campaign outside the shores of Africa by defining its climate change policies to the other governments of the world. One reason why the climate change problem remains persistent, especially in Africa, is because some poor African nations sign deals with multinational companies and industries who come in and set up these highly anti-ecological companies, emitting huge amounts of toxic gas into the atmosphere. As a result of these signed deals and the economic benefits, these African countries become unable to protect their climate by sending these companies out of their soil. In 2017, “The Carbon Majors Database” published a report, authored by Dr. Paul Griffin, where they investigated companies which had the most emission of the greenhouse gases and fuel fossils.<sup>18</sup> Among the top 50 emitters of fossil fuels were companies like Chevron, Total, ExxonMobil, Shell, etc. most of these companies mentioned can be found operating in most African oil producing countries. The operations of these companies add up, negatively to the depletion of the atmosphere through their fuel fossil emission. As such the poor people in the rural areas tend to be affected by these emissions from these companies and because of the low adaptability of the rural settlers to the adverse effects

of climate change, they become very vulnerable to these climatic effects. Therefore, the inability of some of these African governments to refuse such economic deals is also a disadvantage to the climate. These African governments need to clearly define their fight against climate change by refusing such anti-climactic economic deals from these multinational companies.

Finally, it is worth noting that the climate change threat is one which the global community has very little or no time speculating. This is because every second that passes without a curative action brings mother earth closer and closer to extinction. Pope Francis, in his encyclical, *Laudato si'* rightly pointed out that "If present trends continue, this century may well witness extraordinary climate change and an unprecedented destruction of ecosystems, with serious consequences for all of us".<sup>19</sup> Thus, Pope Francis acknowledges the steady decline of the earth as a result of our damaging actions as well as the "effects of our ill-advised delays" in the implementation of the climate change policies.<sup>20</sup> In this encyclical, the Holy Father speaks directly to everyone to get involved in the salvaging of mother earth. To achieve this, he calls on a global conversion towards our earth; an internal conversion that is backed with action. Hence, the mitigation strategies towards climate change have to start from within us all living on the face of the planet. It is a process that has been long delayed, thereby giving us very little time to keep on debating on.

In conclusion, the problem of climate change in our present world is one that requires the conscious awareness and response of everyone living on the face of the planet. It is so sad that even with the perceptible depletion of our earth, some people still do not get the seriousness of a global fight to save our world. Nevertheless, without being crestfallen by the unbelief of climate change sceptics, it is necessary that we all rise up and get involved in salvaging what is still left of mother earth; this can be efficiently done by supporting the call for climate change education to be entrenched within all our institutions of learning as well as becoming agents of climate change education. This can only be achieved through a strong response and awareness campaign towards climate change by all of us; but more especially by the rural dwellers in various parts of the

African continent, particularly in Mokwa local government area of Niger state. We need to act swiftly against the climate change threat because it is like a cancer, eating fast into mother earth. The longer we keep up our arguments and scepticisms, the harder the possibility of its control; the harder the possibility of its control, the nearer the earth reaches its annihilation and when it finally does, where will you and I go?

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<sup>7</sup> Moyo, Mvumi, et al. 323.

<sup>8</sup>The Climate Change Secretariat, Zambia. Climate Change Knowledge, Attitude and Behavioural Practice Survey. 45.

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**Fr Mark Tawengwa Chandavengerwa, C.Ss.R.** is Priest of the Redemptorist Region of Zimbabwe from May 2009 to present. He served the Redemptorists in various pastoral roles, Redemptorist Publications and Redemptorist Communications. He is a Scripture Lecturer at Holy Trinity College since 2014 to Present and he also served as a Vice-Dean from 2017 to 2018 at the same college. He holds a Diploma in Philosophy and Theology (Arrupe College), BA Honours in Philosophy (UZ), BA Honours in Theology, Holy Trinity College – (CUZ), Master of Arts Degree in Philosophy (UZ), Master of Arts Degree in Scripture (Heythrop College – University of London), Currently he is studying for a Post Graduate Diploma in Education (CUZ).

**Jean Gaëtan Nyurahayo** is a Rwandese and a holder of a Bachelor of Science Hons Degree (BSc) in Biotechnology from the University of Rwanda (UR). Currently, he is an MA Philosophy Student at Arrupe Jesuit University (AJU).

**Blazio Mahaso Manobo** is a Lecturer of Fundamental and Systematic Theology (Catholic University of Zimbabwe). He holds: a BA in Theology (Nairobi CUEA), MPhil in Systematic Theology (SA), and he is a PhD Theology Cand. (UKZN)

**Alex Tatenda Dakamire SJ**, is a Zimbabwean and a member of the Jesuits of Southern Africa Province. He is an alumni Student of Arrupe Jesuit university (Harare) and also a former assistant administrator at the same University. During his regency, he served at St Peters Kubatana as a teacher and assistant chaplain. He was ordained to the order of diaconate in the Catholic Church in Nairobi on 13 February 2021. He is currently finishing his studies in Theology at Hekima University College (Nairobi) and he looks forward to be working in South Africa at Holy Trinity Parish in Braamfontein (Johannesburg) as the assistant pastor and assisting in the chaplaincy at the Universities of Johannesburg and Witwatersrand as of 1 June 2021. Apart from holding degrees in Philosophy and Theology, he also holds qualifications in Leadership and management, Spiritual direction and Retreat giving, and Child protection among others.

**Marvellous Tawanda Murungu, O. Carm.** is a holder of a Bachelorette Degree in Philosophy (Gregorian University, Rome). Currently, he is a student of Theology at Holy Trinity College, an affiliate to the Catholic University of Zimbabwe.

**Ashley Salima** is a Carmelite brother from Zimbabwe. Currently, he is a 4th year student of Philosophy at Arrupe Jesuit University in Harare, Zimbabwe.

**Paul T Tivenga** is an active Catholic at St. Agnes Parish, Zengeza. He studied at Holy Trinity College and obtained a Certificate in Theology (CUZ). Currently, he is a BBM and IT final year student at Catholic University of Zimbabwe (CUZ).

**Sr. Ednella Muchingamwa HLMC**, Mutare. Did her final vows in 2005 in the congregation of the Handmaids of Our Lady of Mount

Carmel (HLMC), she is a holder of Master's Degree in Missionary Spirituality (Urbaniana Pontifical University Rome - 2012 - 2014), Honours in Religious Studies (Urbaniana Pontifical University, Rome 2009 - 2012), Honours in Administration (University of Zimbabwe 2002-2005). Have worked with Jesuit Refugee Service, IMBISA and in the formation ministry in her congregation. Currently the Secretary General of the HLMC Sisters.

**Br Lloyd H. Champiruka O. Carm**, is currently doing Philosophy at Arrupe Jesuit University.

**Michael Kyalo** is a Jesuit Priest and a Canon Lawyer from Kenya. He holds an MA in Philosophy from the University of Zimbabwe, an MA in Social Ethics/Human Rights (JSTB, Santa Clara, California) and an MA in Canon Law (Gregorian University, Rome). Currently, he is the acting Chaplain at Loyola High School, Dar-es-Salaam as well as an Assistant Parish Priest at St. John the Baptist Parish, Luhanga-Dar-es-Salaam.

**Charles Tochukwu Ugwuonah** is an author and student of Arrupe Jesuit University, Harare, Zimbabwe where he is doing a BA program in Philosophy and Humanities. He is also a climate change researcher and an environmentalist at the same University. He has attended many online conferences and recently published in the International Journal of Sciences Basic and Applied Research (IJSBAR). The research is titled A Critical Review and Response to the Climate Change Denier Letter "There Is No Climate Emergency". He is an advocate member of the African Forum for Catholic Social Teaching (AFCAST) where he carries out some advocacy and activism against human trafficking and environmental degradation. He has an interest in climate change and is presently doing a research which links the negative effects of climate change to extreme capitalist greed. Looking forward to working with environmental organizations and carrying out more researches into climate change and advocacy in order to bring about a safer planet for us all.

## *Dare Style Sheet*

In Text Format

1. **Text:** New Times Roman, size 12
2. **Paragraphs:** Paragraphs should be separated by a single line space or by the use of 8 spaces indent.
3. **Subheadings:** should be in bold text, not underlined, and not numbered.
4. **Footnotes** in text come after the full stop, not before.  
e.g. Paul VI was the last Pope to wear the tiara to date. (Footnote)  
Not  
Paul VI was the last Pope to wear the tiara to date (footnote).

### ***Endnotes:***

#### **1. For a book:**

Neyrey, Jerome H. *Render to God: New Testament Understandings of the Divine*. (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2004.), 27.

#### **2. For a translation:**

Cicero. *De Officiis*. Trans. Walter Miller. (London: Heinemann, 1951.) 109.

#### **3. For an article in a journal:**

Downing, F. Gerard. "The Ambiguity of 'the Pharisee and the Toll-Collector' (Luke 18:9-14) in the Greco-Roman World of Late Antiquity." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 54 (1992) 80-99.

#### **4. For an online source:**

King, Peter. "Peter Abelard". *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. First Published Tue 3 Aug 2004; substantive revision Tue 9 Nov 2010. <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2010/entries/Abelard/> Accessed: 5 Oct 2016.

#### **5. For a source already quoted:**

Surname of Author, Title of source (shortened), page number: Neyrey, *Render to God*, 29.

### **Note for HTC students**

Please note that the Dare style sheet differs from the HTC Style sheet on the following:

- i. The name of publisher, its location and the year of publication are all put in brackets



