

Review Symposium

James F. Keenan and Mark McGreevy (Eds) (2019)

Street Homelessness and Catholic Theological Ethics

New York: Orbis Books. pp.320. €40.65

Review I by Laura Stivers, Dominican University of California

This book is fittingly dedicated “To every homeless brother and sister of Christ sleeping on our streets tonight.” While the primary focus is street homelessness, many of the chapters also address the wider population of people who are homeless globally, whether sleeping in their cars, campsites, the homes of others, or substandard and insecure housing. Central to Catholic theological ethics is belief in the human dignity of each person created in God’s image. From this belief, the authors advocate for adequate shelter as a human right and argue that we have a collective responsibility to work in solidarity towards a common good that includes the “justice of housing and other forms of justice” (p.xiii). As Project HOME in Philadelphia puts it: “None of us are home until all of us are home” (p.8). Setting an example, Pope Francis honours the dignity of those who are homeless and challenges a culture of indifference by inviting street people to his residence for breakfast, installing showers and opening a shelter, a free laundromat, barbershop, and medical center near the Vatican, and even giving shelter in Vatican apartments to war refugees (p.xiv).

The book is divided into two parts: *Accompanying the Homeless* and *Working to End Homelessness*. The emphasis on accompanying the homeless includes listening to their voices and meeting them where they are at by understanding each individual’s unique needs. While the end goal is always justice and the elimination of homelessness, those who are in relationship and present with people who are chronically homeless are living out Pope Francis’ call for “a revolution of tenderness”, by fostering mutual transformation through God’s grace (p.3). As Sister Mary Scullion says: “In true accompaniment, both persons are changed” (p.6). She argues furthermore, that these powerful human encounters prophetically call us to societal transformation. While listening to people’s stories gives a window into the various reasons people end up on the street, it also paints a picture of the ways our society exploits and marginalises people, causing crippling poverty.

The second section of part one includes case studies of particular groups of people negatively affected by homelessness, namely stateless refugees from Syria,

Lebanon and other countries; women in India affected by domestic and other forms of violence; the elderly in Africa; U.S. military veterans; poor workers in Hong Kong; homeless youth (especially due to abuse and homophobia) in the United States; and people affected by addictions. While extreme poverty is prevalent for people in all of these groups, the particular contexts of each group also indicate a variety of other causes and factors related to homelessness, and thus, different strategies relevant to preventing and/or addressing homelessness for each group. Violence – wars, domestic abuse, sexual and verbal abuse, and all forms of oppression (e.g. race, class, gender, sexual orientation, age, etc.) – make people more vulnerable to homelessness in a world where housing is not a right.

The articles in the second half of the book related to working against homelessness are divided into global and ecclesial strategies, theological-ethical foundations, and case studies illustrating local strategies in Cameroon, India, and Jamaica. Although the word “homelessness” does not appear in the United Nations’ (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the first articles discuss strategies to address ending poverty in all its forms (SDG 1), ensuring healthy lives and well-being for all (SDG 3), and creating sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11). Connecting homelessness to the SDG goals is useful for addressing the root causes and complexities of the problem. Extreme poverty, inequality, and unsustainable development that negatively affects the health and well-being of everyone, but most specifically those on the margins, is a result of a global neoliberal development model that “puts absolute value on market operations at the expense of economic and social justice policies” (p.121). These articles claim that a focus on justice requires a redistribution of primary social goods in accordance with a sustainable common good.

The next articles in this section outline two strategies from above (government and Caritas) and two from below (subsidiarity and *The Catholic Worker*). One article argues that the power of government is important, and necessary, for long-term prevention of homelessness. Another article, cautions, however, that an essential function of modern governments is the protection of private property; thus, we ought to be wary of relying on government to promote a common good and should turn instead to different practices of subsidiarity. Still another article argues that Catholic social ethics relies too heavily on the principle of *caritas* in its response to homelessness, thus limiting a more structural approach that addresses the root causes of the problem. A focus on the common good would be more fruitful, according to this author.

The articles developing theological-ethical foundations for addressing the problem of homelessness focus on the principles and themes of accompaniment, mercy, human dignity, peace and justice making, hospitality, human rights and human flourishing, and solidarity. The first two articles focus on mercy and compassion

and the promotion of human dignity in our service to and accompaniment with people who are homeless. Two articles focus on hospitality. The first argues that movements of hospitality call us to listen to narratives of how actual communities address homelessness and warns us that the move toward institutionalisation in our responses is always ambiguous in its exclusionary tendencies. The second views homelessness as a problem of exclusion and advocates for hospitality as outreach. Another article argues that the appeal to human rights is connected to Catholic Social Teaching's advocacy for human dignity and that the increasing international codification of a right to housing should also be a key foundation of Catholic theological ethics. Finally, one article develops the concept of solidarity in Catholic theological ethics, emphasising its "radical prioritizing of the full and personal human dignity of each person encountered" (p.215).

This collection of essays is an important theological contribution towards global dialogue on the problem of homelessness. In their analysis of street homelessness, development of theological-ethical foundations, and discussion of strategies to address the problem, the authors in this book support Pope Francis' response to street homelessness and his emphasis on accompaniment, mercy, and justice. The case studies from different countries and the focus on particular populations of homeless people show the similarities that people on the street face, especially extreme poverty, as well as the unique challenges each group negotiates. Clearly the problem of street homelessness is not unique to poorer countries, but is a symptom of a global economic system that benefits an elite few and exploits and marginalises the majority. Connecting Catholic theological ethics to the United Nations' sustainable development goals as well as its concept of human rights, especially the right to housing, is useful in promoting global dialogue and serves as powerful critique of the neoliberal development model.

The development of theological-ethical norms in relation to homelessness from a variety of religious perspectives is extremely important if there is to be a prophetic movement to end homelessness. These authors did an excellent job of representing many of the important values within Catholic theological ethics. Accompaniment and listening to the voices of people on the street, honouring the dignity of each and every person who is created in the image of God, and working in solidarity through mercy, compassion, and hospitality are all foundational tenets within Catholic social teaching. Creating and sustaining mutual relationships with people who have routinely been marginalised and stigmatised is a first step in addressing street homelessness. As several authors note, however, works of mercy and *caritas* alone are not sufficient for preventing homelessness. Catholic social thought has always supported a common good where all may flourish.

I would have liked to have seen deeper development of what it would mean to take seriously the goal of a common good where all are housed and healthy. Does the Catholic church have a role beyond offering charity? What structural changes are necessary to prevent homelessness, and can the Catholic church offer prophetic wisdom for social change? While Catholic social thought emphasises a common good, it also supports private property. Can the church challenge the role of the state in protecting private property, especially in a neoliberal global order where corporations are treated as individuals and an elite few own vast amounts of wealth?

None of the authors draw on the well-developed concepts of “social mortgage” and “universal destination of goods” in Catholic social teaching. Pope John Paul II in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (SRS) argues that private property always has a social function. Thus, the owners of private property are accountable for the ways in which the goods produced by property are used. He writes: “the private ownership of property is always under social mortgage, and so must always serve the common good” (SRS 1982, p.8). In other words, social mortgage is related to justice and the obligation of property owners to support and maintain the community. While the Catholic church recognises that individuals have a right to private property, the universal destination of goods is a moral claim that the goods of creation are destined for humankind as a whole.

The ecclesial strategies in the book tend to focus on local community efforts and accompaniment with street people. While necessary in responding to critical and urgent need, these strategies will not prevent homelessness. A deeper analysis of the connections between neoliberal globalisation, inequality, and environmental destruction is needed to adequately address poverty and homelessness. While Pope Francis does not use the term neoliberal economics in his most recent encyclical, *Laudato Si*, he nevertheless critiques our global economic system that maximises profits for a small minority at the expense of the environment and vast numbers of people struggling in poverty. Solidarity includes both accompaniment with those on the margins *and* structural social change to create a common good of sustainability and flourishing for all.

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Review II by Joe Doherty, University of St Andrews

Preamble

A curiosity of this book is an apparent mismatch between title and content. The declared objective is to ‘... deepen contemporary understandings of, and approaches to, Catholic theological ethics and the global crisis of homelessness’. Yet, while the meaning and prevalence of ‘homelessness’ is extensively discussed and debated, ‘Catholic theological ethics’ is rarely mentioned and nowhere defined. This mismatch is all the more curious given that the book chapters are derived from papers presented at a 2017 symposium in Rome on ‘Street Homelessness and Catholic Social Teaching’. Reflecting its origins, the book is replete with references to and commentary on ‘Catholic social teaching’: it is referenced over 20 times in the index, by contrast ‘Catholic theological ethics’ is cited only once.¹ This disjuncture poses a conundrum for any reviewer. Since the distinction between ‘Catholic Theological Ethics’ and ‘Catholic Social Teaching’ (if there is one) is not addressed, a possible resolution to the conundrum is to assume a congruence between the two concepts; a degree of compatibility that for the purposes of review allows them to be seen as interchangeable. This is the solution adopted here. To reflect this, in what follows, the compound term ‘Catholic social teaching / theological ethics’ (CST/TE) is used.

This book is organised by the editors into two parts: ‘Accompanying the Homeless’ and ‘Working to End Homelessness’. For the purposes of this review, however, I focus on the level of engagement of authors with the book’s declared objectives as defined above and identify three groupings of chapters. First, ‘The Disengaged’ – those that effectively ignore the book’s objectives; secondly, ‘The Evasive’ – chapters that skirt-round the objectives, and thirdly, ‘The Engaged’ – those chapters which address directly the book’s defined aims.

‘The Disengaged’

Four chapters do not reference or even allude to Catholic social teaching, ethics or theology, and quote no biblical parables, prayers or papal injunctions. In the first of these four chapters, Culhane and Montgomery examine homelessness among U.S. military veterans (pp.63–69).² Recounting a long established association between traumatised soldiers and homelessness, the authors identify the

¹ A possible explanation might be found in that the book is the latest in a ‘Catholic Theological Ethics’ series published under the auspices of the ‘Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church’; an organisation founded by James Keenan one of the editors and a contributor to this book.

² The book chapters are not numbered. Page numbers are used as identifiers.

creation in the USA of the Department of Veteran Affairs in the 1930s and the decisive 2009 policy decision of President Obama to commit substantial funding to ending veteran homelessness, as two of the most important initiatives in what has been an undoubtedly successful programme of intervention and provision: providing, it is suggested by the authors, a potential model for adoption elsewhere. The success of this programme ‘bears witness’ – as the subtitle to this chapter intimates – to the efficacy of conjoining ‘political will’ with ‘evidence based policy making’ – evidence which, over the past few decades, Dennis Culhane has been centrally involved in accumulating.

The second chapter, authored by Kat Johnson, explores the potential of the UN Sustainable Development Goal 1 (SDG 1) ‘to end poverty’ (pp.103-10). SDG 1 does not explicitly consider homelessness but does recognise housing exclusion as an issue closely associated with poverty and espouses the right to housing. Johnson rightly argues that street homelessness is as stark a demonstration of poverty as you can get, and articulates several proposals for bringing homelessness into the SDG 1 poverty agenda, these include: integrating housing into social protection systems, using street homelessness as a proxy measure for extreme poverty in wealthy countries, and incorporating housing as an ‘obligatory aspect for improving the resilience of populations vulnerable to climate related extremes’ (p.107).

The third chapter in this sequence is Rosanne Haggerty’s ‘Homelessness and SDG 3’ (pp. 111-19). SDG 3 aims to ‘Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all’; as with SDG 1, homelessness is not explicitly mentioned. Haggerty, in a rather idiosyncratic intervention, suggests that by recasting homelessness as a ‘complex health problem’ it can and should be adopted as one of SDG 3 goals. She advocates a community, congregate approach (a variant of Housing First) to the ending of homelessness, drawing parallels with the ‘relentless, coordinated opposite-of-silver-bullet action that shifted the ground on smoking, drunk-driving and HIV-AIDS’ (p.112). Haggerty cites several examples of the successful adoption of such approaches, including her own ‘100 000 Homes’ Campaign and the ‘Built for Zero’ initiatives (p.117).

The fourth chapter focuses on governmentality (pp.129-37). Authored by Louise Casey – a Dame of the British Empire, a sometime deputy leader of Shelter (one of the UK’s largest homelessness organisations), a homelessness ‘Tsar’ in Tony Blair’s Labour government of late 1990s and presently homelessness adviser to the Johnson Tory government. With this pedigree, Casey has much to say on the ‘necessary’ role of the state in initiating and coordinating homelessness policies and strategies and in promoting homelessness legislation. However, the largely celebratory tone of this chapter is disappointing: there is no room here for consideration of the frequently conflicting motivations of central (strategies from above)

and local (strategies from below) state organisations, nor of the constraining short-term political nature of many acclaimed – at the time of their inauguration at least – initiatives.

As essays on homelessness the above four chapters are instructive and informative in their own right, but they contribute little explicitly to the book editors' stated objectives to expand understanding of the relationships between Catholic social teaching/theological ethics and global homelessness. There are several additional chapters that share this lack of explicit attention to the book's objectives. However, in stark contrast to the above 'secular' contributions, they adopt an insistent religious trope and are liberally infused with scriptural references and papal homilies and invocations. Examples are Keenan's chapter entitled 'Blessed are the Poor in Spirit' (pp.176-86), a commentary on the Sermon on the Mount Beatitudes as recounted in Mathew's gospel and Carlo Santoro's extraordinary account of 'Friends of the Homeless' (pp.19-27). In this chapter, Santoro hero-worships three popes: the canonised John Paul II, and Pope Benedict XVI and the present Pope Francis. Recounting, apparently from memory, verbatim quotes from each pope Santoro is concerned to establish the seriousness of their concern for and commitment to alleviating the lot of homeless people. Equivalent unrelenting adulation (justified or not) for a civic leader would be greeted with cynicism and scorned as a public relations exercise.

Two further chapters can be added to the list of those that 'fail' to engage directly with the book's discursive agenda: that by Scullion and Williams entitled 'Accompanying Each Other on the Journey Home' (pp.3-11) and that by Carol Elizabeth Thomas on 'The Prayers of the Homeless' (pp.12-18). The first of these chapters recounts the impressive personal transformative experiences of two homeless people following their engagement with the educational and support programme offered by the Philadelphia based Project HOME.³ The second narrates the transformative experiences of the author herself (Thomas) when she worked as a care worker in the same Philadelphia project. Both of these chapters convey good news stories and are singularly congratulatory of achievement attributed to spiritual conviction that combines accompaniment with prayer. It is not to detract from the importance of these personal testimonies to observe that what these chapters say about CST/TE is difficult to gauge since equivalent testimonies – devoid of religious 'conversion' – are commonly cited by non-Catholic and secular/civic homelessness organisations as indicative of near identical personal achievements and transformations. Catholic Social teaching/theological ethics may well provide a motivator for the commitment of individual Catholic care workers and support staff and figure

³ Project HOME is nominally a non-faith based organisation. But see: <https://catholicphilly.com/2020/03/news/local-news/as-hard-times-descend-project-home-still-caring-for-the-least-of-these/>

prominently in the life transformations of some homeless people, but clearly 'compassion for others' is not an exclusive religious preserve – Catholic or otherwise. While the authors of these chapters would undoubtedly argue differently, for this reviewer the 'value added' of Catholic social teaching/theological ethics is not elucidated by these narratives.

'The Evasive'

Daniel Franklin Pilario's chapter, 'A methodological proposal for Catholic social teaching' (pp.187-98), reveals what is perhaps the major obstacle – apart from individual author disinclination – to examining the relationship between Catholic social teaching/theological ethics and homelessness, namely that the foundational documents for CST/TE, as Pilario discovered, have little to say about homelessness. Pilario's observation that 'many writers are at a loss for where to find resources in official magisterial documents' (p.187), echoes Keenan's lament in the book's Introduction that scholars were 'unable to find any article or book by any theological ethicist anywhere in the world on the topic of street homelessness' (p.xvii).

Regrettably the potential hinted at in Pilario chapter title to produce 'a methodology' which would enable the systematic examination of the interrelationships between CST/TE and homelessness does not come to fruition. Given the paucity of explicit homelessness references, Pilario eschews what would have been an admittedly demanding interpretative interrogation of CST/TE documentation. Instead he opts for recounting 'concrete stories' to 'see how they can inspire us to respond to homelessness in our time' (p.187). Pilario's story-telling leads us on an informative journey from the 'Basileias' of fourth century Turkey, through Dorothy Days' 'Houses of Hospitality' in 1930s New York and the 'Gawad Kalinga' poverty programme of 1980s Philippines. Pilario extracts two 'explorative reflections' relating to the modification of CST/TE from these case studies. The first involves a shift of CST/TE thinking from the 'universal' – which he associates with 'unchanging principles'- to the 'particular'; that is, listening 'to narratives from the ground on how actual communities address problems of homelessness'. Pilario's second and related reflection is to 'recognise the ambiguity of "institutionalisation" in our housing initiatives' (p.193). This introduces the somewhat radical idea that – in Dorothy Days' words, quoted by Pilario – 'one must live in a state of permanent dissatisfaction with the Church', meaning in this context that any tendency by the institution of the Church to favour the powerful and wealthy in conflicts over housing provision needs to be challenged and countered (p.195).

Criticism of the church as an institution runs through several of the contributions to this book. Anna Kasafi Perkins, for example, in her chapter on 'Women, Catholic Social Teaching and Disguised Homelessness in Jamaica' (pp.254-64) argues that provision of support by the Jamaican Church to homeless women – the disguised homeless – has been 'insufficient', and that 'the teaching tradition of the AEC [Antilles Episcopal Conference] has not treated homelessness (or women's issues) in a sustained or pointed fashion'. She additionally suggests that the structural causes of homelessness among women with children need to be addressed, in particular the 'culture of masculinity' that makes violence against women 'a characteristic of manhood' (p.262). Shaji George Kochuthara in his examination of responses to homelessness in India (pp.242-53), while acknowledging the charitable role of the Indian Church in constructing houses for homeless people and recognising that these 'works of mercy' need to continue, argues that the Church 'has to mobilise its own resources... sharing them with the homeless to ensure a dignified life for them and to guarantee their human rights.... we [the Church] need to change society's perception of the homeless' (p.250). Joseph L. Mben examines the history and role of 'The Household for Hope', a Catholic institution based in Cameroon that focuses on the social and family integration of street children and young prisoners (pp.230-53). Following a detailed history of the impressive work of this institution (he supplies statistical evidence for the 17 years, 2000 to 2016), Mben calls, in the face of a growing problem, for the 'involvement of the whole church' in a more comprehensive approach that 'joins other types of initiatives to supplement the work... of the Household of Hope' (p.238). The three foregoing chapters provide examples of critical and analytical comment and suggestions for improvement in the organisational structures of Catholic institutions and agencies which deliver services to homeless people, they however, for the most part, skirt round and only lightly touch on how these changes relate directly to teaching and ethical issues associated with CST/TE.

'The Engaged'

Mark McGreevy and Molly Seely's 'Preface' (pp.xxi-xxxiii) does not start well. On the first page they claim that it is 'absolutely possible for anyone to escape homelessness...[y]ou just need to construct a ladder that personally addresses each individual's needs and then be there for them' (pp.xxi-xxxiii). The ladder metaphor of course is too reminiscent of the now widely criticised and largely discredited 'staircase model' of homelessness. Fortunately, they retrieve some ground by distinguishing 'four rungs' to their ladder which have little or no relationship with 'housing ready' diktats and thereby distance their approach from staircase perspectives. Their four rungs are: 'consistent vocabulary' (predominantly with

regard to the definition of homelessness),⁴ ‘data collection and analysis’ (coverage and precision of measurement), ‘intersectional thinking’ (relating homeless to a wider context and agenda, uncovering its complex origins) and policy (piecing together solutions). Their coverage of policy is both commendably succinct and thorough, identifying and reflecting on the complex interrelationship between the life experiences of individual homeless people, the absence or presence of appropriate support services and wider structural factors. They argue that the success of strategies to end homelessness is ‘coordination between public and private stakeholders [charitable organisations?] at the local systems level’ (p.xxviii) – though not all the examples cited to support this contention have proved to be, in the longer term, as successful as first anticipated: the UK’s Rough Sleepers initiative of the late 1990s being a case in point. Their conclusion that structural factors make some people more vulnerable than others and must be addressed for any reduction in homelessness to be sustained is an issue taken up in several of the following chapters. At the very end of their chapter, McGreevy and Seely shift gear to introduce for the first time an element of religiosity in a consideration of the multiple meanings embedded in the word ‘agape’ (p.xxx). This short section – decorated with quotes from Deuteronomy and other sacred texts – has the feel of an afterthought, as if the authors had suddenly woken-up to the Catholic teaching and ethical objectives of the publication. However, their discussion of the meaning of ‘agape’ – christian love combined with charity, more generally referred to in this book as ‘caritas’ – together with their observations on structural factors, have considerable resonance in several later chapters which engaged directly with the discursive objectives of the book.

Pat Jones in her chapter ‘Caritas and Beyond’ (pp.138-47) is one of the most forthright voices in this context. In a wide ranging and thoughtful commentary, Jones argues that while the practical response to people who are homeless is strong, ‘ecclesial action and voice addressing the structures and policies implicated in homelessness is uncertain and limited... the contribution of Catholic social teaching is indistinct at best’. Jones contends that this anaemic contribution is attributable to ‘an overdependence on the principle of caritas’ and that there is a need to ‘construct an ecclesial response that aims not simply to alleviate but also to end street homelessness’ (p.140). These sentiments are replicated elsewhere, not least by Julie George (pp.43-52) in her engrossing account of the ‘violence and violation’ that homeless women endure in India. Here the gendered construction of social and economic relations within and outside the household combine with deep-rooted patriarchal attitudes to discriminate against women in practically every aspect of life ‘be it policy development, entitlement in government projects, control over household resources, right of inheritance and ownership and even the

⁴ Curiously there is no mention of ETHOS here, or indeed in any other chapter.

construction of housing.’ (pp.49-50). George maintains that the Church’s response in combination with other concerned NGOs should be to enable the transition of women ‘from being victims to being true citizens’ and ‘to stand in solidarity with them to demand their legal and human rights’ (p.51).

Joseph McCrave’s essay on ‘Hospitality’ (pp.221-29) reiterates Pat Jones’ argument as well as the sentiments articulated by Julie George: ‘Inequality is not natural or inevitable, but a product of human choice. It has structural causes which cannot be transformed by the virtue of hospitality alone’ (p.221). His insistent point is that *caritas* – a cornerstone of Catholic social teaching/ theological ethics – is not a matter of ‘either-or’ but a fundamental and necessary ‘resource for [successful] structural reform’ (p.225).

There is a thin thread running through this book which tenuously links often brief and isolated references to the importance of structural issues in understanding homelessness: the right to housing, universal basic income, private property, neo-liberalism and poverty being among the most prominent. Commentary on these issues reflects a growing concern among some in the Catholic community to move CST/TE beyond ‘*agape*’ and ‘*caritas*’ to unequivocally embrace social justice, to move away from a privileged focus on the alleviation of human suffering and engage in a more far-reaching programme that challenges cultural norms, as well as social, political and economic obstacles to ending homelessness.

Summation

There is much else of interest about homelessness in the 26 chapters of this book which this review has been unable to report. But it would be remiss not to recognise and acknowledge for instance the insights into: the predicament of African elders following the erosion of traditional African customs and practices leading to their increased vulnerability and exposure to homelessness; the double jeopardy of stateless refugees who find themselves ‘away from home but at the same time with no place to call home’; the vulnerabilities of the homeless in Hong Kong, one of Asia’s most affluent countries; and the complexity of issues that attend LGBT homeless communities whose ‘spiritual embrace’ by the Church does not include approval of life styles or sexual preferences. All too often, however, it can be hard work finding a way to these insights through the plethora of religiosity that attend most commentaries – of course, for many of the contributors and perhaps for the majority of readers of this book the religious message is conceivably as important as the insights into homelessness.

If there is an overall message in this book it is that ‘walking with the homeless’ is no longer sufficient. In the spirit of the plea of Pope Francis ‘to cease observing

people and things from balconies [pulpits?]' (quoted on p.xii), it is increasingly recognised that tackling homelessness requires more than kindness and empathy. It involves more, for instance, than moving homeless people from Rome's Termini railway station to St Peter's Square (p.215), more than opening up seminaries and churches to homeless people threatened with Covid-19 (Catholic News Service, 2020) and more than the 'experimental' allocation of unoccupied and under-occupied church property to social housing as in Project Bethléem (Housing Solution, n.d., pp.44-45).⁵ If Catholic social teaching/theological ethics is to advance, the Church needs to engage with what Laura Stivers calls 'prophetic disruption', that is the dismantling of social policies and practices that exploit and exclude disadvantaged people and confronts ideologies that justify such exploitation and marginalisation (2011, p.19). It needs also to build on the new found tolerance for the progressive ideas of liberation theology (Wooden, 2019) whose specific contribution – as Ethna Regan identifies in her chapter on 'Human Rights, Human Flourishing and the Right to Housing' (pp.199-209) – lies in its emphasis on 'the need for systematic structural fulfilment of the rights of the poor'. The integrity and reputation of the Catholic Church has been blighted in the recent years by the exposure of numerous crimes and scandals which have challenged the credibility of its promotion of human rights, yet it remains a resource-rich and influential institution and, as Regan concludes:

'...the contemporary challenges of social global and ecological justice make the Church's continued promotion of human rights especially the rights of the poor, an urgent imperative. Within that imperative the situation of the homeless poor needs to be treated as a violation of the right to housing, a violation that merits the same attention as that given to torture and executions' (p.203).

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Catholic News Service (2020) *Across Europe, Churches Offer Empty Facilities to Help Fight Covid-19*. See <https://www.catholicnews.com/services/englishnews/2020/across-europe-churches-offer-empty-facilities-to-help-fight-covid-19.cfm> [accessed 5 May 2020].

⁵ Thanks to Freek Spinnewijn for alerting me to this.

Housing Solutions Platform (n.d.) *50 Out of the Box Housing Solutions to Homelessness and Housing Exclusion*. See https://99536665-f232-4d42-aa6c-b165414b34b8.filesusr.com/ugd/bcd9b3_a65c4a5b4a6443619a0edda6e-dfd198e.pdf [accessed 5 May 2020].

Stivers, L. (2011) *Disrupting Homelessness: Alternative Christian Approaches*. (Minneapolis Fortress Press).

Wooden, C. (2019) *Pope Reflects on Changed Attitudes Towards Liberation Theology*. See: <https://cruxnow.com/vatican/2019/02/pope-reflects-on-changed-attitudes-toward-liberation-theology/> [accessed 5 May 2020].

Review III by Siobhán Garrigan, Trinity College Dublin

Confusingly, the “Catholic theological ethics” of this book’s title is not taken by most of its contributing authors to refer to scholarly public discourses on theology and ethics in the broad Catholic tradition. It refers to the ethical teachings of the Roman Catholic Church as expressed in Catholic Social Teaching (CST), a body of encyclicals and other documents issued by successive popes and Church Councils in response to major social issues of the day.

CST may be prompted by economic and political affairs, but its treatment of these, from the rise of socialism in the late nineteenth century to the climate catastrophe facing our own, always stems from its fundamental concern to articulate the right relationship of humans with God. As such, “the family” is the core unit of its version of “social”, with family meaning normative heterosexuality and binarized gender. Given this, CST could be described as a long-term reaction against Modernity were it not for its interventions on matters of economic justice and environmental repair, and its consistent insistence on the equal dignity of every human being.

The concepts of human dignity, solidarity, subsidiarity and the common good that inform so many of the chapters in this volume have become ethical doctrines not by being expounded as such but by being repeatedly deployed as useful thought-changers on some of the most pressing matters of each era. Why then, this book suggests, not apply these concepts from CST to homelessness in hopes of similar intervention?

Because to do so might obfuscate the actual voices of people experiencing homelessness, causing further alienation and oppression. This is addressed in the first part of Part I, where attempts are made in different ways to include and forefront a sampling of such voices.

Because to do so might further an assumption that “street homelessness” is only about older males in industrialised societies. This is addressed in the second part of Part I, where the distinctive co-incidences of statelessness, gender, ageing, former military service, extreme wealth disparity, being young and LGBT, and addiction are all briefly explored.

Because to do so might result in a translation gap between the church and today’s governments and non-governmental organisations. This is addressed in the first part of Part II, with a strong attempt to identify where, specifically, in the UN’s strategic development goals such interventions might find a purchase (so that they can influence policy), followed by a strengthening of the Church’s own account of its response to homelessness, mostly at grassroots levels.

Because it might not be possible on its own terms. This is addressed in the second part of Part II, where contemporary theologians imagine and develop in more depth a constructive response to the question.

Because it ought not be a predominantly Western project, given the global nature of both the Church and the problem of homelessness. This is addressed in the third and final part of Part II, with responses from authors in Cameroon, India and Jamaica.

It is a worthwhile project but a difficult read, coming across as a lengthy string of vignettes mixed with overly-short scholarly nuggets. This is perhaps the inevitable underside of the book's greatest strength, which is the relative diversity of its contributors' perspectives. Getting all of these people together in one place is quite a feat and must have been wonderful when it happened in person. One can only imagine the conversations between them at the conference out of which this book project grew. But in the starkness of book form, the different perspectives are not seen to inform one another, and one is left with the homelessness edition of "from our own correspondent", despite the careful editing.

It is also difficult to review a volume in which so many essays resolve through an expression of piety rather than analysis, and it is worth noting that the intended audience for this volume is not in an academic journal but "in classes or in study groups, in urban or rural areas, in churches or schools" (p.xviii). Nonetheless, this volume is a unique resource on the relation of Catholic teachings to homelessness and not merely a call to action, and so I would like to suggest a few angles that a prospective PhD or other researcher might take up for more prolonged investigation. Other reviewers in this Review Symposium have already given detailed outlines of the content of the volume and identified aspects of Catholic thought that might have further improved it and this frees me to take this slightly unusual approach.

Research typically proceeds via questions, and the first that one might pose is: what is the homelessness that Catholic theological ethics needs to address? This volume's attempted multi-national and not solely First World perspective is reflective of a Church whose social teaching is designed to be as catholic as its membership, "universal" in the best sense of the world. But are all sorts of homelessness sufficiently equivalent (in existential or phenomenological terms) that they can be usefully corralled together under a single term? Consider the distinctions between a middle-aged woman sleeping on her friend's couch for months in a wealthy city and a young queer person forced into sexual labour in a poor rural town and vast swathes of human beings living in refugee camps or immigration-processing centres and a middle-class family evicted due to rent-raises and now sleeping in their parent's car. What makes such globally different manifestations, with such different causes, collectable in a single category?

If one is calling for Catholic theological ethics to better address homelessness, of what should that category consist and what would be its limits?

Second, how, and why, ought one to distinguish “street” homelessness from any other type, as this volume does? In a study with social justice at its heart, it seems incongruous to draw a particular focus on the *visibly* homeless, when so many more people are *invisibly* but just as damagingly so. Moreover, such an approach will bias any study’s overall outcomes to highlight the experiences of males, given that most women experiencing homelessness are not on the street, for obvious reasons. What is it about the image of the person seeking shelter on the street that repeatedly gains public attention, and why does scholarship like this follow? Relatedly, why is the phrase, “the homeless” still in such extensive usage, including throughout this book. Does it have a potent currency in public discourse that “people experiencing homelessness” does not? Not only does the term elide the distinctions between people’s situations, preventing proper study, it also objectifies them, “stripping individuals of even their fundamental personhood” (p.4) as Mary Scullion remarks in the opening essay of the non-ironically titled section, “Hearing the Voices of the Homeless.”

Third, as noted at various points in this volume, but explicitly by Daniel Franklin E. Pelario, while there are numerous responses to homelessness “from below”, “many writers are at a loss for where to find resources on homelessness in official magisterial documents” (p.187); why is this? Is it to do with the category/definition problems of the first two questions? Or is it because the Church sees homelessness as a symptom of deeper problems which it does address, such as capitalism, ecological abuse, family breakdown, etc.? Or something else? Ethna Regan’s account of the Church’s increasing adoption of the language of human rights suggests potentially fruitful avenues for further investigation here, particularly with regard to both the universal right to housing and how this is to be integrated with more systemic accounts of poverty.

Fourth, why are Catholic writers so timid in their criticism of the imagination of the State? William Cavanaugh’s article makes explicit what is implied in so much of the rest of the volume: that responses “from below” means not only empowering parishes and other local sites of mercy and accompaniment but also accepting that this is the right or the only possible response, given that “one of the fundamental roles of the state is to protect property rights, and that means protecting the rights of those who already have property” (p.150). Might it not be possible to argue for, even to model, a Catholic theological ethics that imagines and articulates a fundamental role for the State that is oriented in such a way that it does not cause homelessness in multiple ways?

Such a study would mean standing in more critical relation to Catholic Social Teaching, and this brings me to my fifth and final suggestion for further investigation. While mannerly hints are made by several contributors that the Church could develop more resources on various aspects of the topic in hand, it is surprising how much of the volume assumes the “good” or at least “adequate” nature of Catholic theological ethics. I was particularly surprised that so few contributors even questioned whether Catholic teachings might also have *contributed to* homelessness. For example, many authors in this volume rightly note that Catholic theological ethics has had a lot to say on the side of those in poverty and against the excesses of capitalism; but attention ought also to be given to the ways in which CST’s accommodation to neo-liberalism (i.e. private wealth is acceptable if it is then spent on the common good) has proven not nearly robust enough as a counter to the aggressive neo-liberalism that dominates today’s world and has homelessness hard-wired into its programme.

One potential exception is Alejandro Crosthwaite’s chapter on “Youth and LGBT: Homeless, Overlooked and Underserved” which notes that while religiosity is usually “correlated with positive mental health outcomes for young adults and adolescents” (p.83), it is negatively correlated for those who are LGBTQ, demonstrating that a significant percentage of LGBTQ homeless youth, even in the relatively liberal city of San Francisco, fled or were ejected from Roman Catholic backgrounds. He calls on the church to improve its pastoral mission in this regard and also on Pope Francis to provide the teaching “needed to offer LGBT homeless youth an unconditional spiritual embrace” (p.82). This is important, but stops far short of analysing the effects on homelessness of Catholic teaching on sexuality or CST’s insistence on “the family” as the essential unit of social organisation. Similarly, when Julie George and Anna Kasafi Perkins examine the situation of homeless women in India and Jamaica, respectively, one wonders why it is only the local Church’s response and not the magisterial Church’s teaching on women, its very theological anthropology throughout CST, that is deemed insufficient.

For all the ways Catholic theological ethics offers the inspiration and routes to action that this book outlines, the ways in which it is itself also implicated in the causes or perpetuation of homelessness remain remarkably unexplored. Without such a critically nuanced approach, it is hard to see how the necessary evolution of Catholic theological ethics can take place.

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