

ACAB
PARABLE OF THE SOWER
OCTAVIA BUTLER
TALKING POINTS

1 Wealth Inequality

"In Parable of the Sower, there is an even greater rich/poor gap than we have now, and that the gap does seem to be widening. In the novel, there are people who work as hard as they can, but have to choose between eating and living in a house."

"This does not mean it's the end of the world, or even the end of the US. Things are just a lot worse."

—OB

Butler has placed the book in the if-this-goes-on category coined by Robert Heinlein (along with the what-if category; the if-only category)

2 Sharing

"What the world is going to be like when it is inherited by the children of today's drug addicts. My main character has a problem that is caused by her mother's drug-taking. It's an unusual problem—I want it to be medically possible but not something I've actually seen. Things biomedical do catch my interest."

—OB

Hyperempathy—helpful or not?

3 The Environment

"Global warming is a kind of character in the book...I think global warming is going to stay questionable until we can't deny it any longer, because nobody wants to do the things we would have to do to live with it"

"We're less and less willing to pay for the things that make civilization possible, and yet we imagine that civilization will somehow continue, and I don't see that it must."

—OB

4 Gender

Women are central characters in the book, yet Lauren becomes a man for the journey and roles are largely heteronormative/conservative around marriage and childcare.

5 Utopia

"Personally, I find utopias ridiculous. We're not going to have a perfect human society until we get a few perfect humans, and that seems unlikely."

—OB

Olivar decides to become a privatized city, owned by KSF.

What are the compromises Lauren is willing to make and where does she draw the line?

6

Religion

In an interview, Butler explained that she wanted to tell the story of someone who, "Sometime after her death—after people have had time to forget how human she was—might easily be considered a god."

She draws on elements of Buddhism, Taoism, matriarchal religions, and the Yoruba religion to write *Earthseed: The Books of the Living*.

"Earthseed deals with ongoing reality, not supernatural authority figures"

"God is power—infinite, irresistible, inexorable, and yet, god is pliable—trickster, teacher, chaos, clay. God exists to be shaped, God is change."

"All that you touch, You Change. All that you Change, Changes you. The only lasting truth Is Change. God Is Change."

"God is change" is an invitation to respond to fear with creativity and compassion. Practitioners of Earthseed must acknowledge perpetual struggle as an inevitable companion to love and happiness. Change is the only constant in Lauren's trauma-filled life.

Cult or social movement?

7

Conflict

Lauren writes: "Embrace diversity. Unite—or be divided, robbed, ruled, killed by those who see you as prey."

And Butler says in interview: "Whenever anyone brings up a division of any kind—people/technology or mind/body, for example—I immediately think, well those aren't necessarily two separate things."

8

"The destiny of Earthseed is to take root amongst the stars."

What is their relationship to the colonization of outer space? Butler has spoken of her interest in the space race as a violence-free proxy for nuclear war.

9

Internet

Julia Dash: "In cyberspace, one can surrender themselves to the technology and become whoever you want to be—you can gender change, change your age, your political views, your race"

OB: "I do that all the time. So far, you haven't given me anything that I don't do myself, in my writing, so no advantage yet."

How would things be different with the internet? The book was written on a typewriter, does this present blind-spots?