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Religious Belief in Butler's *Parable of The Sower*

*Parable of the Sower*, a novel written by Octavia Butler tells the story of "Lauren Olamina". The novel develops step by step the maturing of Lauren's beliefs in a different God than the Christian beliefs of her community. Her new perception of God helps her endure the atrocities that constantly occur in her world, giving meaning to the changes she sees and providing the peace necessary to face adversity. Once she had the understanding that "God is change" and that it is necessary to adapt to changes, Lauren comes to the conviction that she must share her beliefs, which she does in due time. These events are key in the relationship of the novel to its title. Once Lauren matures her idea of her beliefs called "Earthseed" and beginning to preach about it, the parable of the Sower makes sense, as her teachings are being sown in different people who, like the parable, resemble infertile land where her beliefs are not accepted, land with thorns where they do not grow well, or good land.

Octavia Butler shaped in this novel a dystopian future based in exaggerations of the treacherous tendencies in modern society as “illiteracy, social division, economic inequality, drug abuse, and exploitations of children and women” (Stillman 15). The story is developed in a dysfunctional society where the evilness of the people is easy to flourish. The main character “Lauren Olamina” is a black girl, quiet, raised by her Latin stepmother and her father on a society with a lot of prejudices towards interracial relationships. Due to these prejudices, she and her family (her father, stepmothers and three brothers) live in a closed mixed-race community. This community where Lauren lives is on the edge of collapse, and the survival of the people is at risk, which only Lauren notices. Lauren, unlike her fellows, has a pessimistic point of view of life, since she is not in negation and perceives the postapocalyptic ending of her community.

As Curtis says, Butler "shows the fractures and fissures in which any community is built and can crumble" (136). This is key in the novel since it is not only a criticism of the society that was applied to its time but also applies to these times. The society where Lauren lives is in search of security and denies its own weakness or "vulnerability". These people delegate their security to the system, the rules, and the political authorities, without realizing that they need to be prepared to survive and adapt in this wild society.

Upon this dystopic scenario, it is show how those with Christian beliefs confront the adversity and despair. The Christianism is shown in the novel as beliefs based on a distant God that leads its followers to passivity. It is shown that the “love” which is the base of these beliefs is rarely saw or perceived on the society or their God, and clash with the action needed to take to survives. As Kouhestani describes “All that Lauren sees and feels are disgusting” since it is clear the fate of poverty sectors is suffering, with a Christians God that is unavailable to take care of those in need (899). Since, Lauren cannot find comfort or answer to the changes and violence that occurs in her life on Christianism, she starts to develop a beliefs and perspective of life that supports her better to affront the crisis.

The novel begins with a verse of “Earthseed: the book of the living” that stated “You Change. All that you Change Changes you. The only lasting truth Is Change. God Is Change”. This verse belongs to the insights written by Lauren in her diary which reflects Lauren’s beliefs. This statement written at the beginning of the book is key to understand Lauren's point of view. Lauren is a brave girl that noticed that persons has the needs of changes and adapt to survive.

Unlike Lauren, the other characters in the novel prefer to remain in a status quo, being carried away by events like a leaf in a stream of water. Many of these characters lived better times, with purchasing power to buy electronic devices, or safely to go to church, which was enjoyable to them. But the time changed, and now they are living in a dangerous environment without making a change in their life, enduring robberies every day and dream of living again the old comforts (Kouhestani 899). This situation is one of the most worrying things that happens in the novel because it could happen to us. It is overwhelming the thought of not preparing for the future, and living in the past without making changes. This is why Lauren's character is so interesting since she perceives and recognizes the temporality of life and the need to identify the reality of change, adapting to overcome the future, which is the preliminary idea designed for Lauren's lifestyle. As Stillman described Lauren “is determined and active, thoughtful and engaged, a strong, intelligent and capable young woman” (22).

Another feature that makes special Lauren is her condition of "hyperempathy" that she suffers due to her mother's drug abuse during pregnancy. This condition makes Lauren susceptible to others' feelings since she feels their feelings too, which makes her vulnerable, especially near to people in pain. Lauren affronts her reality, knowing that she must endure her vulnerability and adapt to survive even if this means use self-defense. This attitude is a good example for all the readers since they could feel identified with vulnerability and need to adapt at some point.

The “parable of the sower” related to St. Luke is universally understood as the relationship existing between a belief and “converted hearts” (Gerhardsson 166), being the belief analog to the seed, the one that preaches analog to the sower, and the heart of people that hear analog to the ground. If the teachings and beliefs are well accepted, this is similar to the seed that grows on good ground. This is evidenced in the novel since after Lauren leaves the place where she was raised, she started to preach and teach about “Earthseed”, her beliefs and insights of the universe. So, it could be said that she sows "Earthseed" principles. The purpose of "Earthseed" is to accept the world and perceive each one as an agent of change. It tries to motivate each person to persevere in an introspective way.

After Lauren leaves her hometown, she travels in search of a better place to settle. During her trip, she takes the opportunity to teach how to read and write to preach on "Earthseed". Her teachings try to make people think about the future and not just solve their daily problems. Since this religion was created as a response “to the failures of traditional modes of survival” (Stillman 22), promoting the acceptance of inexorableness of change and pressuring the necessity to be dynamic and influence what occurs. Lauren Wanted to help people to build themselves, as well as to build their God. As a verse from her ideas says, she perceives that each person is an "Earthseed", and that they need to adapt and develop to grow. They need to learn from "Changes".

The perception of life taught by Lauren is not well accepted at the beginning, but it ended in unifying the group that she makes in order to survive after she leaves her hometown. Her teachings of “Earthseed” lack of the mysticism present in all religions, instead it provided a “belief system, and a world view” that perceives God in change (Stillman 25). This new religion allowed its followers to bet at peace in that unstable environment since they have accepted that, “God is change… God exists to be shaped… God doesn't love or hate… God just is”. So, their belief is shaped in order to guarantee their survival. They have accepted the need for change by themselves and adapt to it, which perfectly suits the vulnerable and marginalized as the integrates of Lauren’s group. This group gathered by Lauren shares the vulnerability to the hostile environment in which they live. Likewise, some of them have hyperempathy like her. So, Lauren's teachings are accepted to unify and remain in the new interdependent community that they found called “Acorn”, based on "Earthseed" principles.

In conclusion, the novel matures well the ideas related to the fractures of society, exploding them to create that post-apocalyptic development. These events reflect how a passive understanding of Christianism could lead to a lack of comfort or answer in despairing and wild scenarios. This could produce the search for support on other principles as Lauren did. So, the parable of the sower could be applied to each person, where people resemble the seed that needs good ground to flourish and develop, and this ground is the bases of Lauren’s beliefs “Change”. In the same way, the parable could be understood in its universal understanding related to preaching a belief to others, as Lauren did. Since the novel did not have specific ending events, only time could say if the seed of “Earthseed” grew in each member of “Acorn” as well as how much they develop on the ground of Lauren’s beliefs.

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