

Alnmouth study week 2011

'Dehumanising poverty; dehumanising wealth'

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I have been intrigued by concepts all of my life. Some concepts have the similar effect to that of discovering a wonderful piece of music or poem, they create in me an AH! Moment. They are a stimulating revelation that sends me on a new journey of thinking or discovery.

So when reading the words of Marian Hillar from her essay on Liberation Theology, my eye alighted upon the words 'dehumanising poverty', where she reflects upon the idea of chosen poverty over against 'suffering dehumanising poverty': -

Members of the religious orders are committed to the vow of poverty and do not own property individually, nevertheless they enjoy a standard of living and security that separates them from the daily agony of the poor. The question then arose for some of them, what is the ideal of poverty in a situation where most are suffering dehumanising poverty and what should the Church and Christians do about it? ¹

This definition of 'suffering poverty and dehumanising poverty' present a troubling image for the Religious as in the story of Dives and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-25) where a rich man has a suffering poor man on his doorstep and does nothing about it.

The 'dehumanising' effect is for all to see with the sores covering the man's whole being. His poverty rendered him unable to get treatment for his condition, food for his daily needs and shelter.

But some modern analysts suggest that the dehumanising effect is actually upon the rich man, who has no compassion for his fellow man, and scripture supports that view since the suffering poor man goes to heaven and the rich man does not.

Setting the complexity of these ideas against the background of the Widespread Riots in August 2011 that spread throughout London and then beyond, it would be difficult to apply the term 'dehumanising poverty' to those reported for looting, arson, criminal damage and murder, nor to the youths and their joyful triumph as gangs of them ran wild on these sprees, for on face value, there was no comparison. This was quickly confirmed by media reported public opinion which quickly berated these young people and later their parents for being feral beings, without public decency and good order.

Is it conceivable, however, that we might make generalised assessments about situations and people and thus be guilty, ourselves, of dehumanising people by our statements about them? The answer is clearly yes as we vilify our enemies, berate foreigners and immigrants and

¹ Published in **Humanism and Social Issues. Anthology of Essays. M. Hillar and H.R. Leuchtag, eds., American Humanist Association, Houston, 1993, pp. 35-52.**

Marian Hillar <http://www.socinian.org/liberty.html>

create modern forms of outlawry as we decide who can or cannot participate in the goods and welfare of our communities.

For example, the welfare state as envisaged by the Beveridge Report in the 1900's sought to offer education, medical care, pensions and social welfare to include the lower stratum of society. One hundred years later we see many ways by which attempts are made to dehumanize or delineate afresh as to who the benefactors of these provisions might be. Hence we have the term, the 'deserving poor' as a battle cry encouraged by the self interested tabloids and media followed by articles denouncing scroungers and wilful abusers of the system and peddling vitriolic alternatives that frequently bear no relationship to the real and available possibilities in our shrinking industrial and economic environment.

The media, which continually focuses upon the detritus of society, is itself in danger of becoming embroiled in these substrata standards. Their uncensored publications can easily highlight a garnered case of excessive abuse and by strong inference seek to state that all claimants are scroungers and malingerers.

This divisive tactic becomes part of the uncritical contemporary culture and infects the way we are asked to look at the disposal of 'diminishing resources' in the world of Education, University Places, Medical provisions in Hospitals and Surgeries, Old People's Homes, Care of the Elderly and finally public and private pensions. I say divisive because of the way people and their humanity increasingly counts for nothing and proscribed money becomes the arbiter.

Hence money was one of the values of assessment used in the 'Tottenham Rioting' scenario and poverty was refuted at least at the cash flow level. These were not thought to be the homeless night shelter and street sleeper people. They were deemed to be from homes where incomes were received be that by wages or social security, but where parents were being unfaithful to their duties as parents to control their offspring.

You can hear the next criticism forming; however, as they become the army of unemployed scroungers who sponge off the State and suddenly we have moved behind the smoke screen of reasonable outrage and upon emerging, we have shifted from financial poverty to a new ideological prejudice. These young people and a whole host of others are suffering from dehumanising undeserved wealth. Oh dear! I wonder where this will lead us.

Dehumanising Undeserved Wealth

Without realising it, dehumanising undeserved wealth that we shall call DuW, may be a syndrome that has been running rampant throughout our land, but which has been overlooked or hidden from view. It has only recently begun to be publicly recognised within our higher offices of state or economic control and we are learning that it exists in a variety of species that mankind has often learnt to live with, in its domesticated forms.

1. Recent sightings have recognised it, (DuWbank), within the Banking fraternity, internationally and locally. It is capable of inflicting unimaginable damage to the world's economies. It has insatiable appetites for bonuses and redundancy payments and is so high up the food chain of the world's leadership that it is only occasionally constrained.
2. A close variety (DuWstock) occupies the Stock exchanges of the world and they speak such convoluted languages be they verbal or sign that they too are able to avoid control

as long as they produce wealth for their masters. They have, however, also been known to destroy companies and affect the Global economy.

3. There is now an ongoing investigation as to the presence of DuW in the media conglomerates. There certainly appears to be a DuWjour viral effect that has caused SOME PEOPLE who work in the media to HACK. This is a process of covert investigative journalism that invades victim's private lives for the ultimate financial gain of a SCOOP. Parliamentary Committees and Police investigations have therefore sat to interrogate the top controllers of these heinous activities of the DuWjour but it is becoming evident that these activities affect the minds and eyesight of their colleagues since no one has seen anything heard anything or knows anything about it. This is truly alarming and may suggest that we are all vulnerable to attack by the DuW monster
4. Then there is (DuWparl) i.e. that, which has infested members of Parliament making false claims and which has already been discovered amongst some perpetrators. Society has already punished them and procedural fences have been erected to prevent them ever occurring again. It is of course known that DuWparl infects foreign governments and their members since foreign aid, meant to assist the needy in various countries, is often diverted to personal bank accounts. Is there no limit to this?
5. Apparently not, as today on the news (August 2011) I heard of yet an even newer species that is emerging, the DuWolymp. Apparently in London this species is going to 'Hike' accommodation prices sky high throughout the Olympic Games, and flights into and out of London will rise by at least 40%. No doubt ticket touts for stadia are also lurking in the undergrowth somewhere and other scams will become apparent.
6. Lastly, for brevities sake, there is the DuWLoan shark, who lends money to the vulnerable and enmeshes the victims in a state of bondage that is very difficult to escape from and which often entraps their dependants and families as well. Duwcredit card has similar effects but is given state credibility. Duwstudent loan has yet to be evaluated.
7. It would appear that mankind as a species is vulnerable to contagion in some form of the Dehumanising undeserved Wealth syndrome that lies deep down inside us all. If this is so, has it been recognised before and can anything be done about it?

SOME ACCOUNTS OF JESUS CONFRONTING THE DUW SYNDROME

•Jesus is attacked by the DuWsoul syndrome but overcomes its power. Luke 4:5-8.

The devil took Jesus up and revealed to him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. "I will give you the glory of these kingdoms and authority over them," the devil said, "because they are mine to give to anyone I please. I will give it all to you if you will worship me." Jesus replied, "The Scriptures say, 'You must worship the LORD your God and serve only him.'

• Jesus Clears the Temple when he finds DuWreligious syndrome present

Jesus entered the Temple and began to drive out all the people buying and selling animals for sacrifice. He knocked over the tables of the moneychangers and the chairs of those selling

doves. He said to them, "The Scriptures declare, 'My Temple will be called a house of prayer,' but you have turned it into a den of thieves!" ^{Matthew 21:12-13}

- **Jesus teaches about the Duw syndrome effect upon the soul**

And he spoke a parable unto them, saying,

The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, what shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, this will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?

So is he that lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.

• **Further teaching on the value of the soul in Matthew 16:24-26, shows Jesus stating clearly that earthly treasures are not a worthy exchange for the price of our souls**

Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

- **Jesus meets with a man deeply involved in extortion. Luke 19:1-10**

There was a man named Zacchaeus, the chief among the publicans, who was rich. Upon meeting Jesus in Jericho, Jesus asks to visit his house and Zacchaeus welcomes him there. The public complain bitterly saying that Zacchaeus is a sinner and question Jesus for going to this house.

But Zacchaeus has a different response and says to Jesus: Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.

To which Jesus replies: This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

HISTORIC ATTEMPTS AT TREATMENT FOR DUW.

The ironic reflection so far, implies an inherent weakness or defect *within mankind* as a species that renders them vulnerable to the agency of dehumanising undeserved wealth. This has posed a problem for those who have wished to impose isolation from society (imprisonment) as a solution to DuW syndrome since there is evidence from the early hermits that our own and the wrongs of the world will accompany us wherever we go.

- I. The *early hermits* in their isolation repeatedly identify an inherent weakness within themselves that pervades their lives and against which they must constantly fight, even though they are alone. We could be tempted to ask whether the battle is something they bring from their past lives or is it a contemporary struggle with a life's issue. Do these

extracts written by Una Kroll working as a solitary Novice companion to a Hermit, in 1996, throw light upon this matter?²

- II. 'Hermits go into solitude to become the place where Christ confronts evil. That is their special task in the Church, which is not to say that other people do not have this vocation '
- III. They have the ability to hold two opposites in tension. From time to time everyone who has this vocation will have to hold the good and evil in the world, in full consciousness and stand before God waiting for Christ to accomplish the victory.
- IV. Hermits will be aware not only of the evil in... the world, for whom they are interceding, but also of (their) own evil ...upon which the external evil is fastened and be content to feel consumed by it, knowing that he or she is absolutely safe because Christ has already overcome the evil.
- V. To some extent we all are the space in which Christ continues his work of overcoming evil. The hermit simply exists to point us all to our baptismal vows and to encourage us to be true to them in our lives. '

No doubt there were shades of many issues that arose to haunt the ancient Hermit or as they say, demonise them. So our term of Dehumanising undeserved Wealth is unlikely to be a concept that the ancient or modern hermit would be unfamiliar with since they would both easily recognise the saying that 'money is the root of all evil'. But because we have institutionalised so many ways of making money that oppress others and have created power blocks of people that have gained from such activities, it is going to be very hard to redress the problem or find people willing to see and acknowledge their own version of the syndrome. I wonder how Jesus, St Francis of Assisi or others would tackle it today.

FURTHER HISTORIC ATTEMPTS

- *Perhaps owning our contagion and repenting and seeking God's healing is our only hope or else we spread our versions of DuW upon the world as we might see from the writings of the Prophet Haggai 2:10-14.*

On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Haggai: "This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Ask the priests what the law says: If someone carries consecrated meat in the fold of their garment, and that fold touches some bread or stew, some wine, olive oil or other food, does it become consecrated?'" The priests answered, "No."

Then Haggai said, "If a person defiled by contact with a dead body touches one of these things, does it become defiled?" "Yes," the priests replied, "it becomes defiled."

² **THE HERMIT'S BATTLE By Una Kroll The Tablet 07/12/1996**
<http://www.thetablet.co.uk/article/6770>

¹⁴ Then Haggai said, “‘So it is with this people and this nation in my sight,’ declares the LORD. ‘Whatever they do and whatever they offer there is defiled.

World Reactions

In contrast, we have, through the years blamed others. So in the study of global histories, wrong doers have been defined as being ‘Depraved or Bad’ and the legal processes acted accordingly by extending the death penalty to cover even acts of theft or criminal damage. This has been upon the grounds that there was no chance to deviate the perpetrator from their behaviour. Like a bad vegetable, you cast them away.

Then as science progressed, the USA and the UK moved towards people being described as ‘Deprived and or Mad’ and society sought to formulate treatments or processes to overcome the deficiencies or disorders within the individual.

Later still there grew the awareness that environments can also be the disabling factor and so slums were eradicated, vice cleaned up, education and health care provided and Utopia had arrived, or had it?

Some must surely say that in earthly terms, there are still vast and complex running sores to be healed throughout the world and even here in the UK. In spiritual terms, if one dares venture here, there is an even greater battle to be fought within each of us as well, whose scope would require another paper to be written.

But in conclusion I offer this thought by Paul Bodenham, the Third Order of the Society of St Francis, Nottingham Area Minister, who comments in his September 2011 Letter upon the recent riots in the UK.

‘We [The members of the Third order of the Society of Saint Francis] are a community of people who seek to represent the antidote to everything we saw last month. If our society is sick, we each can be an antibody – a responsibility that requires us to live resolutely with humility, love and joy.’

A timely challenge indeed against these earnest words from John the Epistle writer at 1 John 1: 8-9 that helps us to acknowledge that we can be, and maybe often are, a part of the problem. Since: -

‘If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us but if we confess our sin, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.’

Only then, and with God’s daily forgiving grace at work in us, might we represent the one who is the antidote that God has given us, namely Jesus Christ our Lord.

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