

# Review of: "How can Ecological ethics assist in the progress of man? - Towards a reflection on the Encyclical letter Laudato si'"

Dawn M Nothwehr<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Catholic Theological Union

Potential competing interests: I have No potential competing interests to declare.

Review of:

## HOW CAN ECOLOGICAL ETHICS ASSIST IN THE PROGRESS OF MAN? – TOWARDS A REFLECTION ON THE ENCYCLICAL LETTER LAUDATO SI'

The content and substance of the article appears to be fine.

HOWEVER – it's use of the English language has MUCH to be desired. The Author should work with an English language tutor to correct the NUMEROUS awkward phrasing and grammatical inaccuracies throughout the work.

**More significantly THEOLOGICALLY** – Much of this article is erroneous because the author fails to address half of the human race insofar as there is only reference to MALES throughout the text..... men, he, himself, his, man, man's, etc. Such neglect places this work outside the pale of acceptable Catholic theology and professional theological ethics disciplinary standards.

Acceptable professional standards for Catholic authors generally, but certainly in the theological disciplines – including theological ethics – requires use of carefully inclusive non-discriminatory language. To fail to do this contradicts much of what the author is attempting to say here.

**Here are the standards that need to be followed for a publishable version of this article:**

### **Catholic Theology and Academic Writing Standards**

All instructors and students are expected to use nondiscriminatory language when referring to human beings in classroom presentations and discussions, in written materials and papers for courses and in theses or projects. While recognizing the complexity of the cultural contexts and theological issues around the question of how we name God, everyone is to use gender-neutral or gender-balanced language and imagery in so far as possible when they speak about God.

The heart of the matter is the conviction that how we speak and write shapes the way that we imagine, think about, and act toward others. Our words and images shape our belief in God as well. Bias-free language in the broad sense means "using words which affirm the equality and dignity of each person regardless of race, gender, creed, age, or ability.[1] The

words we use must reflect the fundamental dignity and equality of the people of God and our work of building up a community of faith and love. Bias-free language is a matter of justice. Pastoral ministers, religious educators, preachers, and teachers, must use their words carefully, as Thomas Groome explains, because "the purposes of our ministry and the commitments of our faith can be defeated or enhanced by the very language that we use."<sup>[2]</sup>

## Gender-Specific Language

The United States Catholic Bishops, in the criteria they developed to evaluate translations of Scripture for liturgical use, explain that "English vocabulary itself has changed so that words which once referred to all human beings are increasingly taken as gender specific and consequently exclusive."<sup>[3]</sup> Thus, words like man, men, mankind, brethren, and sons in English mediate a sense of male superiority and male social power. They are not truly generic terms that include both women and men. Likewise, the third person masculine singular pronoun (he, his, him) is gender specific and should be avoided when the context is inclusive of both women and men. Because our images and metaphors for God also affect how we understand who God is for us, care should be taken with regard to personal language and pronouns for God, particularly unbalanced use of male hierarchical terms like Master, King, and Lord.

Some strategies:

Use the plural rather than the singular. Compare the following:

If a **student** wants to register, **he** should come to my office.

If **students** want to register, **they** should come to my office.

This strategy can also help you to avoid overuse of she or he/she ("slash pronouns") or the longer he or she, his and hers; can make your text awkward to read. In some cases, institutions and countries are referred to with feminine singular pronoun {she, her, hers}; replace with the neutral it, its for impersonal entities.

- Choose inclusive terms to denote humanity in general like humankind, people, humanity, human beings.
- Expand the expression: brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, children of God, etc.
- Choose inclusive terms when you are translating from another language into English, especially where the original language expresses a generic meaning through a grammatically masculine form.

Avoid terms that unnecessarily combine a person's gender and job or role. Thus, policeman, anchorman, laymen should be expressed police officer; anchor; and lay people. Avoid gratuitous references to gender as in expression like female doctor or male nurse.

## Exclusive Language in Quotations

Issues of accuracy and integrity may require that you quote a source exactly, even if exclusive language is used. When you are using sources that for historical and cultural reasons do not use unbiased language, be very cautious about changing the quote or adding commentary. As study of the United States Declaration of Independence shows, the men in the sentence, "All men were created equal;" refers to white, propertied, male citizens. Here, changing the quote hides the

history of bias we have now come to recognize. In general, you may end up distorting the quote or making it unintelligible.

According to the *Chicago Manual of Style* ( CMS 13.59), literally meaning "so:" "thus" "in this manner:" and traditionally set in italics, *sic* may be inserted in brackets following a word misspelled or wrongly used in the original. *Sic* should not be used merely to call attention to unconventional spellings, which should be explained (if at all) in a note or in prefatory material. Similarly, where material with many errors and variant spellings (such as a collection of informal letters) is reproduced as written, a prefatory comment or a note to that effect will make a succession of *sics* unnecessary.

## Collective Norms

Bias-free language also entails more than gender-specific language and is careful to respect the human dignity of all people. There are some cases of English usage that identify a person or groups of persons in a biased manner. In particular you should also be careful about describing a collective group of people with adjectives: the deaf, the crippled, the blind, gays, blacks, diabetics. In each of these cases, an adjective is being used as a noun. It is more appropriate to use "people" or "people who are:" This is especially the case with regard to disabilities: prefer to "put people first"-people with learning disabilities, people who are paraplegic. There are no set rules; each writer will have to strive for sensitivity and clarity.

The writer sensitive to bias will also be attentive, for example, to how particular terms are used in different contexts. When we speak of someone who is "blind" to indicate that they are unaware or unwillingly to perceive something, we imply that someone who has "vision" is aware and perceptive and thus negate the experience of those who have blindness. Likewise, imagery of white as "good and clean" and black as "bad and dirty" has the power to perpetuate racial stereotypes.

[1] 'Bishops' Pastoral Team, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, To Speak as a Christian Community: Pastoral Message on Inclusive Language (1989), no. 2, in 'The Liturgy Documents: A Parish Resource (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1999), 2:245

[2] Thomas Groome, Language for a Catholic Church, rev. ed. (Kansas City. MO: Sheed and Ward, 1991), 3-4. 1

[3] National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Criteria for the Evaluation of Inclusive Language Translations of Scriptural Texts Proposed for Liturgical Use (1990), no. 1, in *Liturgy Documents*, 2:251.