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# **Troubled but Not Destroyed**

**African Theology in Dialogue with  
HIV and AIDS**

**Ezra Chitando**



**World Council  
of Churches**  
Publications

## TROUBLED BUT NOT DESTROYED

African Theology in Dialogue with HIV and AIDS

Ezra Chitando

EHAIA series

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## Introduction

This book seeks to review African theology's response to HIV and AIDS<sup>1</sup> and to suggest areas for further engagement. It is informed by the conviction that although some scholars and commentators note that the trickle of articles and books on HIV and AIDS in the 1990s became "a flood with the turn of the millennium",<sup>2</sup> much more remains to be done. African women theologians have done a commendable job in pushing HIV high up on the agenda of African theology. However, other strands of African theology, including inculturation, black and African liberation theologies and reconstruction theology are yet to be "invaded" by the pandemic. This book explores the challenges posed by the pandemic to the various strands of African theology. It is premised on the conviction that instead of plunging into new "theologies of AIDS", African theology in its current form is strategically placed to respond to HIV and AIDS.

There is a worrying lull in African theology, mitigated (and masked?) only by the productivity of African women theologians. Despite bursting on to the scene with vibrancy and militancy in the 1960s and 1970s, African theology appears to have experienced a mid-life crisis. This is understandable for a discipline that has been

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<sup>1</sup>This book uses "HIV" more than "HIV and AIDS" in line with current terminology. The term "pandemic" is used to refer to the extent of the effects of HIV and AIDS in most parts of sub-Saharan Africa.

<sup>2</sup>Martha T. Frederiks, "HIV and Aids: Mapping Theological Responses in Africa," *Exchange* 37(1), 2008, 6.

dominated by men! However, the challenges posed by the HIV pandemic require that African theology become more contextually relevant. This book examines how the various strands of African theology have responded to the pandemic and how they could improve this response.

### **Troubling and Destructive Contexts: Theological Reflections on HIV and AIDS**

A longer narrative is required to provide a detailed analysis of theological reflections on the pandemic. For the purposes of this introductory section, it is important to note that African theologians have begun to produce full texts on this theme. Musa W. Dube is undoubtedly one of the leading voices on theology and the pandemic in Africa. Having previously edited a number of volumes, she has published a book that brings together her essays on the theme.<sup>3</sup> Dube has been consistent in her call for gender justice in the wake of HIV and AIDS. Her leadership in this area can be connected to the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians' commitment to focus on HIV and AIDS.<sup>4</sup> Chapters three and four of this book have sections that seek to interpret Dube's HIV and AIDS work in the context of African theology.

There have been a number of significant publications on HIV and AIDS within the context of theology. Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator has reflected on the role of the church in his *From Crisis*

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<sup>3</sup>Musa W. Dube, *The HIV/AIDS Bible: Selected Essays*. Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 2008. For a review of Dube's HIV and AIDS work, see for example, Ezra Chitando and Rosinah Gabaitse, "Other Ways of Being a Diviner-Healer: Musa W. Dube and the African Church's Response to HIV and AIDS," in Ezra Chitando, ed., *Mainstreaming HIV and AIDS in Theological Education: Experiences and Explorations*. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2008, 85-101.

<sup>4</sup>The Circle has published a number of edited volumes on HIV and AIDS. See, among others, Teresia M. Hinga, *et al*, eds., *Women, Religion and HIV/AIDS in Africa: Responding to Ethical and Theological Challenges*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2008.

to *Kairos: The Mission of the Church in the Time of HIV/AIDS, Refugees and Poverty*.<sup>5</sup> The African Jesuit AIDS Network (AJAN) published the book, *AIDS and the Church in Africa*,<sup>6</sup> while Benezet Bujo and Michael Czerny edited another volume, *AIDS in Africa: Theological Reflections*.<sup>7</sup> Eunice K. Kamaara focuses on gender, youth sexuality and the pandemic in Kenya.<sup>8</sup> The Churches United against HIV and AIDS in Eastern and Southern Africa (CUAHA) have published a volume, *Challenging the Current Understanding around HIV and AIDS: An African Christian Perspective*.<sup>9</sup>

Ghislain T. Matadi revisits theodicy in the time of HIV in his analysis of the book of Job.<sup>10</sup> Elias K. Bongmba's *Facing a Pandemic: The African Church and the Crisis of AIDS*<sup>11</sup> provides fresh perspectives on the theme. I have also reflected on the pandemic in two volumes of my own.<sup>12</sup> James N. Amanze and others have

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<sup>5</sup>Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, *From Crisis to Kairos: The Mission of the Church in the Time of HIV/AIDS, Refugees and Poverty*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2005.

<sup>6</sup>Michael F. Czerny, ed., *AIDS and the Church in Africa: To Shepherd the Church, Family of God in Africa*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2005.

<sup>7</sup>Benezet Bujo and Michael Czerny, eds., *AIDS in Africa: Theological Reflections*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2007.

<sup>8</sup>Eunice K. Kamaara, *Gender, Youth Sexuality and HIV/AIDS: A Kenyan Experience*. Eldoret: AMECEA Gaba Publications, 2005.

<sup>9</sup>Riita Aaltonen *et al*, eds., 2005. *Challenging the Current Understanding around HIV and AIDS: An African Christian Perspective*. Nairobi: Daystar University/CUAHA.

<sup>10</sup>Ghislain T. Matadi, *Suffering, Belief, Hope: The Wisdom of Job for an AIDS-Stricken Africa*. Translated by Joseph P. Newman with Robert E. Czerny. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2007.

<sup>11</sup>Elias K. Bongmba, *Facing a Pandemic: The African Church and the Crisis of AIDS*. Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2007.

<sup>12</sup>Ezra Chitando, *Living with Hope: African Churches and HIV/AIDS*. Volume 1. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2007; and Ezra Chitando, *Acting in Hope: African Churches and HIV/AIDS*. Volume 2. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2007.

edited the volume, *Christian Ethics and HIV/AIDS in Africa*.<sup>13</sup> Alongside these books, some journals have devoted special issues to reflections on theology and religion in the context of HIV and AIDS in Africa. These include the *Bulletin for Contextual Theology*, *Missionalia*, *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* and the *Journal of Religion in Africa*.<sup>14</sup> Postgraduate students in African institutions have also expressed their views on the theme.<sup>15</sup> This confirms that African theology and religious studies have begun responding to the pandemic. However, I argue that African theology needs to be more strategic in its engagement with HIV and AIDS.

It must be noted that while more publications in the field of theology and the pandemic are from Africa, scholars in other parts of the world have also reflected on the theme. The Union Theological Seminary, Pune, India, devoted a whole issue of its journal to the theme of HIV and the theological curriculum.<sup>16</sup> In North America, Maria Cimperman provided ethical reflections on the epidemic.<sup>17</sup> She takes African theologians seriously and integrates their views in her reflections. Similarly, Donald Messer's *Breaking the Conspiracy of Silence: Christian Churches and the Global AIDS Crisis*<sup>18</sup> interacts with African reflections on the theme. Robin Gill's *Reflecting*

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<sup>13</sup>James N. Amanze, et al. eds., *Christian Ethics and HIV/AIDS in Africa*. Gaborone: Bay Publishing, 2007.

<sup>14</sup>See the *Bulletin for Contextual Theology* 7(1), 2000; *Missionalia* 29(2), 2001; *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 125 & 126, 2006 and the *Journal of Religion in Africa* 37(1), 2007.

<sup>15</sup>Edwina Ward and Gary Leonard, eds., *A Theology of HIV & AIDS on Africa's East Coast: A Collection of Essays by Masters Students from Four African Academic Institutions*. Uppsala: Swedish Institute of Mission Research, 2008.

<sup>16</sup>*UBS Journal*, 4(2), 2006.

<sup>17</sup>Maria Cimperman, *When God's People Have HIV/AIDS: An Approach to Ethics*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005.

<sup>18</sup>Donald Messer, *Breaking the Conspiracy of Silence: Christian Churches and the Global AIDS Crisis*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004.

*Theologically on AIDS: A Global Challenge*<sup>19</sup> allows diverse voices on the topic to be heard.

From the foregoing, it is clear that African theological reflections on HIV and AIDS are undertaken within the context of increasing scholarly interest on the theme. There is also a growing realization that churches and other faith-based organisations are strategically placed to make effective contributions to the struggle against the pandemic. African theologians are called upon to play a leading role in this quest.

### **Troubled but Not Destroyed: African Theology and the HIV Pandemic**

The title of this book seeks to capture the responses of both African theology and the continent itself to HIV and AIDS. It is inspired by the theme of the All Africa Conference of Churches 7<sup>th</sup> General Assembly held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, October 1997. The theme was, “Troubled but not Destroyed”. It derives from II Corinthians 4:8-9. The title acknowledges the devastating impact of the pandemic, while at the same time capturing the tenacity and endurance of the people. AIDS has troubled Africa. (But) AIDS has not destroyed Africa. African theology has been paralysed by the pandemic. (Yet) African theology has covered appreciable ground in responding to the pandemic.

Chapter one revisits the identity and growth of African theology. It highlights the main strands of African theology, as well as describing their responses to HIV and AIDS. Chapter two discusses inculturation and the pandemic, drawing attention to the debate on the status of African cultures in the era of HIV. African women’s theologies and HIV are the focus of chapter three. It describes the context in which African women’s theologies are formulated and discusses factors that have enabled the Circle to be highly productive.

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<sup>19</sup>Robin Gill, *Reflecting Theologically on AIDS: A Global Challenge*. London: SCM Press, 2007.

Chapter four explores black/African liberation theologies and HIV. It explores the diminishing status of these theologies and suggests that a critical engagement with HIV would raise their profile yet again. Reconstruction theology and HIV is the theme of chapter five. How can reconstruction theology respond to the pandemic? What are some of the major areas where reconstruction theology can guide African communities to respond to HIV and AIDS? Chapter six concludes the book. It probes areas ripe for further research as African theology seeks to come to terms with the pandemic.

This book emerges from the conviction that African theology can stir African churches and communities to provide effective responses to HIV and AIDS. Where Afro-pessimists are writing off Africa – due to AIDS, corruption, ethnic wars and other challenges – this book contends that Africa will, as always, stubbornly refuse to die. Where one must in all honesty concede that Africa is indeed troubled, one must also celebrate the fact that it is not destroyed.

## CHAPTER ONE

# African Theology: History and Key Features

### Introduction

**A**frican theology is well placed to respond to HIV and AIDS.<sup>1</sup> Since its emergence in the late 1950s, African theology has placed emphasis on contextual relevance, maintaining that the theological task in Africa entails grappling with local realities.<sup>2</sup> Although African theology has not always lived up to this ideal, it has sought to ensure that African issues and needs feature prominently on its agenda. In the contemporary period, the HIV pandemic has become an integral aspect of life in most parts of sub-Saharan Africa. Consequently, African theology must respond creatively to the HIV epidemic.

This chapter seeks to examine the character of African theology and provide an overview of its historical development. It highlights the key concerns of African theologians and the major trends in African theology, providing a background to the chapters that follow.

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<sup>1</sup>This book tends to use “HIV” more than “HIV and AIDS” to register the need to ensure that HIV does not progress to AIDS. I also use “pandemic” to refer both to the extent of the effects/impact of HIV and AIDS. In some instances, the term “epidemic” is also used.

<sup>2</sup>See for example Gwinyai Muzorewa, *The Origin and Development of African Theology*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985.

An appreciation of African theology – that is, historical development, key themes and challenges – will facilitate the analysis of the challenge of HIV and AIDS to the theological task on the continent.

### **African Theology: The Naming Debate**

Scholarship lives by its debates over terminology and many terms and concepts used in the humanities remain contested. These include religion, literature, history, philosophy and others. Scholars have expended considerable energy trying to clarify these concepts. There is no unanimity regarding the meaning of most of the terms that enjoy a lot of currency in the humanities and African theology is no exception. There is considerable debate over its meaning, and alternative labels have been put forward.

In general, African theology refers to the effort to reflect on Christianity, utilizing African concepts and categories.<sup>3</sup> It is an attempt to express the Christian faith in African thought patterns, a theology that seeks to “drink from African wells”.<sup>4</sup> African theology is predicated on the conviction that African beliefs, contexts and experiences must provide the basis for theological reflection in Africa. The final communiqué of the Pan African Conference of Third-World Theologians, December 17-23, 1977, Accra, Ghana, outlines the major concern of African theology, thus:

We believe that African theology must be understood in the context of African life and culture and the creative attempt of African people to shape a new future that is different from the colonial past and the neo-colonial present. The African situation requires a new theological methodology that is different from the approaches of the dominant theologies of the West. African theology must reject,

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<sup>3</sup>Edward W. Fashole-Luke, “Footpaths and Signposts to African Christian Theologies”, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 34(5), 1981, 385-414.

<sup>4</sup>Tinyiko Sam Maluleke, “Black and African Theologies in the New World Order: A Time to Drink from our Own Wells”, *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 96, 1996, 3-19.

therefore, the prefabricated ideas of North Atlantic theology by defining itself according to the struggles of the people in their resistance against the structures of domination. Our task as theologians is to create a theology that arises from and is accountable to African people.<sup>5</sup>

There is debate over the first use of the term in scholarly publications, as well as over the precursors of African theology.<sup>6</sup> This dimension is particularly important as a term might enjoy a lot of currency before being used in writing. In the case of African theology, there is growing acceptance that it was first used in 1956 in the publication, *Des Pretes noirs s'interrogent (Some Black Priests Wonder)*.<sup>7</sup> African Catholic priests were making a passionate plea for the church to reflect an African flavour. They insisted that Africans had the right to express their religious commitment in their own language, without interpretation from outsiders.

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<sup>5</sup>Pan African Conference of Third World Theologians, December 17-23, 1977, Accra, Ghana, "Final Communiqué", in Kofi Appiah-Kubi and Sergio Torres, eds., *African Theology En Route: Papers from the Pan African Conference of Third World Theologians, December 17-23, Accra, Ghana*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979, 193.

<sup>6</sup>Klaus Hock highlights the various starting points of African theology that have been identified. These include the Donatist movement, Kimpa Vita, African "Church fathers" like Ajayi Crowther, while others insist that African theology only came into being after the 1960s. Yet, earlier movements like Pan-Africanism and negritude paved the way for African theology. See Klaus Hock, "Appropriated Vibrancy: 'Immediacy' as Formative Element in African Theologies", in Klaus Koschorke, ed., *African Identities and World Christianity in the Twentieth Century*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2005, 113-126.

<sup>7</sup>Rosino Gibellini, ed., *Paths of African Theology*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994, p. 6. For a useful analysis of the views of the pioneers, see Benezet Bujo and Juvenal Ilunga Muya, eds., *African Theology in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Contribution of the Pioneers*. Volume One. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2003.

Christianity has a long history in Africa, having been brought to North Africa during its earliest stages<sup>8</sup> and existing in a fairly unbroken manner since the Coptic churches of Egypt and Ethiopia. It is therefore difficult to pin down the proper historical period associated with the term. Some scholars contend that reflections by the early church fathers in North Africa in the third and fourth centuries qualify as African theology. Kwame Bediako, a leading African theologian from Ghana, has examined theological reflections from early African Christianity and by pioneering African theologians.<sup>9</sup>

The term African theology is also contested on theological and ideological grounds. If every community has the capacity to reflect on God, then it is possible to associate the term with reflections on God in the pre-Christian, African traditional/indigenous religions. Since it is now generally agreed that the concept of God in Africa predates the arrival of Christianity and Islam,<sup>10</sup> it is admissible to talk of African theology in the context of African Traditional Religions (ATRs), the indigenous religious beliefs and practices handed down from one generation of Africans to another.

The realization that African theology can be associated with ATRs has prompted some scholars to add the qualifier “Christian”.<sup>11</sup> Others make reference to Christian theologies of Africa to maintain the distinction and yet others have used the term *Theologia*

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<sup>8</sup>See for example, Adrian Hastings, *The Church in Africa, 1450-1950*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994.

<sup>9</sup>Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and Modern Africa*. Oxford: Regnum Books, 1992.

<sup>10</sup>See for example, John S. Mbiti, *Concepts of God in Africa*. London: SPCK, 1970.

<sup>11</sup>See for example, Jesse N. K. Mugambi, *African Christian Theology: An Introduction*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers Ltd, 1989.

*Africana*'.<sup>12</sup> The overarching concern is to retain the integrity of African Christian theological reflections in the wake of criticisms of syncretism or “diluting” Christianity with traditional African beliefs.

Although the qualifier “Christian” is important, this study adopts the term African theology to describe theological reflections by African Christians, for two main reasons. Firstly, the term “African theology” continues to enjoy a lot of currency, is widely used by scholars, and is convenient and accurate. Secondly, practitioners of ATRs have not published African theology. In other words, adherents of ATRs have not called their reflections on God “African theology”. The addition of the label “Christian” tends to be redundant: only Christian African theologians have produced African theology.

Apart from the debate over the adequacy of the concept, there is another issue, relating to use of the singular or the plural. Is there one African theology or is it more helpful to talk of African theologies in the plural? There are valid reasons for applying the plural: Africa is a vast continent; theologies have emerged from various strands (inculturation, liberation, women’s, reconstruction), as well as the different confessions (Catholic, Protestant, African Independent, Pentecostal). However, in this study the singular is adopted for an ideological reason: I regard all the various expressions of African theology as concerned with ensuring that Christianity promotes abundant life in Africa.

### **African Theology: An Overview of the Historical Development**

African theology has emerged out of the quest to ensure that the Christian faith speaks to African realities in an African idiom. It seeks to address African issues seriously and to prevent loss of identity among African converts to Christianity. Whereas in the missionary period, converts were encouraged to cut their ties to their religious

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<sup>12</sup>Kwesi A. Dickson, “Towards a Theologia Africana”, in Mark E. Glasswell and Edward W. Fashole-Luke, eds., *New Testament Christianity for Africa and the World: Essays in Honour of Harry Sawyerr*. London: SPCK, 1974, 198-208.

and cultural past (a theme that persists in African Pentecostalism), African theology mainly promotes continuity between the old and the new. Its key goal is to ensure that Christianity in Africa reflects an African ethos, outlook and flavour.

The historical development of African theology has been sketched and detailed in a number of books and articles.<sup>13</sup> Recently, efforts have been made to familiarize readers with the major personalities involved in the emergence of African theology.<sup>14</sup> This study, which focuses on the challenges posed by the HIV pandemic to African theology, does not preoccupy itself with the intricacies surrounding the development of African theology. Instead, it describes the key issues around the emergence of African theology, placing emphasis on how these issues are relevant to the contemporary challenge of HIV and AIDS. John Parratt<sup>15</sup> has rightly noted that a number of factors, not all of them religious, have contributed to the rise of African theology. In the following section, I highlight some of its key influences.

### *Christianity as a Foreign and Alienating Religion*

Although it is now generally accepted that the image of European and North American missionaries waging an incessant war against African culture is simplistic, it remains true that, for the most part, conversion to Christianity has involved embracing a totally new

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<sup>13</sup>See for example, Muzorewa, *The Origin and Development of African Theology*; Emmanuel Martey, *African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993 and John Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity: African Theology Today*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995.

<sup>14</sup>Benezet Bujo and Juvenal Ilunga Muya, eds., *African Theology in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Contribution of the Pioneers*. Volume One. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2003 and Benezet Bujo and Juvenal Ilunga Muya, eds, *African Theology in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Contribution of the Pioneers*. Volume Two. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2006.

<sup>15</sup>John Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity*, 13.

culture. African converts have struggled to distinguish the gospel from Western culture. African theology has emerged as an effort to separate the two and to “rewrap the Christian faith indigenously”.<sup>16</sup>

The pioneering African theologians were keen to emphasize that conversion to Christianity must be accompanied by cultural continuity. For them, Christianity had to find roots in the African soil. African culture could not simply be written off as evil and backward; Africa’s religious past was not to be discounted so easily. Christianity had to be sensitive to African culture in order for it not to become a superficial religion.

By the end of the 1950s, a generation of mission school-trained African theologians had issued the clarion call for the church in Africa to engage native culture more meaningfully. They challenged the church to uphold the integrity of the conversion of Africans by upholding positive African cultural values and practices. More critically, they also sought to highlight the distinction between the gospel and Western culture.

African theology has been motivated by the desire to make Christianity a truly African religion, contending that African converts must feel that the religion addresses their deepest needs and fears. If Christianity fails to do this, it will continue to be experienced as a foreign religion, the religion of the white man.<sup>17</sup> Christianity must no longer be alienating. Africans must feel that they are an integral part of “the commonwealth of the new Israel”.

### *Power to the People: African Nationalism*

The 1960s – “a golden spring of independent Africa”<sup>18</sup> – witnessed numerous African countries becoming politically independent. The

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<sup>16</sup>John Wesley Zwamunondiita Kurewa, “The Meaning of African Theology”, *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 11, 1975, 32-42.

<sup>17</sup>Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

<sup>18</sup>Adrian Hastings, *A History of African Christianity, 1950-1975*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975, 132.

conviction that political independence must be accompanied by theological and ecclesiastical independence explains the determination shown by African theologians. The emergence of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) in 1963 added to the quest for an African theology. The AACC espouses a pan-African agenda and its rhetoric on total African independence galvanized African theology.<sup>19</sup> African theology insists that Africans have the requisite intellectual skills to make their own independent reflections on their experiences of God, and its practitioners, like their nationalist counterparts, have argued that Africans have the right to express themselves using their own categories. African nationalism has influenced African theology by placing emphasis on the capacity of Africans to charter their own destiny in the various spheres of life.

It must be borne in mind that African nationalists and theologians have a lot in common. Firstly, both are the product of the mission school. Secondly, both had to fight institutional racism. While African nationalists were “seeking the political kingdom”, African theologians sought to ensure that blacks were fairly represented in church structures. Thirdly, African nationalists and African theologians shared common ideological ground. They were convinced that Africans were in no way inferior to Europeans and had the mandate to assert their autonomy. Fourthly, some of the publications of African nationalists, such as Jomo Kenyatta on ATRs, were adopted by African theologians. The search for “lost ancestral values” united African nationalists and African theologians.

*The Spirit Speaks: African Independent and Indigenous Churches*  
African theology has been defined as such by scholars with Protestant and Catholic backgrounds. Evangelical African theologians like

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<sup>19</sup>See for example, Efiang Utuk, *Visions of Authenticity: The Assemblies of the All Africa Conference of Churches*. Nairobi: All Africa Conference of Churches, 1997.

Byang Kato<sup>20</sup> and Tokunboh Adeyemo<sup>21</sup> have also contributed to the growing corpus of African theology. Theologians from African Protestant and Catholic churches have led the way in calling for African theology as they feel that African Independent/Indigenous/Initiated/Instituted Churches (AICs)<sup>22</sup> have been more creative in Africanising Christianity. They challenge their own churches to utilize the insights of the AICs in formulating a relevant Christianity for Africa.

AICs have always sought to integrate Christianity and African culture and emerged as a response by Africans to a Christianity they experienced as a foreign religion.<sup>23</sup> AIC leaders in various parts of Africa averred that they were led by the Holy Spirit to break from missionary churches. Ogbu Kalu, a distinguished Nigerian church historian, describes it as a “wave” that swept across different parts of Africa before the First World War and especially during the influenza epidemic of 1918.<sup>24</sup>

Many African theologians have put forward AICs as paragons of how to indigenize Christianity. Although their valorisation is problematic (given, for example, gender disparities in most AICs),

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<sup>20</sup>Byang Kato, *Theological Pitfalls in Africa*. Kisumu: Evangel Publishing House, 1975.

<sup>21</sup>Tokunboh Adeyemo, *Salvation in African Tradition*. Kisumu: Evangel Publishing House, 1975.

<sup>22</sup>Ezra Chitando, “Naming the Phenomena: The Challenge of African Independent Churches”, *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 31,1, 2005, 85-110.

<sup>23</sup>See for example John S. Pobee and Gabriel Ositelu, *African Initiatives in Christianity: The Growth, Gifts and Diversities of Indigenous African Churches – A Challenge to the Ecumenical Movement*. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1998.

<sup>24</sup>Ogbu U. Kalu, “A Trail of Ferment in African Christianity: Ethiopianism, Prophetism and Pentecostalism”, in Klaus Koschorke, ed, *African Identities and World Christianity in the Twentieth Century*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2005, 28.

it must be acknowledged that AICs take the African worldview seriously. They have sought to ensure that their followers encounter Christianity as an African religion and for the most part manage to inculcate a sense of belonging amongst their members. They address existential issues that confront their members and have extended healing services to other African Christians and traditionalists.

### **The Growth of African Theology**

Having examined three of the major factors that influenced the rise of African theology, it is important to highlight the different phases in its growth. From the mid 1950s to the present, African theology has undergone various changes. An overview of these phases will enable the reader to appreciate why African theology must respond to the challenge of HIV and AIDS in the contemporary period.

#### *Adapting Christianity to the African Context: The First Phase of African Theology*

The earliest phase of African theology, which can be dated roughly between 1956 and 1973, concerned itself with the call to adapt Christianity to the African context. Catholic and Protestant African theologians demanded that the church in Africa be truly indigenous and also queried the interpretation of African cultures and religions as primitive.

From the Catholic side, Belgian missionary Placide Temples' *Bantu Philosophy*, published in 1945, was quite influential. Temples maintained that indigenous African religions were characterized by the principle of "vital force". Alexis Kagame and Vincent Mulago, both Catholic priests, were influenced by Temples. They sought to integrate Christianity with African culture.<sup>25</sup> These contributions by French-speaking African theologians need to be acknowledged as the discipline tends to concentrate on publications by English-speaking African theologians. Only a few African theologians from the Lusophone region, such as Jose Chipenda, receive attention, and

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<sup>25</sup>John Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity*, 10-11.

then only when they have written in English, thanks to the dominance of English in African theology, as in other disciplines.

John S. Mbiti from Kenya and E. Bolaji Idowu of Nigeria emerged as key voices on the need to develop an African theology. Mbiti published books and articles on African beliefs and practices that could be integrated in African Christianity. Idowu called for an indigenous church and argued that the concept of God in Africa was as systematic as any that could be found elsewhere, including Christianity.<sup>26</sup>

The first phase of African theology is important in that it represents the period when African intellectuals articulated the need for African theology and took decisive steps to frame its identity. Catholic and Protestant theologians from both Francophone and Anglophone Africa called for a theology that would spring from their own soil. This dimension is vital as the church in Africa seeks to respond effectively to the challenge of HIV and AIDS.

Pioneers of African theology insisted that Africans had the relevant intellectual resources to address the issues confronting their continent. In calling for an African theology, these pioneers were urging the African church to be contextually sensitive and relevant. The church had to preoccupy itself with answering African questions. Today, the HIV epidemic is asking numerous hard questions. African theology has a duty to respond to these questions.

### *Towards a Self-Reliant African Church: The Second Phase of African Theology*

The second phase of African theology was, roughly, between 1974 and 1989. The mid-1970s witnessed growing confidence on the part of the church in Africa. The late 1980s, on the other hand, saw the demise of communism and prepared the path for the transformation of the political landscape in many parts of Africa. The second phase

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<sup>26</sup>Ezra Chitando, "African Christian Scholars and the Study of African Traditional Religions: A Re-Evaluation", *Religion* 30, 2000, 391-397.

is characterized by the willingness of African theologians to elaborate on most of the themes identified by the pioneers.

The AACC Third Assembly in May 1974 in Zambia marked a turning point in the radicalization of the African church. The meeting called for a moratorium on overseas aid in personnel and finance. While this stance remains controversial — given the theological interpretation of the church as one body — one must appreciate the spirit that informed such a stance. The conviction that Africans must become self-reliant in all aspects of life inspired the call for a moratorium.

As most African nations sought to consolidate the gains of independence, African theologians were exploring and explaining the importance to African Christianity of the continent's culture and religion. The second phase of African theology saw more university Religious Studies departments establishing courses on ATRs and African theology, along with an increasing acceptance of, and emphasis on, these new areas of academic enquiry.

The concept of God in indigenous religions continued to receive attention,<sup>27</sup> alongside other themes. Consultations were held in various parts of the continent on how to conceptualise and indigenize Christian theologies in Africa. The debate on terms like “indigenization”, “adaptation”, “translation”, “Africanization” and others<sup>28</sup> showed a willingness to ensure that Christianity took African realities into account. The quest for a relevant theology for Africa<sup>29</sup> was truly underway.

During this phase, the theme of Christology was subject to more scholarly interest; Adrian Hastings expressed the view that it

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<sup>27</sup>See for example Gabriel M. Setiloane, *The Image of God among the Sotho-Tswana*, Rotterdam: AA Balkema, 1976.

<sup>28</sup>Stephen Kaplan, “The Africanization of Missionary Christianity: History and Typology”, *Journal of Religion in Africa* 16,3, 1986, 166-186.

<sup>29</sup>Hans Jurgen Becken, ed; *Relevant Theology for Africa*, Durban: Lutheran Publishing House, 1974.

had thus far received limited attention.<sup>30</sup> A number of African theologians utilized African concepts to explore the meaning of Christ in an African context. In particular, Charles Nyamiti, a Catholic theologian from Tanzania, reflected on Christ as an ancestor.<sup>31</sup> Other African theologians also explored the theme of Christology using different categories.

Various African beliefs and practices were examined in this phase. These included rites of passage, ancestral beliefs, the concept of salvation and others. Marriage as a major rite of passage in African societies received a lot of attention, with most African theologians defending the practice of polygamy/polygyny in the face of scathing attacks on the practice from missionaries.

*The Second Phase of African Theology: Examining its Significance*

This phase of African theology is significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, African theology spread to most parts of sub-Saharan Africa. During the first phase, contributions from West, East and Central Africa were dominant. In the second phase, practitioners from Southern Africa began to contribute to theological debate, thereby ensuring that the discipline was more widely distributed.

During the second phase, the scope of African theology expanded. Although the issue of defining the subject remained,<sup>32</sup> there was a growing acceptance of the viability of African theology. Reflections on black theology in South Africa also increased,<sup>33</sup> as the struggle against apartheid gained momentum. Similarly, the struggle for liberation in present-day Namibia and Zimbabwe was

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<sup>30</sup>Adrian Hastings, *A History of African Christianity, 1950-1975*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979, 52.

<sup>31</sup>Charles Nyamiti, *Christ as our Ancestor: Christology from an African Perspective*. Gweru: Mambo Press, 1984.

<sup>32</sup>John S. Pobee, *Toward an African Theology*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1979.

<sup>33</sup>See for example Allan Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence: A Socio-Ethical Study on Black Theology*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1977.

intensifying. Through its Programme to Combat Racism (PCR), the World Council of Churches provided material and theological support to liberation struggles in Southern Africa.<sup>34</sup> The need for blacks to define themselves theologically amidst racial oppression became pronounced.

Publications on the theological significance of the African sense of community amplified the importance of this theme, identified by the pioneers. Scholars from different parts of the continent highlighted the challenges posed by teaching the salvation of individual souls to people who subordinated the individual to the community. The church here had to contend with the African sense of communal solidarity, they argued.<sup>35</sup> Mbiti had popularised the centrality of community to African life with the saying, “I am because we are.”<sup>36</sup> African theologians elaborated on this theme by illustrating how their communities placed emphasis on the collective, as opposed to the individual.

To a considerable extent, the second phase of African theology is characterized by the determination to move from *calling for* an African theology to *doing* African theology. Although the complaint that African theologians “mostly talk about doing such a theology”<sup>37</sup> continued to be voiced, there was progress in extending its scope, which was enhanced in the third phase of African theology.

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<sup>34</sup>Canaan S. Banana, *Politics of Repression and Resistance: Face to Face with Combat Theology*. Gweru: Mambo Press, 1996.

<sup>35</sup>See for example Kwesi A Dickson, *Theology in Africa*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984, 62.

<sup>36</sup>John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*. London: Heinemann, 1969.

<sup>37</sup>Ambrose M. Moyo, “The Quest for African Theology and the Problem of the Relationship between Faith and Culture – The Hermeneutical Perspective”, *African Theological Journal* 12, 2, 1983, 95.

*Experimentation and Expansion: The Third Phase of African Theology*

The third phase of African theology can be dated from 1990 to the present day, 2008. The 1990s brought a lot of hope and optimism, especially with Namibia attaining of independence in 1990 and the demise of apartheid in South Africa in 1994. Churches in Africa actively participated in the democratisation processes,<sup>38</sup> while African theologians experimented with diverse themes. This phase of African theology has clearly been the most challenging, with the HIV epidemic devastating most parts of sub-Saharan Africa. It is also the period when the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians emerged as the leading producer of African theology. Theologies of reconstruction also came to the fore during this period, as discussed below.

The third phase of African theology has in many ways continued to address the themes that preoccupied scholars in earlier phases. The relationship between Christian and African culture has remained in focus, with many scholars sustaining the call for Christianity to take on an African flavour. While we do not agree with Jesse N. Mugambi's contention that during the 1960s and 1970s African theology tended to suffer from a lack of definition and direction, we accept his interpretation that in the contemporary period there is a greater focus on Africa. He writes:

During the 1980s, several African Christian theologians of the younger generation began to write with African readership in mind. The 1990s opened to considerable theological literature produced in Africa by African scholars, primarily for African readership.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>See for example Paul Gifford, ed, *The Christian Churches and the Democratisation of Africa*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995.

<sup>39</sup>Jesse N.K. Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology After the Cold War*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1995, 11.

Critics of African theology, however, contend that the discipline has not been able to build on the momentum of the earlier phases. They suggest that it has been caught up in the “prescriptive” stage, where scholars have continued to call for African theology. However, considerable ground has been covered, and the field has become more diverse than before. The visibility of African women’s theologies confirms the growth and expansion of African theology during its third phase.

*African Theology: Extending the Scope*

The third phase of African theology has seen practitioners elaborating on themes that arose in previous phases. Reflections on Christology increased significantly;<sup>40</sup> in different parts of the continent, scholars utilized African Christological titles like Chief, Healer, Ancestor, Elder Brother and others to interpret the significance of Christ in Africa. African women theologians also examined the meaning of Christ to African women. According to Martey, “[C]entral to the Christological reflection of African female theologians is the experience of women in patriarchal society and male-dominated churches.”<sup>41</sup>

The third phase of African theology has witnessed more reflection on ecclesiology. Pioneering African theologians protested that the church in Africa was too foreign in its outlook, and expended considerable energy endeavouring to ensure that the church in Africa has a structure attuned to the African context. Both Protestant<sup>42</sup> and

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<sup>40</sup>See for example, S.O. Abogunrin, J.O. Akao, D.O. Akintunde and G.M. Toryough, eds., *Christology in African Context* (Biblical Studies Series No. 2). Ibadan: NABIS, 2003.

<sup>41</sup>Emmanuel E. Martey, *African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation*, 82.

<sup>42</sup>See for example Jesse N.K. Mugambi and Laurenti Magesa, eds., *The Church in African Christianity: Innovative Essays in Ecclesiology*. Nairobi; Initiative Publishers, AACC, 1990. Some chapters are by African Catholic theologians.

Catholic<sup>43</sup> African theologians have utilized local realities to argue for a contextually relevant church.

While the importance of the Bible to African Christianity and theology had already been noted, it was in the third phase that more publications on the Bible appeared. Mugambi examined the biblical basis for evangelisation,<sup>44</sup> while Hannah W. Kinoti and John Mary Waliggo edited a volume on the Bible in African Christianity.<sup>45</sup> Gerald West and Musa W. Dube also edited a volume on the Bible in Africa.<sup>46</sup> These studies highlighted the importance of the sacred text to African Christians.

The scope of African theology has been extended considerably in the third phase. More students pursuing doctoral studies in Africa and abroad have examined different themes in African theology, including ethics, points of convergence between ATRs and Christianity, the contribution of African creative writers and others. If previously African theology expressed a slogan and a wish, it is now very much a reality, expressed in different trends, as outlined below.

### **Trends in African Theology**

Having highlighted the different phases of African theology, one must turn to trends within it. This is critical, since each trend in African theology responds to the HIV epidemic in a specific way. Although

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<sup>43</sup>See for example Agbonkhanmeghe E. Orobator, *The Church as Family: African Ecclesiology in its Social Context*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2000.

<sup>44</sup>Jesse N.K. Mugambi, *The Biblical Basis for Evangelisation*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1989.

<sup>45</sup>Hannah W. Kinoti and John Mary Waliggo, eds., *The Bible in African Christianity*. Nairobi: Acton, 1997.

<sup>46</sup>Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube, eds., *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories, Trends*. Leiden: Brill, 2000.

there is merit in referring to African theologies,<sup>47</sup> there are convincing reasons for retaining the singular. The different trends can be taken to represent unity in diversity. The different trends are bound by a common goal: to ensure that African Christianity avails abundant life to its adherents, as I have argued above. As with the individual periods in the preceding section, the trends noted below should not be viewed too rigidly. There is considerable overlap across the different categories.

*Inculturation: Upholding the Integrity of African Cultures*

The quest to integrate Christianity and African culture has been a key feature throughout African theology. From its inception in the 1950s and early 1960s, African theology has insisted that African culture should have a major role in the growth of African Christianity. Generations of African theologians have refused to accept the verdict that their culture is pagan, and have protested against the tendency of most missionaries to condemn African culture and promote Western values in the name of Christianity. Mbiti writes:

It was very unfortunate, therefore, that Africans were told by word and example, by those who brought them the gospel that they first had to become culturally circumcised before they could become Christians (according to the form of Christianity developed in the home country of those missionaries).<sup>48</sup>

It must be reiterated that most African theologians regard African culture as a significant source for the theological task in Africa. They are convinced that there are many positive values in African culture that are compatible with the gospel. Consequently, they call

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<sup>47</sup>Luke L. Pato, "African Theologies", in John de Gruchy and Charles Villa-Vicencio, eds., *Doing Theology in Context: South African Perspectives*. Cape Town: David Phillip, 1994, 154.

<sup>48</sup>John S. Mbiti, "Christianity and African Culture", *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 20,4, 1977, 29.

upon their church to integrate these values. According to Ambrose Moyo, Christianity must embrace Africa's cultural heritage and dialogue with the African worldview. He elaborates:

This means taking the African experience and cultures seriously and allowing them also to participate in the transforming power of the gospel, so that in them and through them the love of Christ might be made manifest.<sup>49</sup>

The debate on inculturation has been gaining momentum from within African Catholicism. Aylward Shorter, a Catholic missionary, provided a detailed discussion of what inculturation entails.<sup>50</sup> The period after the African Synod (1995) has seen more deliberations on the subject. There are searches for appropriate liturgy, Christian art and dance, discussed by Laurenti Magesa in his book assessing the extent of inculturation in selected countries in East Africa.<sup>51</sup>

As noted in foregoing paragraphs, alternative terms have been used to describe the process of relating Christianity to African culture. Terms like translation, indigenization, acculturation, conceptualisation, accommodation and others<sup>52</sup> seek to capture the attempt to make Christianity relevant in an African context. African culture is interpreted positively, with theologians placing emphasis on "points of contact" between Christianity and African culture.

### *African Culture in African Theology: Key Issues*

This study seeks to explore African theology's most effective responses to the HIV epidemic. It is therefore important to analyse

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<sup>49</sup>Ambrose Moyo, *Zimbabwe: The Risk of Incarnation*. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1996, 14.

<sup>50</sup>Aylward Shorter, *Towards a Theology of Inculturation*. London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1988.

<sup>51</sup>Laurenti Magesa, *Anatomy of Inculturation*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004.

<sup>52</sup>John S. Pobee, *Skenosis: Christian Faith in an African Context*. Gweru: Mambo Press, 1992, 23-41. See also note 27 above.

the key issues regarding African culture within African theology, allowing an analysis of possible reactions to the HIV epidemic by scholars who operate within the inculturation paradigm.

Firstly, it is clear that the strand of inculturation in African theology has provided valuable information on various aspects of African culture. Alongside anthropologists, creative writers and historians, African theologians have played a major role in describing African beliefs and practices, resulting in a wealth of information relating to African rites of passage, spiritual beliefs and other aspects of life. African theologians have made a significant contribution to knowledge of African culture.

Secondly, the inculturation trend in African theology is characterized by a positive evaluation of African culture. Emerging against the backdrop of the colonial experience in which African culture was minimized,<sup>53</sup> inculturation presents African culture as valuable and worthy of preservation. Generations of African theologians have defended their culture against charges of being backward and unsophisticated. The inculturation trend is defined by its commitment to the dignity of African culture.

Thirdly, inculturation discourses have left a legacy of critique in African theology. While most African theologians have passionately defended African culture, they have been willing to acknowledge that it has certain aspects that are not compatible with the gospel, showing a willingness to thoroughly examine African culture. According to Josiah Young, “in no case, then, is Africanization essentially repretinisation: only elements truly complementary to a Western, Christian orthodoxy appear desirable in African theology.”<sup>54</sup>

Fourthly, African theologians operating within the model of inculturation have been creative in their endeavours to relate

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<sup>53</sup>See for example Valentin Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988.

<sup>54</sup>Josiah U. Young, *Black and African Theologies: Siblings or Distant Cousins?* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986, 70.

Christianity to African culture. In those instances where they felt that an African ritual is vital, but that certain aspects clash with Christian values, they have proceeded to develop Christianised versions of the ritual. This dimension is important as we consider the role of African theology in the era of HIV and AIDS, as African theologians are being called upon to develop alternative rituals to replace those that might increase vulnerability to HIV.

*Reaffirming Blackness: Overcoming Oppressive Structures: Black and African Liberation Theologies*

Although the tendency has been to limit black theology to South Africa and to discuss liberation theology with particular reference to contexts outside South Africa, this study brings the two aspects together. This is justified on the grounds that the central goal of both black theology and of African liberation theology is to ensure that black people enjoy abundant life. Both approaches are motivated by the desire to overcome poverty and reaffirm the dignity of black people.

As it developed in South Africa in the 1970s, black theology emphasized the need for black people to utilize the Christian faith in the struggle against apartheid. Bonganjalo Goba argued that the central concern of black theology was how the oppressed black Christian community could access the liberating activity of God in Christ.<sup>55</sup> Black theology emerged out of the conviction that black people feature prominently in God's plan. This was revolutionary in a context dominated by apartheid.

Black theology has been defined by the struggles of black people against racism and their quest for dignity. Black theology has sought to expose the hypocrisy of the white Christians who dominated and oppressed black people by manipulating the Bible and theology. It pays particular attention to socio-political issues, laying bare the

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<sup>55</sup>Bonganjalo Goba, "Doing Theology in South Africa: A Black Christian Perspective", *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 31, 1980, 24.

structures that continue to oppress black people. Marxist analysis enabled black theology to engage in critical social analysis.<sup>56</sup>

Black theology in South Africa has interacted with black theology in North America, although each has its own separate identity. Both forms seek to empower black people against racial oppression and poverty. They “are one voice”<sup>57</sup> that calls upon black people to work for their total liberation. Black theology endeavours to energize black Christians in particular, and the black community in general, to anticipate “a new heaven and a new earth”. It takes issues that confront the black community seriously, and makes them the starting point for theological reflection.

Black theology makes a “preferential option for the poor”, a concept well established in Latin American liberation theology. It interprets the Bible in a liberating way, showing that God as the God of the oppressed.<sup>58</sup> Such interpretations are consistent with the conviction that God sides with the poor, oppressed and marginalized. God has consistently opposed injustice and discrimination, black theology asserts. God’s decisive intervention in Christ confirms that God takes the side of the excluded, according to black theologians.

### *Resisting Dehumanisation: Liberation Theology in Africa*

The attainment of political independence did not immediately improve quality of life for the majority of Africans. As black theology gained momentum in South Africa in the 1970s, most parts of Africa were re-examining the meaning of political independence. It quickly became clear that the lowering of the colonial flag did not result in a dramatic transformation of the socio-economic situation for the majority of the citizens. Indeed, in countries like Uganda (with Idi Amin), Nigeria (under successive military regimes) and Zaire (under

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<sup>56</sup>See for example Itumeleng J. Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989.

<sup>57</sup>Simon Maimela and Dwight Hopkins, eds., *We are One Voice: Black Theology in the USA and South Africa*. Braamfontein: Skotaville, 1989.

<sup>58</sup>James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*. New York: Seabury, 1975.

Mobutu Sese Seko), the dream of independence became a nightmare under African “leaders” — who were more “rulers” than leaders!

Theological reflection on the post-colonial situation in African countries gave rise to case-specific theologies of liberation. Jean Marc-Ela<sup>59</sup> bluntly pointed out the poverty that continued to dehumanise the majority of Africans. Canaan Banana<sup>60</sup> called for “combat theology” in order to dismantle oppressive economic and political systems. As mentioned, African theologies of liberation have been influenced by Latin American liberation theology, although they respond to concrete situations in Africa.

Liberation theology in Africa challenges the churches in Africa to strike a balance between preaching a futuristic gospel and challenging oppressive structures in the here and now. Like black theology in South Africa, liberation theology in other parts of the continent calls for the emancipation of the oppressed. It proclaims freedom, justice and the restoration of the dignity of those who toil under all forms of oppression.

Both these theologies pay particular attention to class. Whereas inculturation theology has tended to celebrate African culture, theologies of liberation are more cautious, highlighting the fact that Africans occupy differing social and class positions. Some Africans have accessed political and economic power and abuse this power to the detriment of the majority. Furthermore, they have used culture to subdue the majority.

African liberation theology has been keen to draw attention to how poverty in Africa affects individuals, social groups and the state. Engelbert Mveng underlines the extent to which this poverty is an anthropological and structural phenomenon.<sup>61</sup> Other liberation

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<sup>59</sup>Jean Marc-Ela, *African Cry*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986.

<sup>60</sup>Canaan S. Banana, *Politics of Repression and Resistance: Face to Face with Combat Theology*. Gweru: Mambo Press, 1996.

<sup>61</sup>Engelbert Mveng, “Impoverishment and Liberation: A Theological Approach for Africa and the Third World”, in Rosino Gibellini ed., *Paths of African Theology*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994, 154-165.

theologians have challenged the church to be actively involved in resisting poverty and dehumanisation. They have called upon the church to stand with and for those who have been trampled upon and dismissed as non-persons.

*Africa Crucified: Key Issues in Black and African Liberation Theologies*

Black and African liberation theologies can play a major role in responding to the HIV epidemic. Serious questions have been asked concerning black theology in South Africa and the USA. The end of apartheid in South Africa and the emergence of a black majority government in 1994, as well as other relevant issues have led to calls to abandon black theology in South Africa.<sup>62</sup> On the other hand, Alistair Kee contends that black theology in the USA is dead.<sup>63</sup> This study argues that the HIV epidemic provides a remarkable opportunity for black theology to demonstrate its relevance in both contexts.

Firstly, black theology has preoccupied itself with issues that confront black communities. It is surprising to note that although HIV has devastated black communities, black theology is yet to make it a major focus. The HIV epidemic offers an opportunity for black theology to reassert its concern with issues relating to the rights and welfare of black people.

Secondly, the HIV epidemic brings to the fore most concerns that have been at the heart of black theology. These issues are connected to poverty, racism, discrimination and the quest for social justice. Black theology therefore needs to examine and highlight how the material conditions of black people have resulted in increased

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<sup>62</sup>For a clear discussion of the issues, and an insistence on the relevance of black theology to South Africa, see for example Tinyiko S. Maluleke, "Black Theology Lives! – On a Permanent Crisis", *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa* 9,1, 1995, 1-30.

<sup>63</sup>Alistair Kee, *The Rise and Demise of Black Theology*. London: Ashgate, 2006.

vulnerability to HIV. Black theology is well placed to investigate the continued marginalization of black people in different parts of the world.

Thirdly, African liberation theology has paid particular attention to the question of governance in post-colonial Africa. It has sufficiently demonstrated that oppression by African governments remains oppression, and is therefore unacceptable. In the specific context of HIV, insights from Africa liberation are likely to galvanize African churches to challenge leaders who loot and plunder national resources while many people living with HIV are condemned to lives of poverty and premature death.

Fourthly, black and African liberation theologies focus on the need to transform communities. They seek to restore agency to the poor and the marginalized, which is particularly important in the era of HIV and AIDS. There is need to recognize the agency of people living with and affected by HIV and AIDS. Black and African liberation theologies seek to mobilize those who have been rendered powerless and invisible to reaffirm their value and dignity, which orientation is invaluable to black communities struggling against HIV.

Although there has been debate on the relationship between black theology in South Africa and African theology, there is a growing consensus that the two are closely related.<sup>64</sup> They have both experienced growth during the different phases outlined in the foregoing section. While black theology has been experiencing an identity crisis in South Africa, this study regards the HIV epidemic as a major challenge that has the capacity to reinvigorate it.

### *Hearing the Lament of the Daughters of Ethiopia: African Women's Theologies*

The third phase of African theology has been characterized by the irruption of African women's theologies. While the two earlier phases

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<sup>64</sup>See for example Emmanuel E. Martey, *African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation*.

were marked by almost exclusively male reflections, the 1990s saw African women theologians announcing their arrival. While Mercy Amba Oduyoye had published in the late 1970s and 1980s, African women theologians were not very visible prior to the emergence of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (called “the Circle” in short). The formation of the Circle paved the way for the increased visibility of female African theologies from the 1990s.

The arrival of women theologians has changed the face of African theology decisively. Through the Circle,<sup>65</sup> their voices are clearly heard. Refusing to keep quiet until church and society address African women’s concerns, women theologians have been militant. They have called the church to account,<sup>66</sup> charging that it has not accompanied women in their struggle against patriarchy.

African women’s theologies (the plural form can also be applied as the practitioners themselves uphold it) primarily focus on the liberation of African women from oppressive religio-cultural, political and economic systems. They constitute a significant dimension of African theologies of liberation. Alongside their male counterparts, African women theologians struggle against Africa’s marginalization in the global economic arena. However, they proceed to show how African women are the poorest of the poor.

Where generations of male African theologians have generally defended African culture, African women theologians have been more critical and have drawn attention to patriarchal, suffocating and life-denying beliefs and practices. Although they engage in cultural hermeneutics,<sup>67</sup> they sift African cultural practices with far greater

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<sup>65</sup>See for example Teresia M. Hinga *et al.*, eds., *Women, Religion and HIV/AIDS in Africa: Responding to Ethical and Theological Challenges*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2008.

<sup>66</sup>Mercy A. Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995. Chapter 8.

<sup>67</sup>Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro, *Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics: An African Perspective*. Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2002.

caution than their male counterparts. African women theologians have named and condemned cultural practices that diminish women's worth.

The Circle has emerged as a highly productive theological forum or body. Covering all the linguistic zones of the continent, it has ensured that women's issues are an integral part of the agenda of Africa theology. The Circle has promoted theological reflections by women in a context where they are generally marginalized and has encouraged African women theologians to be assertive in the quest for social transformation.

African women theologians have been incisive in demonstrating how religious and cultural practices have left African Christian women "groaning in faith".<sup>68</sup> Whereas black theology and African liberation theology have placed emphasis on race and economic structures, African women's theologies privilege gender. They employ gender analysis to lay bare the oppression of African women and illustrate how religious ideologies have been deployed to keep these women subjugated.

African women's theologies are undertaken in contexts characterized by a lot of lamentation. Although there is also a celebration of life, there is a longing for a better world characterized by gender justice. African women theologians are freedom fighters who are mobilizing African women to resist all forms of oppression. They have summoned "the will to arise"<sup>69</sup> and overcome domination.

It is crucial to point out that it is no longer possible to refer to African theology without having African women's theologies in mind. Due to the sheer volume and quality of reflection in this field, there is need to accept that they have moved from the periphery to the centre. Even the most rabid male chauvinist must now acknowledge

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<sup>68</sup>Musimbi Kanyoro and Nyambura Njoroge, eds., *Groaning in Faith: African Women in the Household of God*. Nairobi: Acton, 1996.

<sup>69</sup>Mercy Oduyoye and Musimbi Kanyoro, eds., *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition and the Church in Africa*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995.

the output by African women theologians; their work has come to be an integral part of African theology.

*Radical Sisters: Key Issues in African Women's Theologies*

Male theologians are no longer the sole producers of African theology. It is no longer admissible to line up male practitioners only and claim to have done justice to African theology. With clarity, passion and compassion,<sup>70</sup> African women theologians have announced their arrival. One of the most significant issues emerging from their writing is the need to pay particular attention to the needs, concerns and capacities of women, since earlier phases of African theology were not sufficiently attuned to them.

African women represent the only group of theologians who have researched and published consistently on HIV and AIDS.<sup>71</sup> How African theology responds to the HIV epidemic, the central concern of this study, largely depends on the proposals that have been put forward by the Circle. Effectively therefore, reflections on theology and the HIV epidemic in Africa have to take the contributions of African women seriously and as a point of departure.

African women's theologies offer an opportunity to examine the intersections in African theology in general. The women's theologies are related to inculturation, liberation, oral and reconstruction theologies. They challenge the inculturation project by highlighting the highly gendered nature of African cultures. They share the quest for justice with liberation theologies and have also utilized aspects of oral theology. The desire to establish just and thriving communities also characterizes theologies of reconstruction.

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<sup>70</sup>Virginia M. M. Fabella and Mercy A. Oduyoye, eds., 1988. *With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

<sup>71</sup>See for example, Isabel A. Phiri, Beverley Haddad and Madipoane Masenya, eds., *African Women, HIV/AIDS and Faith Communities in Africa*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2003.

African women's theologies have also critiqued some of the sources of African theology, with African culture, the Bible and AICs identified as major sources. In the preceding section it was noted that African women theologians do not assume that African culture is innocent. They have also called for gender-sensitive re-readings of the Bible in the era of HIV and AIDS,<sup>72</sup> and have also drawn attention to the subordination of women in many AICs.

African women's theologies have the greatest potential to connect theological reflections to communities of faith. Although there are no compelling reasons for theology to always be linked to the so-called "grassroots" or "ordinary believers", theologies that seek to make a difference in the era of HIV need to do so. Women theologians have succeeded in mobilizing women in remote parts of Africa to be actively involved in their own liberation.

Christological reflections by African women theologians in the context of HIV and AIDS will help clarify the meaning of Christ to vulnerable women and girls. Who is Christ to a woman living with HIV, without access to antiretroviral drugs? Who is Christ to women who are survivors of rape and abuse? How does the girl child heading a household hear the invitation by Jesus to bring her heavy burdens to him?

Overall, African women's theologies have become by far the most vibrant trend in African theology. While the inculturation and black theology schools especially appear to be struggling to take their ideas further, African women's theologies do not seem to be suffering such uncertainty. It is therefore likely that the "radical sisters" who seek to dismantle patriarchy will provide African theology with the most creative strategies as it seeks to respond to HIV and AIDS.

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<sup>72</sup>See for example, Musa W. Dube and Musimbi Kanyoro, eds., *Grant Me Justice! HIV/AIDS and Gender Readings of the Bible*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2004.

*Non-Written Theology is also Theology: Oral Theology*

The debate over whether material that has not been committed to writing should be placed at the same level as that which has been written is not confined to African theology. It has emerged in the studies of, for example, African history, literature and philosophy. Defensive African intellectuals have charged that writing does not necessarily add value to history, literature or philosophy and, in the specific case of African theology, some African theologians have called for the recognition of oral theology.

It is surprising to note that arguments in favour of oral theology became pronounced during the third phase of African theology. It is likely that as theologians became more confident about their discipline, they could defend the status of oral theology. Perhaps trying to do this during the earlier phases would have given ammunition to those who were dismissing African theology.

Essentially, oral theology refers to the diverse, non-written modes of expressing theological ideas. An alternative label is “popular theology”, that is, reflections on faith undertaken by the majority of people of faith. Oral theology endeavours to democratise theology and prevent it from becoming the preserve of trained professionals. It is particularly appealing in African contexts where written opinions have not reached the majority.

Oral theology is rooted in the quest for non-elitism. It is motivated by the realization that millions of Africans engage in theological reflection and although this theology might not be written down, it is expressed in prayers, songs, dances and other ways. Proponents argue that it is not persuasive to overlook such theology on the basis that it is not in a written form, as to do so is to fall victim to the fallacy that the written word is superior to the oral.

Oral theology celebrates the power of the spoken and refuses to privilege written theology. African theologians who uphold the integrity of oral theology are convinced that it is a powerful medium for expressing faith. A song that grips the heart is more effective than a theological treatise, they argue. At any rate, the preoccupation with the written word is recent phenomenon, especially in Africa.

According to Harold Coward, the West has tended to place more emphasis on written scripture. He writes:

For modern Christians and for some Jews, it is frequently the written Bible that evokes awe, rather than the power of a memorized and recited scriptural word that is “lived with” orally in liturgical practice as well as in everyday life. This dominance of the written text for modern Westerners is partly a result of the impact of modern, print-dominated culture on religious experience. But it is quite out of line with the traditional experience of scripture as found in the five world religions. In each religion the scripture began orally and to varying degrees has remained a basically oral phenomenon.<sup>73</sup>

The proposal to recognize oral theology in Africa is therefore an integral part of resistance to Western domination. Oral theology endeavours to respect the theological ideas of those who have not benefited from formal training. However, some African theologians envisage close collaboration between academic and oral theology. For Kwame Bediako, African academic theology is being challenged “to be in close contact with the vernacular apprehension of the Christian faith and with its roots in the continuing realities of the primal world-view.”<sup>74</sup>

*Other Ways of Theologising:*<sup>75</sup> *The Significance of Oral Theology*  
Oral theology has not attained a high profile in African theology, despite the fact that although literacy has become key to the development of the continent, Africa retains a lot of its oral traditions. It has been predominantly non-African theologians who have outlined

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<sup>73</sup>Harold Coward, *Sacred Word and Sacred Text: Scripture in World Religions*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988, 161.

<sup>74</sup>Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, 86.

<sup>75</sup>The title is influenced by Musa W. Dube, ed., *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible*. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 200.

the significance of oral theology. Martin Ott<sup>76</sup> has produced a valuable volume on art as a medium of theological expression in Africa. Healey and Sybertz have called for an African narrative theology.<sup>77</sup> There have been some reflections on the theological significance of African Christian names.<sup>78</sup> These works provide insights into the rich potential of oral theology in Africa.

Oral theology is strategically placed to address the HIV epidemic in Africa. While deep theological reflections on HIV are necessary, there is also need to utilize oral theology to communicate effectively. A prayer on HIV and AIDS might be more effective than a thick volume on theology and the HIV epidemic. This is particularly important when the target audience might not have access to the publications due to limitations associated with the use of European languages, levels of education and other factors.

Oral theology in Africa reawakens the debate: for whom do African theologians write? Do they write for external or overseas audiences, their peers in Africa and abroad, or for “ordinary” African believers? How relevant are theological reflections that do not address the existential situation of the majority of people? By giving priority to the theological expressions of lay people, oral theology serves as a check on the potentially elitist character of academic theology.

Like African women’s theologies, oral theology provides an opportunity to examine overlaps in African theology. For example, storytelling is a major characteristic of oral theology in Africa. It is closely connected to the continent’s rich tradition of oral literature. African women theologians have employed storytelling in their writings and sometimes utilize oral theology. While some critics have

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<sup>76</sup>Martin Ott, *African Theology in Images*. Zomba: Kachere Books, 2000.

<sup>77</sup>Joseph Healey and Donald Sybertz, *Towards an African Narrative Theology*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 1996.

<sup>78</sup>See for example Ezra Chitando, “Theology from the Underside: The Case of African Christian Names in Zimbabwe”, *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*. 101, 2, 1998, 23-34.

glibly dismissed such articles as “mere stories”, they are valuable as they give theology a human face.

Oral theology should not be thought of as “spontaneous and simple”. It can indeed be “well thought-out and deep”. This is particularly necessary when efforts are being made to utilize oral theology in the struggle against HIV. There is need to produce songs, prayers and sermons that energize communities to respond to the HIV epidemic in Africa.<sup>79</sup> Oral theology should be harnessed to transform African communities into compassionate and determined armies in response to HIV and AIDS.

*Rebuilding the Continent, Reigniting Hope: Theologies of Reconstruction*

The final trend we will discuss in this study is African theologies of reconstruction. In the 1990s, there emerged an appealing strand in African theology; Mugambi,<sup>80</sup> Charles Villa-Vicencio<sup>81</sup> and Kä Mana<sup>82</sup> proposed theologies of reconstruction. Although with different emphases, they all argued that African theology needed to refocus and take up the theme of reconstruction. Reconstruction theology would ensure that the church made a critical contribution to the development of the continent.

It is critical to note that reconstruction theology shares a lot in common with, and endeavours to build on, earlier trends in African theology. Like African liberation theology, reconstruction theology

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<sup>79</sup> See for example Musa W. Dube, ed, *Africa Praying: HIV/AIDS Sensitive Sermon Guidelines and Liturgy*. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2003.

<sup>80</sup>Jesse N.K. Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology after the Cold War*, Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1995.

<sup>81</sup>Charles Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction: Nation-Building and Human Rights*. Cape Town: David Phillip, 1992.

<sup>82</sup>Kä Mana, *Christians and Churches of Africa: Salvation in Christ and the Building of a New African Society*. Yaounde: Editions Cle/Auropong – Akuapem: Regnum Africa, 2002.

contends that political independence has not transformed the lives of ordinary African citizens, unlike the earlier hopes. In line with African women's theologies, reconstruction theology calls for the envisioning of a "new heaven and a new earth". Reconstruction theology contends that Africa can yet shake off all the negative labels associated with it and attain health and prosperity.

Whereas the Exodus motif (Exodus 3) dominated liberation theology, reconstruction theology utilizes the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. These books are selected because they illuminate the challenges and prospects of reconstruction. For Kä Mana, reconstruction theology emerges from the devastation caused mainly by "truly insignificant" African leaders. He writes:

At the dawn of independence and also during the period characterized by military dictatorships, we saw Africa undergo a crisis as a result of truly insignificant people who usurped power and occupied leadership positions in many of our African states, as the guides of our destiny. Apart from a few who left behind fond memories of their reign, many of our heads of state did not have what it takes to build for the future.

The leaders were totally ineffective, mentally bankrupt and lacked any political will, deficiencies camouflaged by pompous and verbose speeches. They resembled puppets who repeated formulae prepared elsewhere, and implemented measures planned in other countries. They appeared shallow and lacked the strength of character needed to enable them to lead the people.<sup>83</sup>

Kä Mana's sharp rebuke of African political leaders highlights reconstruction theology's critique of the paradigm of liberation in African theology. Proponents of liberation theology argue that the project of liberation has not improved the quality of life for the majority of African citizens. There is an urgent need for the continent to rebuild its ruins. This will allow Africa to regain its dignity in a world in which it is ridiculed and abused.

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<sup>83</sup>Kä Mana, *Christians and Churches of Africa*, 10.

Reconstruction theology challenges theologians, churches and communities in Africa to work towards building new communities. From the ruins of collapsed postcolonial African societies must emerge a robust and confident Africa. It is Africans ourselves who must take centre stage in the rebuilding of the continent. Such a task is too sacred to be outsourced. The task of theologians is to envision the future (Kä Mana), paying particular attention to law, human rights and economic justice (Villa-Vicencio), and reconciliation, confidence-building and re-orientation (Mugambi).

*Africa Born Again:*<sup>84</sup> *Key Issues in Reconstruction Theology*

The latest trend in African theology, reconstruction theology, has not been as popular as one might have anticipated. Critical reviews, for example by Tinyiko S. Maluleke<sup>85</sup> charge that reconstruction theology, especially in the works of Villa Vicencio and Mugambi, tends to be too quick to dismiss earlier paradigms. Valentin Dedji<sup>86</sup> has also provided an informative review of the key concerns of reconstruction theology.

The theme of reconstruction is quite appealing in the context of an Africa seeking to emerge from the death and destruction caused by AIDS. Mugambi's multi-layers or levels of reconstruction (personal, cultural, ecclesiastical and socio-economic) are particularly important in the wake of the HIV epidemic. It is therefore critical to ask how HIV necessitates reconstruction at these different levels.

Kä Mana's blistering attack on the mediocrity of most postcolonial African leaders becomes even more relevant against the background of the HIV epidemic. Leadership is undoubtedly a

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<sup>84</sup>Julius M. Gathogo, "A Survey on an African Theology of Reconstruction", *Swedish Missiological Themes* 95, 2, 2007, 148.

<sup>85</sup>Tinyiko S. Maluleke, "The Proposal for a Theology of Reconstruction: A Critical Appraisal", *Missionalia* 22, 3, 1994, 245-258.

<sup>86</sup>Valentin Dedji, *Reconstruction and Renewal in African Christian Theology*. Nairobi: Acton, 2003.

major factor in the quest to provide effective responses to the epidemic. Reconstruction theology challenges the churches in Africa to take their prophetic role seriously by asking African leaders to demonstrate the required vision.

Reconstruction theology interacts closely with other concerns in Africa. Although calls to collapse all African theology into reconstruction theology<sup>87</sup> are premature, reconstruction theology resonates with some key economic and political programmes on the continent, especially the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).<sup>88</sup> As its proponents demonstrate in their work, reconstruction theology enables African theology to interact with other disciplines.

Reconstruction theology justifies the contention that African theology remains alive. The creativity shown by its proponents confirms that African intellectuals are willing to push the boundaries of their discipline as far as possible. The ensuing debate is necessary, especially the critique by some African women theologians like Musa W. Dube.

### **Alive but Searching for Relevance: African Theology**

This chapter has provided an overview of the growth of African theology and an outline of the trends that have emerged in the discipline. Since its emergence in the late 1950s until the contemporary period, African theology has sought to make Christianity relevant to the African context. Across the different phases and paradigms, African theology has preoccupied itself with ensuring that the Christian faith is articulated in an African idiom, and that it facilitates quality of life for the adherents.

At the heart of African theology is the conviction that the church must respond to the actual, lived realities of African converts and

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<sup>87</sup>Julius M. Gathogo, "A Survey on an African Theology of Reconstruction", 148.

<sup>88</sup>Josiah K. Murage, "Development and Reconstruction Theologies of Africa", *Swedish Missiological Themes* 95, 2, 2007, 149-170.

communities. The existential needs of Africans must constitute the core business of the church. Through inculturation, black and liberation theologies, women's theologies, oral theology and reconstruction theology, African theology seeks to make Christianity a relevant religion to millions of Africans.

Although African theology has been vibrant, and numerous books and articles have been published, there are some questions regarding the role of the discipline. Have African theologians succeeded in responding to the needs of ordinary Africans, or have they succumbed to the lure of the ivory tower? How can African theologians strive to ensure that their reflections have at least some relevance to the lives of ordinary Africans? To what extent are African theologians willing to contribute to Africa's reawakening and development?

These questions must continue to challenge African theology as it searches for relevance in postcolonial Africa. All the different paradigms of African theology must examine their connectedness to the day-to-day realities of millions of Africans. Since most practitioners of African theology are based in universities and theological colleges, they must transform these institutions into vibrant research centres that are engaged in the revitalization of the continent.

In the following chapters, this study illustrates how the HIV epidemic challenges African theology to be creative and provide guidelines to churches and communities in Africa. In its different modes of expression, African theology must regard the HIV and AIDS epidemic as a *Kairos*; the "moment of truth" when African theology comes to terms with the challenges posed by the diseases. The following chapter focuses on inculturation theologies and the epidemic.



## CHAPTER TWO

# Healing Culture: Inculturation Theology and HIV

### Introduction

**A**s demonstrated in chapter one, African theologians have placed a lot of emphasis on their culture. Across the different phases, generations and trends, these theologians have argued that Christianity in Africa must come to terms with African cultures. They have maintained that the churches must engage in meaningful dialogue with local cultures. This is a direct response to the negative attitudes towards African cultures that tended to dominate the missionary approaches. However, the reality of HIV and AIDS forces African churches to rethink their defensive attitude towards African cultures.

This chapter examines the impact of the HIV epidemic on inculturation theologies in Africa. It is built on the assumption that African theology is called upon to respond to this crisis as a matter of urgency. African cultures have been heavily implicated in HIV and AIDS discourses; consequently, African theology must provide insights into the appropriation of African cultures in the era of HIV. The chapter argues that African theologians must be creative in upholding positive cultural values while challenging negative beliefs and practices.

### **Inculturation Theologies in Africa: An Overview**

As this chapter focuses on the challenges encountered by inculturation theologies in the face of HIV and AIDS in Africa, it is necessary to discuss briefly the key concept of inculturation. As noted in the previous chapter, inculturation emerged from the need to “convert Christianity to Africa”. African theologians have complained about the foreignness of Christianity, and argue that the gospel that Africans inherited from the missionaries tends to be artificial and does not speak to the existential needs of Africans. John Parratt outlines the historical context in the following words:

There was a widespread feeling of alienation from Western theology, a conviction that the Christian faith, as it had been presented, lacked immediacy and relevance to the African situation and that it had failed to take African traditions seriously. Consequently, the need to integrate the traditional worldview into Christian theology became an emerging theme. Several African theologians, especially in West Africa, began to enunciate guidelines as the directions such a theology should take.<sup>1</sup>

Inculturation theologies in Africa emerge from the conviction that the continent’s cultural and religious past is critical to the formation of its own Christian identities. They contend that the process of conversion to Christianity must be accompanied with cultural continuity, instead of the radical break that missionary ideology demanded. Theologies of inculturation in Africa are built on the idea that native cultures are a valuable resource to the growth and vitality of Christianity.

In his detailed analysis of inculturation, Clement C. A. Majawa, a Catholic theologian, argues that the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) played a major role in the popularity of the term. He cites Pope John II’s reference to inculturation as the incarnation of the gospel in native cultures. Majawa elaborates on the difference

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<sup>1</sup>John Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity: African Theology Today*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1995, 14.

between “adaptation”(a term that was in vogue earlier) and inculturation:

“Adaptation” still suggests a ready-made Christianity, which does not change anything of substance, and does not suggest an equal relationship of reciprocity in its contact with other cultural traditions. “Inculturation”, on the other hand, signifies the insertion of the Christian message, analogous to Christ’s incarnation in human history. It recognizes the responsibility of local churches to shape the future of the church in their own part of the world and the enrichment the universal church is to gain from this experience.<sup>2</sup>

Proponents of inculturation seek to ensure that Christianity in Africa is informed by and draws from African cultures. They argue that God is revealed in African cultures, hence there is need to preserve them. Rejecting the dismissal of African cultures as backward and barbaric, they maintain that African Christianity can only be meaningful to its practitioners if it takes worshipers’ cultures seriously. African theologians who operate within this model have challenged the church to embrace African cultures. They have a positive (though often selective) approach towards these cultures.

African nationalists share the same positive approach towards African cultures as African theologians. C. M. Brand argues that the growth of nationalist consciousness in the colonial world led subject peoples “to reappraise their own cultural heritage and religion in positive terms, thereby posing a new challenge to Christianity, the foreign import of their masters.”<sup>3</sup> African nationalists regarded the struggle for liberation as involving the political and cultural dimensions. Retrieving African cultural heritage was critical, as the

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<sup>2</sup>Clement C.A. Majawa, *Integrated Approach to African Christian Theology of Inculturation*. Nairobi: Creations Enterprises, 2005, 9.

<sup>3</sup>C. M. Brand, “African Nationalists and the Missionaries in Rhodesia”, in Michael F. C. Bourdillon, ed., *Christianity South of the Zambezi*. Vol. 2. Gwelo: Mambo Press, 1977, 75.

colonial project had dismissed it. Liberation was to be undertaken in both political and cultural terms.

Inculturation theologies are also informed by the activities of the African Independent/Indigenous/Initiated/Instituted Churches (AICs). Although there were many reasons behind the emergence of AICs, the need to take the African worldview seriously features prominently among them. AICs have been acknowledged as key actors in the struggle to make the gospel meaningful to Africans. Scholars from different parts of the continent acknowledged that AICs have covered appreciable ground in engaging African cultures.<sup>4</sup> Proponents of inculturation theology utilize AICs in their theological reflections.

The discourse on inculturation is also found in other disciplines that are close to African theology. Some scholars in African biblical studies have applied the concept of inculturation. They contend that there is a close connection between the Bible and African cultures. Whereas the early missionaries mainly preached the gospel of radical discontinuity, these scholars seek to bring the Bible into dialogue with African cultures. Justin Ukpong, one of the leading African biblical scholars who promote inculturation, argues that there is need to uphold African cultures among those who convert to Christianity. He has provided useful reflections on biblical inculturation in the African context. Thus:

I define biblical inculturation as a dynamic on-going process by which people consciously and critically appropriate the Bible and its message from within the perspectives and with the resources of their cultures. It is a hermeneutic process of appropriation which, in the case of Africa, is concerned to make a specifically African contribution to biblical interpretation and actualise the creative

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<sup>4</sup>See for example Deji Ayegboyin and S. Ademola Ishola, *African Indigenous Churches: A Historical Perspective*. Lagos: Greater Heights Publications, 1997; and Allan H. Anderson, *African Reformation: African Initiated Christianity in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*. Asmara: Africa World Press, 2001.

power of the Bible in African society. Its focus is on Africa's anthropological empowerment and cultural identity.<sup>5</sup>

Overall, the inculturation strand has been the dominant one in African theology. African theology has been preoccupied with the recovery of African identity in the wake of Christianity and European culture. Although practitioners of African theology have come from diverse backgrounds, they have been united by the quest for the restoration of respect for African cultures. This debate has surfaced in African liberation and women's theologies as well. There has been a growing appreciation of the need for African Christianity to embrace its own cultures. However, the emergence of the HIV pandemic poses some serious questions to the inculturation project.

### **Site of Struggle: African Cultures in the Era of HIV**

#### *Culture*

1. We will commit ourselves as church to reflect on positive and negative aspects of culture, identifying harmful practices and working to overcome them. In particular, we will recognize the ways in which culturally supported behaviour can make women, girls and also boys more vulnerable to HIV.
2. We will propose alternative rites and rituals in place of harmful practices.
3. We will challenge our churches, ourselves, and the structures to which we relate, to examine and address culture, traditions, and practices that enable the spread of HIV.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Justin S. Ukpong, "Inculturation as Decolonisation of Biblical Studies in Africa", in S. O. Abogunrin, ed., *Decolonisation of Biblical Interpretation in Africa*. Ibadan: Nigerian Association for Biblical Studies, 2005, 35.

<sup>6</sup>World Council of Churches, *Plan of Action: The Ecumenical Response to HIV/AIDS in Africa*. Geneva: WCC, 2002, 11.

In the citation above (from the *Plan of Action* that brought the Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiative in Africa (EHAIA) into being), African church leaders and theologians meeting in Nairobi, Kenya, from 25 – 28 November 2001 set the tone on the cultural impact of HIV. It is no longer possible to adopt an uncritical attitude towards African cultures in the face of the HIV epidemic. There is need to examine African cultural beliefs and practices, with the intention of promoting positive aspects that minimize the spread of HIV and overcoming harmful practices that facilitate it.

Unfortunately, African church leaders and theologians have not lived up to the ideals that they articulated so well in the *Plan of Action*. To date, very little creativity has been witnessed in terms of proposing alternative rites and rituals in place of harmful practices. African theologians operating within the inculturation paradigm appear to have been overcome by the sheer impact of HIV and are yet to demonstrate their relevance.

The realization that African cultures, like all human cultures, are fallible, is not a recent development. Inculturation theology has always promoted the idea of selecting “progressive” African beliefs and practices for integration with the Christian faith. Although culture is “the whole way of life, material and non-material, of a human society”,<sup>7</sup> its different components can be isolated and scrutinized. Inculturation theology has adopted such an approach and has sought to promote positive cultural practices.

Inculturation is a direct response to the minimization of African cultures in Christianity in Africa, as argued above. Whereas the missionary period was characterized by the tendency to dismiss African cultures, inculturation seeks to identify positive values and retain them in African Christianity. Inculturation theologians contend that African cultures are too rich to be jettisoned. Theirs is an “attempt

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<sup>7</sup>Aylward Shorter, *African Culture An Overview: Socio-Cultural Anthropology*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1998, 22.

to marry Christianity with the African world-view, so that Christianity could speak with an African idiom and accent.”<sup>8</sup>

This marriage faces a number of challenges in the wake of the HIV epidemic. First, there is need to ensure that all the beliefs and practices that have been accepted as “Christian” in Africa should be classified under that label. Religious historians have demonstrated that religions do not sit still; they are always evolving. Some beliefs are modified while others are abandoned. African theologians are therefore challenged to scrutinize Christianity in Africa, to identify beliefs and practices that are informed by Western cultures. They can then transform or adjust these beliefs and practices in line with contemporary realities.

Second, there is a need to establish whether the Christian and African beliefs and practices that are being harmonized are indeed life-affirming. This is critical, as both religions have life-denying aspects. The HIV pandemic requires that inculturation theologians make life in the face of destruction and death the preferential option. Practices that enable the spread of HIV must be examined before integration with Christian ones. It is also critical for African theologians to realise that not all “Christian” beliefs and practices enhance life; therefore, they must be critical of both traditions.

Third, inculturation theologians require a lot of creativity in proposing alternative rites and rituals in the time of HIV. In many instances, popular theology has marched ahead of academic African theology. In some parts of Zimbabwe, for example, “wife inheritance” has evolved in the wake of HIV and AIDS. Symbolic inheritance has become popular, with emphasis shifting towards providing security rather than taking over sexual duties. Oliver Mtukudzi, an established musician and cultural worker, has popularised the saying, “*nhaka sandi bonde*” (“inheritance is not all about the marital bed”). These

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<sup>8</sup>Simon S. Maimela, “Religion and Culture: Blessings or Curses?” in Simon S. Maimela, ed., *Culture, Religion and Liberation: Proceedings of the EATWOT Pan African Theological Conference, Harare, Zimbabwe, January 6-11, 1991*. Pretoria: np, 1994, 2.

innovations have taken place without the intervention of professional theologians. This raises major questions about their relevance, as communities of faith appear to be more creative than professional theologians.

Fourth, there is need to review the ideological use of culture. Inculturation theologians have generally tended to adopt an innocent reading of culture. The HIV epidemic demands the application of a more critical approach. As I shall illustrate in the next chapter, culture and religion have been deployed as instruments of oppression. According to Rondwedzi Nengwekhulu:

The application of culture and religion by the dominant classes within the society, as instruments of oppression and exploitation, is sustained and mediated by a network of institutions which are actively involved in the performance of a process of transmission of cultural and religious norms, customs, ethics and usages which perpetuate and reproduce the culture and religion of oppression and exploitation from one generation to another and from one historical epoch to another. Institutions involved in this process of the reproduction of culture and religion to oppression and exploitation include, amongst others, the family, schools, the mass media, etc.<sup>9</sup>

The task for African inculturation theology in the time of HIV entails critically examining culture to identify instances of its use as an instrument of oppression. Too often, men have promoted harmful cultural practices in the name of preserving “African culture”. Women have been made sacrificial victims in an ideologically sponsored crusade to “safeguard” African culture. The HIV epidemic invites African inculturation theologians to approach these cultures in the spirit of discernment.

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<sup>9</sup>Randwezi Nengwekhulu, “The Dialectical Relationship between Culture and Religion in the Struggle for Resistance and Liberation”, in Simon S. Maimela, ed., *Culture, Religion and Liberation*, 24.

*Old Concept, New Context: Principles of Inculturation in the Era of HIV*

African women theologians have brought the inculturation project into question. They have catalogued numerous cultural practices that endanger the welfare of women in the era of HIV. To some extent, the epidemic appears to cast serious doubts on the viability of inculturation. If African culture exposes women and men to HIV, is it not better to transplant it altogether?

In an article entitled, “The Challenges of HIV and AIDS on the Hegemony of Eurocentric Christianity: The Context of Lesotho”, Rasebate I. Mokotso calls upon African theologians to resist the wholesale condemnation of African beliefs and practices by Eurocentric Christianity. He traces the historical context in which the mission school and mission hospital have been used to trivialise African interpretations of health and healing. He underscores the need for African Christianity to tap positive indigenous beliefs and practices in the time of HIV. According to him:

The differences between Basotho culture and academic Christianity should be no longer viewed as permanent factors of tension among the Basotho, and both the differences and similarities should be constructively and effectively exploited to confront the AIDS crisis. This could be achieved through the readiness of Basotho professional theologians for a Christianity/culture dialogical process. Dialogue means interaction between parties with different views. It is different from monologue in which one party makes analysis and conclusions about the other party, the attitude that has dominated Western Christianity.<sup>10</sup>

Very few proponents of inculturation have come forward with suggestions as to how to the enterprise remains sustainable in the era of HIV. John Mary Waliggo, a Catholic theologian from Uganda

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<sup>10</sup>Rasebate I. Mokotso, “The Challenge of HIV and AIDS on the Hegemony of Eurocentric Christianity: The Context of Lesotho”, *Lesotho Journal of Theology* 1, 1, 2008, 62.

who has published widely on inculturation, is an exception. He has come up with four major principles of inculturation to guide the project in the era of HIV. This section dwells on his formulation, as they represent a noble effort to address the HIV epidemic. I have not encountered any other scholar who articulates the principles of inculturation in response to HIV in such a clear way.

According to Waliggo, first:

We need to identify those many *genuine African values and practices* which, when challenged by Christian teaching and modernity, (they) remain *positive, true, noble and capable of resisting* and eventually defeating this deadly epidemic.<sup>11</sup>

One can detect Waliggo's defence of the integrity of African culture. He is convinced, like many other African theologians, that African culture cannot be written off easily. He contends that there are many genuine African values and practices that could be used in response to the HIV epidemic and argues that these include Africa's concern with life, family value of educating children in the appreciation and proper use of their sexuality, community values of caring for one another, the medical and healing values and the spiritual-religious values that focus on God's power.<sup>12</sup>

One can deduce that Waliggo privileges "Christian teaching and modernity" in the inculturation project. African beliefs and practices must be measured against these principles if they are to be accepted, he argues. In addition, he places emphasis on the capacity of particular beliefs and practices to overcome HIV and AIDS. In this regard, he is quite consistent with the trend in inculturation theologies in Africa. They do not uncritically endorse African culture,

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<sup>11</sup>John Mary Waliggo, "Inculturation and the HIV/AIDS Pandemic in the AMECEA Region", *African Ecclesial Review*, 47(4), 2005 and 48 (1), 2006, 294. Italics original.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 294.

but seek to salvage only the positive dimensions. Nonetheless, there is need to acknowledge that what is “life-saving” is essentially contested. There is also no unanimity over what “Christian teaching and modernity” entail.

In the second stage of his quest for relevant and effective inculturation in the era of HIV, Waliggo writes:

We also identify those *African values and practices*, which in the light of Christian teaching and modernity, need *modification and purification* in order to protect life better in the presence of HIV/AIDS. Any African custom, tradition or practice which undermines the united fight against the spread of HIV/AIDS must be properly dealt with by all stakeholders, including church leaders and pastoral agents.<sup>13</sup>

Waliggo calls for the transformation of some African values and practices in the wake of HIV and AIDS. In his examples, he concentrates on the possibility of HIV transmission through circumcision knives and razor blades. He is convinced that if people are equipped with the relevant information, they will be willing to modify the practices and promote life. This is a useful intervention; however, who has the authority to “modify and purify” African values and practices? What happens if the community decides that the Christianised ritual no longer represents authentic African values and practices?

Having begun with positive values and practices and proceeded to those that require modification, Waliggo proceeds to the third stage. For him:

To be identified too are some African traditional customs and practices which should be fully abandoned and replaced by newly thought-out Christian ceremonies and symbols. These are very many, particularly in the *funeral rites* and *final funeral rites*, *traditional marriages*, *initiation* and *circumcision rites* among

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 294.

others in our ethnic groups. The church should courageously identify these ceremonies and give strong catechesis on how they should be done in an entirely Christian and modern way so that they enhance both Christian morality and respect of positive modernity, in order to protect life.<sup>14</sup>

Here, one can see the common ground between a male theologian like Waliggo and African women theologians on the question of transforming Africa culture. With more opportunities for dialogue, African women theologians and their male counterparts can work together to promote life.

Pursuing the re-evaluation of African cultures in the context of HIV, Waliggo proposes the abolition of those indigenous practices that endanger people. In his fourth principle, he counsels as follows:

We should put emphasis on practices, customs and traditions which in the presence of HIV/AIDS and Christian teaching and the demands of human rights and the equality of men and women, should be fully abolished or controlled by our societies, if we are to prevent and contain the prevalence of HIV/AIDS through proper living of our Christianity.<sup>15</sup>

Waliggo identifies widow and widower inheritance, polygamy, the sub-culture of defilement, incest and rape, sex work, pornography, homosexuality and the commercialisation of sex for all as negative aspects of globalisation that need urgent attention.<sup>16</sup> He shows great concern for “Christian teaching”, “positive modernity” and “human rights”. For him, African customs and practices are not cast in stone; they can be modified, replaced or abolished in response to contemporary needs.

I have dwelt on Waliggo’s principles of inculturation in the era of HIV and AIDS because very few theologians have reflected on

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 295.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 295.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 295-296.

the theme with such clarity and courage. Obviously, there will be debate as to what is really “Christian teaching” or “positive modernity”. Nonetheless, the principles he expounds are important. They constitute a significant point of reference in discourse on inculturation in a time of HIV. They offer valuable insights on how to “heal culture” in the face of the pandemic.

### **Ancestral Wisdom, A Contemporary Challenge: African Cultural Resources and the HIV Challenge**

In her evaluation of the Circle’s HIV and AIDS work, Dube observes that there has been a tendency to focus on the negative aspects of African culture. She expresses the concern that this might perpetuate the colonial and colonizing rhetoric. She suggests that the Circle (and indeed other African theologians) should invest in identifying positive cultural values that can be used in the struggle against HIV and AIDS.

What is lacking in the Circle’s cultural engagement with HIV and AIDS is an equal highlighting of the positive aspects of various African cultures that have helped our communities to survive and stay alive even with dire lack of material resources such as ARVs and food. Good examples here include community spirit; the care for orphans and the sick by the family; the communal counselling and support during bereavement. It is the duty of the Circle to explore the philosophies, theologies and theories that hold various African communities together and enable the communities to survive.<sup>17</sup>

In order to be relevant to the struggle against the HIV epidemic, African theologians must invest in identifying strategic cultural resources. There is an urgent need to retrieve positive aspects that

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<sup>17</sup>Musa W. Dube, ‘In the Circle of Life: African Women Theologians Engagement with HIV and AIDS,’ Consultancy Report Submitted to the Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiative in Africa (EHAIA) Theology Consultant, Harare, 2006, 27.

have equipped Africans to uphold life, even as death stalks and attacks with disturbing frequency. It is the duty of African theologians to mobilize communities to stem the tide of HIV and AIDS.

Like Dube, Waliggo is convinced that there are adequate cultural resources in Africa to combat the epidemic. He identifies “inner African energies” that should be integrated in the fight against HIV and AIDS, which include the African concept of the family. This has energized African communities to look after its more vulnerable members. Waliggo also praises the African sense of community or neighbourliness and challenges the church to emulate the African sense of the family and communal solidarity.<sup>18</sup>

Waliggo argues that the renewed interest in post-death rituals that include honouring the dead, cleaning around their graves and honouring ancestors is a positive development. He also identifies African wisdom, found in proverbs, stories and skills as a useful resource that has enabled communities to cope with the epidemic. Equally significant for Waliggo are African healing systems. He argues that modern scientific doctors and experts do not have exclusive rights to finding a cure to HIV and AIDS. According to him, “[t]he cure may and can come from any angle of the world, including the most un-expected.”<sup>19</sup>

Dube and Waliggo provide valuable insights regarding positive dimensions of African culture that have assisted communities in their response to the HIV epidemic. These insights, however, tend to concentrate on those positive cultural aspects that have facilitated caring for people living with or affected by HIV and AIDS. There is need to invest more resources into investigating positive cultural beliefs and practices, and their role in prevention.

African Traditional Religions (ATRs) place emphasis on preventing disease, misfortune and death. Adherents of ATRs are encouraged to undertake ritual action in order to prevent diseases.

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<sup>18</sup>John Mary Waliggo, “Inculturation and the HIV/AIDS Pandemic in the AMECEA Region”, 302-303.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 304.

In many instances, traditional healers empower their clients to face the world by giving them charms. This idea could be integrated in the social marketing of condoms in Africa:

One key idea that could be central to prevention efforts is the utilization of protective charms against harmful spirits and forces. Individuals are given charms and amulets to ward off dangerous spirits. Condoms can be promoted in this context. They could be viewed as another protective charm against the destructive spirit of HIV and AIDS. This is consistent with the cosmology of AIRs (African Indigenous Religions) in which all negative forces can be stopped. Condoms become another strategy for confronting a deadly opponent of life, HIV and AIDS.<sup>20</sup>

One is of course aware of the controversy surrounding condoms in the church and theology. It goes beyond the scope of this study to review the debate on condoms as a prevention strategy. Nonetheless, it is critical to note that there is growing acceptance within the churches in Africa that “fighting condoms” is counter-productive. Inculturation theologians therefore face the challenge of fitting condoms into both the African and Christian worldviews. Perhaps the promotion of life in both traditions might serve as a starting point. Typically, African theologians also wish to respect African culture and place emphasis on the need to address the issue of age and gender when handling the theme of sexuality. In other words, there is a need to be sensitive to cultural values regarding sex education.

Another cultural aspect that could be built on in prevention is the idea of the man as the protector of the family. It is likely that most African women theologians would call for more efforts to deconstruct the notion that men are protectors. However, in the interim, the idea can be utilized to encourage men to be more responsible in their sexual lives. In their quest to fulfil their roles as

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<sup>20</sup>Ezra Chitando, *African Indigenous Religions in the HIV and AIDS Context*. Module 5. Geneva: WCC, 2007, 42.

protectors, men must be challenged to abstain, be faithful or use condoms. In addition, men must be reminded of the need to protect children in the era of HIV.

Within the various African languages, there are many proverbs and sayings that show the value of taking the right course of action. Perhaps the major drawback in the response to HIV and AIDS in Africa has been the dominance of foreign communication models. It is more effective to disseminate HIV and AIDS information using the local idiom, as such information is more readily absorbed than messages couched in foreign concepts. It is therefore necessary for African theologians to collaborate with colleagues in African languages and develop more effective communication.

Healing plays an important role in African cultures.<sup>21</sup> The era of epidemic poses new challenges as traditional healers claim that they can cure HIV and AIDS. Some Christians have also made similar claims. It is crucial for African theologians to integrate African beliefs and practices relating to health and healing. There is need for creativity as antiretroviral drugs (ARVs) have had a positive impact and have brought hope to many. Individuals who had been written off have changed into “new productive citizens”.<sup>22</sup> African theologians must lead the way by arguing that ARVs are an integral part of God’s intervention to address HIV and AIDS.

Integrating African indigenous approaches to health, Christian healing and Western biomedicine requires bringing these medical systems into dialogue. Here, African theologians must avoid the extremist position that traditional medicine is adequate in overcoming the HIV epidemic. Neither must they allow the arrogance of Western biomedicine to frustrate efforts to restore health within African

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<sup>21</sup>See for example, S. O. Abognunrin, ed., *Biblical Healing in African Context*. Biblical Studies Series. No. 3. Ibadan: Nigerian Association for Biblical Studies, 2004.

<sup>22</sup>Ricus Dullaert, ed., *Care for the Caregivers Manual* Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis, 2006, 69.

communities. There is need for openness to the possibility of a cure coming from different sources, as Waliggo argues.

The centrality of life to ATRs must find its way to the heart of African theology as it seeks to respond to the HIV epidemic. The theology of death has been allowed to dominate, with communities specializing in mourning and designing fancy coffins. Perhaps the “other-worldly” dimension of Christianity has supplanted the African concern with life in its fullness. Laurenti Magesa maintains that the promotion of life is expected to inform African ethical decision-making.<sup>23</sup>

If African theologians endeavour to harness the African celebration of life, there would be greater momentum in the struggle against the HIV epidemic. Prevention programmes in church and society would be enhanced. As HIV is a serious threat to life, there would be greater mobilization of the community to counter its negative effects. Similarly, programmes for care and support would receive more attention, as communities would strive to promote life.

Overall, the challenge remains for African theologians to explore the continent’s heritage for windows of opportunity and resources to counter the HIV epidemic. While acknowledging the problematic aspects of African culture, they must invest more intellectual resources and time to the task of identifying positive cultural beliefs and practices. From the beginning, inculturation has been motivated by the conviction that African culture provides an invaluable resource in the formulation of African Christian identities. The HIV challenge has made it urgent for African theologians to sensitise the church and society on the role of African culture in mitigating and eventually overcoming the epidemic.

### **HIV and the Integrity of African Cultures**

Waliggo and Dube have been particularly articulate in calling for a more balanced approach to the question of African cultures and HIV.

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<sup>23</sup>Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life*, Nairobi: Pauline Publications Africa, 1997, 77.

This has to be understood against the background of negative images of Africa that tends to dominate global news. Africa is often portrayed as a place of wars, disease and death and the HIV pandemic worsens these pre-existing stereotypes. As a result, most male African theologians have been hesitant to challenge African cultures in the wake of HIV. They are concerned that they would be endorsing the verdict that African cultures are “heathen, demonic and death-dealing”.

The church in Africa has posted some notable results in the quest for inculturation. In particular, the Catholic Church has promoted the use of indigenous musical instruments, dances, symbols and concepts. Different Protestant denominations and AICs have also fused Christianity and African cultures. To a very large extent, Christianity in Africa now has a distinctively African outlook. The remaining challenge is, how to respond to contentious African cultural beliefs and practices that increase vulnerability to HIV.

The Methodist Church of Southern Africa argues that there is need to respect culture, tradition and practice as it seeks to respond to the pandemic. Thus:

The Methodist response to people living with HIV/AIDS should be sensitive to people’s culture, traditions, customs and religious practices. Our approach must encourage those aspects of culture that promote healing and wholeness (death and dying, communal care for the dying, bereavement and mourning and care of AIDS orphans). In line with Christian ethics we will commit to identifying and challenging harmful rituals and practices where culturally supported behaviour makes people more vulnerable to HIV.<sup>24</sup>

The whole area of health and healing needs to be approached with a lot of caution and sensitivity in the time of HIV, as discussed above. To a very large extent, mission churches have embraced biomedicine

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<sup>24</sup>The Methodist Church of Southern Africa. 2006. *Revised HIV & AIDS Strategy & Implementation Plan.*, 11.

as the paradigm for interpreting health and healing. Churches in Africa play a major role in the provision of health. Church Health Associations are key stakeholders in the health delivery systems of many African countries. However, there is a need for creativity when approaching traditional and AIC forms of healing in the context of HIV and AIDS. Some traditional healers and prophets claim to “cure” HIV and AIDS.<sup>25</sup> Inculturation theologians need to come up with creative solutions to the challenge by appreciating the crossover between the different therapeutic systems.

There appears to be an emerging consensus that the pandemic raises serious questions regarding the practice of polygamy — or, more accurately, polygny — in Africa. Although theoretically polygny does not increase vulnerability to HIV if all the partners are faithful, studies on human sexual behaviour indicate that in most cases there are extra-marital sexual activities. The continental Organization of African Instituted Churches (OAIC) has undertaken massive HIV- and AIDS-awareness campaigns. In Zimbabwe, the Union for the Development of Apostolic Churches in Zimbabwe Africa (UDACIZA) has drafted an HIV and AIDS policy that discourages polygny and promotes monogamy. This confirms the contention that African culture is dynamic and responds to new challenges. Inculturation theologians must study such changes and propose solutions to emerging issues relating to African cultures.

Creativity is also required to tackle female genital mutilation,<sup>26</sup> male circumcision, widow cleansing and other rituals in the context

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<sup>25</sup>For a recent discussion on health and healing in an African context, see for example, Adam K. Arap Chepkwony, ed., *Religion and Health in Africa: Reflections for Theology in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2006.

<sup>26</sup>See for example, Theodros Assefa Teklu, “Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) as a Risk Factor for HIV Transmission: A Theological-Anthropological Critique”, in Edwina Ward and Gary Leonard, eds., *A Theology of HIV & AIDS on Africa’s East Coast: A Collection of Essays by Masters Students from Four Academic Institutions*. Uppsala: Swedish Institute of Mission Research, 2008, 112-126.

of HIV and AIDS. It is necessary to undertake thorough studies of these practices and engage in serious theological reflection on whether to suggest abandonment, modification or retention. Clearly, the guiding hermeneutical principle must be promoting wholeness of life for women, children and men who participate in these rituals. Only those cultural beliefs and practices that enhance life must be upheld in the time of HIV. Other practices will require modification, replacement and control, as suggested by Waliggo. Inculturation theologians need to be actively involved in these exercises and provide leadership.

There are many positive aspects of African cultures that need to be retained and emphasised in this time of epidemic. These include the sense of communal solidarity that plays an important role in prevention, care and support. Notions of purity and danger, teachings on appropriate sexual behaviour, male responsibility and protection of life are vital for mobilising African communities to provide effective responses to HIV. Internal critique, openness and capacity for transformation all imply that African cultures are not closed texts that are set to frustrate efforts to harness them in the struggle against the pandemic.

It is therefore crucial for non-governmental organizations, faith-based organizations and activists involved in the struggle against HIV and AIDS to avoid demonising African cultures in the face of the epidemic. There is need to appreciate that African cultures, like all human cultures, have positive values and practices that are vital to the overall response to the epidemic. Mishael C. Mutaki argues that traditional Tanzanian values regarding sexual purity are compatible with the Bible and must be promoted in the face of HIV.<sup>27</sup> Inculturation theologians in various African contexts need to interrogate their cultures and promote positive values and practices.

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<sup>27</sup>Mishael C. Mutaki, "HIV and AIDS in Tanzania: Toward Reinforcement of Integrated Christian Ethics in Combating the Pandemic", in James N. Amanze *et al*, eds., *Christian Ethics and HIV/AIDS in Africa*. Gaborone: Bay Publishing, 2007, 168.

They must also suggest the transformation and abandonment of problematic rituals and beliefs in the face of HIV and AIDS.

### **Conclusion**

African culture has been implicated in discourses on HIV. Unfortunately, most male African theologians operating within the paradigm of inculturation have not provided reflections on how the enterprise could be undertaken within the context of the epidemic. From the foregoing, it is clear that the HIV epidemic asks urgent questions of African theology. The inculturation trend in particular is challenged to justify its relevance as some aspects of African culture have been identified as fuelling the spread of HIV. On the other hand, African women's theologies have demonstrated a lot of creativity and passion in their engagement with the pandemic. In the following chapter, I examine the response of African women's theologies to HIV and AIDS.



## CHAPTER THREE

# African Women's Theologies and HIV

### Introduction

**T**his chapter focuses on African women's theologies and the pandemic, arguing that whilst male African theologians have promoted inculturation, women theologians have adopted a more critical attitude towards African cultures. African women theologians call for the transformation of African cultures in the time of the pandemic. This chapter outlines the context in which African women theologians began writing on the pandemic and suggests more themes for reflection, acknowledging that African women theologians are clearly leading in the area of theological reflections on HIV and AIDS.

### **Visible and Audible Daughters of Ethiopia: An Overview of African Women's Theologies**

Chapter one provides a more extensive overview of African women's theologies. For the purposes of this chapter, only a few key issues will be highlighted. Coming to the fore in the 1990s, African women's theologies have privileged African women's experiences. Whereas the African male voice had dominated the theological scene up to this point, women theologians now emerged to insist on the right of women to be seen and heard. Mercy Oduyoye played a major role in mobilising African women theologians to form the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians — the Circle — which has

provided a formal platform for established and emerging women theologians to express themselves,<sup>1</sup> although African women had provided valuable theological reflections prior to the emergence of the Circle.<sup>2</sup>

The early phases of African theology were exclusively masculine in outlook; women's concerns did not feature prominently. With the emergence of the Circle, more women theologians appeared and they applied the tool of gender analysis to highlight patriarchal oppression and suffocation of women. They placed emphasis on *her-story*, balancing the focus on men with women's experiences. Across the different geographical, linguistic and cultural zones, as well as spanning the various disciplines in theology and religious studies, Circle activists have emerged to decisively alter the face of African theology.<sup>3</sup>

From the outset, the Circle has not been afraid to "get its hands dirty" by raising and tackling real issues that affect women in Africa. Whereas male African theologians, partakers of the patriarchal dividend, have had the luxury of (sometimes) engaging in abstract theological thought, the setting in life of African women theologians precludes such a possibility. Despite their high levels of education and professional accomplishments, most African women theologians grapple with patriarchy and its death-dealing practices with worrying regularity. Patriarchy haunts them in the home, church, institutions

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<sup>1</sup>See for example, Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001.

<sup>2</sup>For a detailed review of meetings and themes, see Leny Lagerwerf, "African Women Doing Theology – A Survey," *Exchange* 19, 1, 1990, 1-69.

<sup>3</sup>Ogbu U. Kalu, "Daughters of Ethiopia: Constructing a Feminist Discourse in Ebony Strokes," in Isabel A. Phiri and Sarojini Nadar, eds., *African Women, Religion, and Health: Essays in Honor of Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduyoye*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006, 61.

and society at large. As a result, their writings are informed by their life experiences.<sup>4</sup>

Where male African theologians have generally been keen to defend African cultures, their female counterparts have been more critical. They argue that the Bible and African cultures promote patriarchy and the subjugation of women. Promoting cultural hermeneutics where African cultures are tapped for their life-giving values and negative traits are dropped, they call for a review of African cultures. According to Musimbi Kanyoro, cultural hermeneutics is informed by the view that culture must not be romanticised. According to her, “[I]t was necessary to come to terms with identifying in our cultures those things that were beautiful and wholesome and life-affirming and to denounce those which were denying us life and wholeness.”<sup>5</sup>

Whereas male African theologians have enjoyed the privilege of leading churches, theological institutions and other church-related institutions, African women theologians have operated “from the margins”. Patriarchy has bestowed power and status to male African theologians. African women theologians have had (and continue) to wage bitter struggles to be seen and heard. Departments of theology and religious studies and seminaries remain bastions of male authority. I have argued elsewhere, in relation to the academic study of religion, that “one could maintain that in many countries there was a transfer of power from European males to African males in departments of religious studies.”<sup>6</sup> Oduyoye, Elizabeth Amoah, Isabel Phiri and Musa W. Dube represent some of the leading Circle voices

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<sup>4</sup>See for example, Isabel Apawo Phiri and Sarojini Nadar, “What’s in a Name? Forging a Theoretical Framework for African Women’s Theologies,” *Journal of Constructive Theology* 12 (2), 2006, 5-24.

<sup>5</sup>Musimbi Kanyoro, *Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics: An African Perspective*. Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2002, 5.

<sup>6</sup>Ezra Chitando, “Sub-Saharan Africa,” in Gregory D. Alles, ed., *Religious Studies: A Global View*. New York: Routledge, 2008, 121.

to have emerged from departments of theology and religious studies in Africa.

Circle activists come from diverse disciplines in theology and religious studies. They are united by the need for the transformation of society to enable women and children (and men) to enjoy abundant life. Nyambura Njoroge is one of pioneering female African ethicists; Dube, Sarojini Nadar and Madipoane Masenya are biblical scholars, while Phiri and Fulata L. Moyo have a background in the academic study of religion. This multidisciplinary approach has enabled the Circle to have a broad perspective. There is no single overriding “Circle methodology”, apart from putting women’s issues first.

Without doubt, the Circle has emerged as the leading producer of theological reflections on HIV and AIDS, both in Africa and globally. It is regrettable that a book entitled *Reflecting Theologically on AIDS: A Global Challenge*<sup>7</sup> does not devote sufficient space to the achievements of the Circle in this exercise. Phiri and Nadar describe the Circle’s engagement with the pandemic in the following way:

Finally, between 2002 and 2007, the Circle declared HIV and AIDS to be a major priority of research and advocacy for change and empowerment. The Circle recognised that the gendered nature of HIV and AIDS, particularly in Africa, compels its members to reflect theologically on these issues, and to empower communities through conscientisation. Given that religion is often the vehicle for promoting stigma and discrimination, the Circle has prioritised its role in education-raising on these matters. Such education is born out of deep theological reflection on the context of HIV and AIDS. This theological reflection has also borne fruit in mainstreaming HIV and AIDS into the theological curriculum of institutions ...<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Robin Gill, ed., *Reflecting Theologically on AIDS: A Global Challenge*. London: SCM Press, 2007.

<sup>8</sup>Phiri and Nadar, “What’s in a Name?” 15.

If one needs to be aware of the contemporary developments in African theology, one has to be familiar with the writings of African women theologians. As I argued in chapter one, if African women's theologies were previously at the periphery of African theology, they now *define* African theology. When commentators moan that, "African theologians have become dormant", they are falling prey to the exclusivist definition of the discipline. African women theologians have demonstrated high levels of scholarship and social activism, particularly in relation to HIV and AIDS.

### **Aggrieved Hearts, Militant Pens: African Women Theologians and HIV**

Since the 1990s, there has been a low-key but intense debate between male and female African theologians over the status of African cultures. As noted above, African women's theologies exploded onto the scene in the 1990s, fundamentally transforming it. Asking African men to urgently remove their feet from the necks of African women, these women theologians have been forthright and clear in their pronouncements. The Circle has emerged as a highly organised, theologically articulate and practically effective group in its response to African women's issues, especially on HIV and AIDS.

African women theologians have drawn attention to patriarchy's systematic oppression of women in most parts of sub-Saharan Africa. Where the church has tried to substitute harmful cultural practices with Christianised versions, there has been a movement from one patriarchy to another. Fulata L. Moyo argues that although some denominations in Malawi have transformed the traditional *chinamwali* into the Christian rite *chilangizo*, the patriarchal underpinnings have remained intact. She charges:

Yet *chilangizo* like *chinamwali* teach(es) women to serve men's sexual needs as if women have no sexual identity or needs of their own. In addition, church leaders who encourage women's participation in *chilangizo* commonly offer Christian pre-marital and marital counselling that sustain these same messages. In both

contexts, the church inadvertently reinforces women's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS.<sup>9</sup>

Moyo's critique of an inculturated rite highlights the tension between African male and women theologians in the era of HIV. Whereas male theologians and church leaders would have been satisfied that *chilangizo* "preserves culture", African women theologians like Moyo probe the rite further to expose its patriarchal biases. They conclude that both the traditional and Christianised rite increase women's vulnerability to HIV. It is therefore crucial for African theologians to be on the look out for the coalescence of traditional and Christian patriarchies.<sup>10</sup>

In their theological reflections on HIV and AIDS, African women theologians have problematised culture and gender. In line with our observation in chapter two that culture is not ideologically neutral, African women theologians have highlighted the extent to which culture has been used to keep women in bondage. Unfortunately, this has increased women's vulnerability to HIV. Musa W. Dube calls upon theologians and others to be actively involved in transforming culture and gender. She extends the following invitation:

Any theologian, lecturer, leader or worker who lives in the human-rights era – who believes in democracy, and wants to contribute positively to the fight against HIV/AIDS, which is turning our dark-peopled continent into a red fire-inflamed continent of death – must not only seek to understand fully how gender is socially and culturally constructed, how it disempowers half of humanity, how it fuels the spread of HIV/AIDS, but also to change gender

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<sup>9</sup>Fulata L. Moyo, "Sex, Gender, Power and HIV/AIDS in Malawi: Threats and Challenges to Women Being Church," in Isabel A. Phiri and Sarojini Nadar, eds., *On Being Church: African Women's Voices and Visions*. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2005, 131.

<sup>10</sup>See for example Anna Chitando and Ezra Chitando, "Weaving Sisterhood: Women African Theologians and Creative Writers," *Exchange* 34, 1, 2005, 22-38.

construction so that it empowers men *and* women. It is up to the society to be instrumental in change and transformation. The present set-up benefits no one – men or women.<sup>11</sup>

African women theologians have also underlined the need to transform cultural beliefs that continue to disempower women. Such beliefs increase women's vulnerability to HIV. Throughout their writings, members of the Circle have bemoaned women's lack of economic power as a major factor behind the epidemic's disproportionate impact on women. Where most male African theologians have celebrated African cultures, African women theologians have identified culture as a sponsor of women's subjugation. Writing on the socio-economic and cultural factors that have left women in Zimbabwe struggling for survival, Sophie Chirongoma has catalogued the challenges. She writes:

Pervasive gender inequality, poverty and the violation of women's rights is propelling the spread of HIV and AIDS among women in Zimbabwe. Traditional practices and violence affect their ability to enjoy a healthy, safe and stress-free existence. The adverse and multi-faceted impact of these forces, combined with a social system of patriarchy continues to deny women their rights under customary law.<sup>12</sup>

The approach towards the HIV epidemic that has been adopted by the Circle is urgent and militant. African women theologians have been outraged by the church's failure to identify with vulnerable

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<sup>11</sup>Musa W. Dube, "Culture, Gender and HIV/AIDS: Understanding and Acting on the Issues," in Musa W. Dube, ed., *HIV/AIDS and the Curriculum: Methods of Integrating HIV/AIDS in Theological Programmes*. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2003, 85.

<sup>12</sup>Sophie Chirongoma, "Women's and Children's Rights in the Time of HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe: An Analysis of Gender Inequalities and its Impact on People's Health," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 126, 2006, 49.

women in the era of HIV. They have seen church leaders making impressive pronouncements on solidarity with women and getting press coverage; however, these pronouncements have not been followed by concrete actions. Consequently, the majority of African women continue to wallow in poverty and gender oppression. The HIV epidemic thrives on such fertile ground, hence the lament of the Circle.

The militancy of the Circle is understandable, given the general neglect of HIV and AIDS in African theology. It would appear that male African theologians have categorized the epidemic as beyond the scope of the discipline. Leading male African theologians like John S. Mbiti and others have not provided theological reflections on the HIV epidemic. It has been left to the Circle to provide theological leadership on this theme.<sup>13</sup>

**Prophesying to Deadly Cultures in Church and African Traditions: The HIV and AIDS Ministry of Musa W. Dube**

Perhaps the publications and activities of Musa W. Dube of Botswana are best placed to illustrate the leadership of African women theologians in the area of HIV and AIDS. Serving as a theology consultant on HIV and AIDS in EHAIA, between 2002 and 2004, Dube has emerged as a leading authority on theology and HIV in Africa. She has persuaded, cajoled and rebuked church leaders and theologians in her quest to ensure that African churches offered effective responses to the HIV epidemic.<sup>14</sup> In chapter four I discuss Dube's contribution to African liberation theology in the era of HIV and AIDS.

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<sup>13</sup>See for example Teresia M. Hinga *et al.*, eds., *Women, Religion and HIV/AIDS in Africa: Responding to Ethical and Theological Challenges*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2008.

<sup>14</sup>See for example, Musa W. Dube, *The HIV & AIDS Bible: Selected Essays*. Scranton: Scranton University Press, 2008.

*Upholding Abundant Life*

Dube's work and writings on theology and the HIV epidemic show her to be a theologian of life. Writing in an environment saturated with disease, stigma and death, Dube stubbornly affirms life. Where Afro-pessimists are willing to write off the continent, Dube seeks to energise the continent to behold "a new heaven and a new earth" (Revelation 21:1). While acknowledging the devastation brought by the epidemic, Dube refuses to grant death the last word. She proclaims life amidst despair and death. In a World Council of Churches module for Theological Education by Extension (TEE), Dube invites her readers to have a new perspective. She writes:

My dear learner, come closer to me. *Stand with me*. Please put on your binoculars. Watch and pray with me. Let us watch this heavenly vision with John at Patmos, right here where we have been exiled and where we long for home — a new heaven and a new earth. I believe that what we shall see with John at Patmos is the best capture of what this module is about — namely, our search for new stories that counteract the HIV and AIDS horror story in our lives through weaving new and warm stories of hope, compassion, healings joy, life and justice-loving world.<sup>15</sup>

Dube is unrelenting in her call to the church in Africa to promote justice. For her, the church has the mandate to be compassionate in the era of HIV and AIDS. In her manifesto, "Preaching to the Converted: Unsettling the Christian Church", Dube reminds the church of its obligation to provide love, care and support to people living with HIV and AIDS. She calls upon the church to overcome stigma and discrimination, and to work towards justice. In her

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<sup>15</sup>Musa W. Dube, *Reading the New Testament in HIV and AIDS Contexts*. Module 4. Theology in the HIV & AIDS Era Series. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2007, 167.

writings Dube challenges the church to uphold a theology of compassion.<sup>16</sup>

Dube is convinced that deadly cultures in church and African traditions have sponsored the spread of HIV in Africa, with dire consequences for women and children. Using her expertise as a biblical scholar, she mines the biblical text for the meaning of prophecy and the role of a prophet. For Dube, there is an urgent need for prophetic action in the era of HIV. Prophets insisted on justice, preached hope and assumed the role of teachers. In the face of HIV in Africa, there is need for prophetic action that exposes death-dealing practices in the church and African cultures. A prophetic church that follows the example of eighth-century Israelite prophets and Jesus denounces injustice and promotes life, Dube contends.<sup>17</sup>

### *Taking Children Seriously*

The era of HIV and AIDS demands that African theology accords more space to children. The epidemic has given rise to millions of orphans, most of whom face bleak futures. Dube has been alert to the impact of the epidemic on children in Africa and espouses an activist-oriented theology of children's rights in the era of HIV and AIDS.<sup>18</sup> This entails challenging patriarchal approaches in African cultures that tend to marginalize children.

### *Reading the Bible Afresh*

Dube's conviction is that the Bible should be read with HIV and AIDS lenses. This task becomes particularly urgent in the wake of the subordination of women. Gender readings of the Bible in the era

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<sup>16</sup>Musa W. Dube, "Preaching to the Converted: Unsettling the Christian Church," *Ministerial Formation* 93, 2001, 38-50.

<sup>17</sup>Musa W. Dube, "The Prophetic Method in the New Testament," in Musa W. Dube, ed., *HIV/AIDS and the Curriculum*, 44.

<sup>18</sup>Musa W. Dube, "Fighting with God: Children and HIV/AIDS in Botswana," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 114, 2002, 33.

of HIV and AIDS empower African women<sup>19</sup> and enable them to sing new songs of freedom, unlike the prevailing situation where they were condemned to leading miserable lives. African women who read the Bible afresh in the era of HIV are able to name oppressive religious and cultural ideologies, and to imagine a new world.

*Resisting Colonial and Colonising Discourses*

However, Dube is too conscious of the impact of colonialism and missionary ideologies on African consciousness to condemn African cultures totally. In line with the inculturation school, she finds positive values in African cultures that can be appropriated in the struggle against the HIV epidemic. Dube regards the practice of divination as a valuable opportunity to reconstruct African communities in the wake of HIV and AIDS. Divination enables communities to come together, identify the problems threatening their well being, and come up with solutions. Dube therefore encourages African communities to engage in introspection and commit themselves to the task of mitigating the effects of, and eventually overcoming, HIV and AIDS.

Dube has consistently reminded HIV and AIDS activists in Africa to refrain from writing off African cultures. While accepting that there are many African cultural practices that require transformation, she recognizes that the same cultures have resources that could be utilized in the struggle against the pandemic. Always conscious of the power of European culture to dominate,<sup>20</sup> Dube invites African theologians to mine their own traditions, as well as to reconstruct existing practices, in generating effective responses to the epidemic.

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<sup>19</sup>Musa W. Dube, ed., *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible*. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2001.

<sup>20</sup>Musa W. Dube, *Reading the New Testament in HIV and AIDS Contexts*, 161.

### **Teaching Life: Dube and the Transformation of African Theological Education in the Era of HIV**

Reading the signs of the times, Dube embarked on a crusade to ensure that theological education in Africa was attuned to the reality of the HIV epidemic. She had to be creative as she was one of the pioneers in this field. Her conviction has been that African theological institutions are strategically placed to provide leadership in the era of HIV and AIDS and have the capacity to galvanise communities to stem the tide.

The underlying philosophy in Dube's strategy is that African theological institutions have been caught up in intellectual poverty and theological mediocrity.<sup>21</sup> They have not been able to live up to expectations in the era of HIV and AIDS. Although African theology prides itself as a contextual theology, its inability to tackle the HIV epidemic signals that this is more a claim than a fact. As a result, Dube has sought to mobilise theological institutions in Africa to become relevant through addressing the pandemic.

Dube employed three dominant strategies to persuade African theologians to respond to HIV and AIDS. First, she organised Training of Trainers workshops across most parts of sub-Saharan Africa. Working with EHAIA regional coordinators, she held regional and national workshops to equip theological educators and church leaders to respond to HIV and AIDS. These workshops provided basic information on the HIV epidemic, as well as reflections from diverse disciplines. Dube's overriding conviction has been that every unit of theology and religious study can make a meaningful contribution to the struggle against HIV and AIDS.<sup>22</sup> The workshops

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<sup>21</sup>Musa W. Dube, "Theological Education, HIV/AIDS and other Challenges in the New Millennium," in J. Galgalo and G. Le Marquand, eds., *Theological Education in Contemporary Africa*. Eldoret: Zapf, 2004, 105-130.

<sup>22</sup>Musa W. Dube, "Introduction: Towards Multi-sectoral Teaching in a Time of HIV/AIDS," in Musa W. Dube, ed., *HIV/AIDS and the Curriculum*, xi.

encouraged theological educators to examine how their own disciplines could be utilised in response to the pandemic.

The second strategy employed by Dube was to spearhead research and publication on theology and the HIV pandemic in Africa. Lack of interlocutors has stifled theological reflections on HIV and AIDS on the continent. The availability of some publications on the theme has given rise to the misleading assumption that the market is now awash with material on the theme. In fact, reflections on the HIV epidemic in African theology are yet to appear consistently. Dube has played a major role in encouraging theologians to publish on HIV and AIDS.

Cognisant of the need to address popular theology, Dube edited the volume, *Africa Praying: A Handbook on HIV/AIDS-Sensitive Sermon Guidelines and Liturgy*.<sup>23</sup> The handbook has been widely used as it guides church leaders in effective communication on HIV and AIDS. Dube has also published widely on various aspects of the pandemic. Her essays confirm her creativity and leadership in the areas of biblical studies, missiology, theology, gender and the HIV epidemic.<sup>24</sup>

The third strategy that Dube has used to mobilise church leaders and theologians in Africa is presentations at major conferences and seminars. A fiery and articulate public speaker, she is to be credited for challenging church leaders to move from denial to engagement. She excoriated them for their passivity, docility and theological rigidity. She bemoaned their shallowness, and called for their conversion to the struggle against the epidemic. Dube has certainly unsettled many African theologians, but her sense of mission has propelled her to defy the odds.

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<sup>23</sup> Musa W. Dube, ed., *Africa Praying: A Handbook on HIV/AIDS Sensitive Sermon Guidelines and Liturgy*. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2003.

<sup>24</sup> Musa W. Dube, *The HIV & AIDS Bible. Selected Essays*. Scranton: Scranton University Press, 2008.

Overall, Dube's HIV and AIDS ministry provides a useful example of interventions by African women theologians. Her status as a scholar-activist is consistent with the thrust of the Circle. Whereas some regard activism as diluting scholarship, Dube (and the Circle) highlights the need to tie theological reflection to the existential needs of African communities. Modipoane Masenya, a South African woman biblical scholar and theologian, affirms this stance. She avers:

The advent of the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and the consequent Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) — hereinafter referred to as HIV/AIDS — cannot leave any concerned Bible interpreter in the Southern African region unchanged. The change must be one in favour of active involvement in the lives of suffering peoples, rather than taking a detached stance. This change must be geared at saving and preserving life rather than in joining hands with the forces of death, to consign many African peoples to death. AIDS has come to challenge those of us who have taken comfort and refuge in the study of the biblical past, even at the expense of addressing the urgent contextual concerns of Bible readers, to get out of our comfort zones in order to work.<sup>25</sup>

I have cited Masenya at length because she captures the activist concerns of the Circle very well. Dube's HIV and AIDS work reflects this orientation. While calling for excellent scholarship and deep reflection, she maintains that the central focus must be on defeating HIV.<sup>26</sup> Lofty and abstract theological formulations that do not transform the lives of women, children and men living under the

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<sup>25</sup>Madipoane Masenya (ngwana Mphahlele), "HIV/AIDS and African Biblical Hermeneutics: Focus on Southern African Women," *Chakana: Intercultural Forum of Theology and Philosophy* 3, 5, 2005, 25.

<sup>26</sup>For a review of Dube's HIV and AIDS work, see for example, Ezra Chitando and Rosinah Gabaitse, "Other Ways of Being a Diviner-Healer: Musa W. Dube and the African Church's Response to HIV and AIDS," *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 34, 2008, 29-54.

shadow of HIV in Africa are severely limited, she argues; if African theologians want to be relevant in the era of HIV, they need to climb out of their ivory towers and engage with the threats to life.

### **Singing Down the Walls of Patriarchy: African Women Theologians and Harmful Cultural Practices**

Tambudzai casts furtive glances around the room. To her right are her fathers. Their grey heads and composure demand respect. To her left are her mothers, silent with inscrutable faces. "Yes, I will go," she declares in her tender but firm voice. Her fathers clap their hands respectfully, while her mothers break into controlled ululating. As Tambudzai rises to go to her new people, her old people do not know whether to celebrate or to cry: for now, all they can do is to salute her for her heroic action.<sup>27</sup>

I have dramatised the story of Tambudzai. It is a story that is replicated many times in Zimbabwe. It is the story of teenage girls who are forced into marriage as their extended family's payment to an avenging spirit (*ngozi*). Traditional Shona beliefs surrounding murder dictate that in most cases the spirit of the deceased will demand a teenage girl from the extended family of the murderer. She will be expected to contribute to the growth of the deceased's lineage by giving birth to many children. Tradition teaches that once the girl has been selected, she has to comply. Suffering, misfortune or early death will haunt her and her family if she refuses to comply.<sup>28</sup>

The forced marriage of teenage girls for traditional religious-cultural reasons exposes them to HIV. In most cases, no HIV tests

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<sup>27</sup>For a gripping account of the indigenous beliefs and practices associated with placating an avenging spirit, see for example Charles Mungoshi, "Sacrifice," in Charles Mungoshi, *Walking Still*. Harare: Baobab Books, 1997.

<sup>28</sup>See for example Michael F.C. Bourdillon, *Shona Peoples: An Ethnography of the Contemporary Shona, with Special Reference to their Religion*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Gweru: Mambo Press, 1987.

are undertaken to at least ensure that the man is not living with HIV at the time of ritual marriage (I am not hereby endorsing the practice, I am just suggesting a lesser evil). The rights of the teenage girls are trampled upon in the name of protecting the lineage and saving it from extinction. After men have killed each other (which is equally regrettable), it is the young girl who has to pay the price! The system of *Trokosi* in South-eastern Ghana, where girls as young as seven are given by their families to a shrine in order to atone for a family transgression, exposes children in a similar way. African women theologians and children's rights activists have rightly protested against this form of abuse.<sup>29</sup>

The story of Tambudzai demonstrates the extent to which patriarchy is willing to go to sacrifice girl-children and women. The conspiracy by society forces young girls to sacrifice their health and well being in the name of upholding culture and tradition. Mothers are forced to comply with patriarchal dictates that increase their children's vulnerability to HIV. Alongside condemning the practice of forcing young girls to marry for religio-cultural reasons, African women theologians have identified a number of other cultural beliefs and practices that increase women's vulnerability to HIV.

Circle publications are replete with African cultural practices that have a bearing on the HIV epidemic. These include female circumcision or female genital mutilation, widow inheritance, widow "cleansing" and polygamy. Widow "cleansing" is particularly singled out as it entails having a man "purifying" the widow through sex. Circle writers from different African contexts have provided detailed descriptions of how some cultural practices increase women's vulnerability to HIV.

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<sup>29</sup>See for example, Dorothy B. E. A. Akoto, "Women and Health in Ghana and the *Trokosi* Practice: An Issue of Women's and Children's Rights in 2 Kings 4: 1-7," in Isabel A. Phiri and Sarojini Nadar, eds., *African Women, Religion and Health: Essays in Honor of Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduyoye*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006, 96-110.

In their engagement with African cultural realities in the era of HIV, African women theologians have drawn attention to the gendered nature of the bias against women. They have catalogued how African women are rendered powerless due to indigenous and missionary religious ideologies. Brigalia Bam writes:

Worse still, are the many irrational cultural and theological taboos and stigmas attached to women in the church and to women ministers in particular. The Bible continues to be used and abused in order to exclude and oppress women. Where the Bible is incorrectly or improperly used, culture is brought in to ensure that women remain slaves of slaves.<sup>30</sup>

Circle activists like Oduyoye, Kanyoro, Njoroge, Phiri, Dube, Moyo and others have called for a fundamental transformation of African cultures in the era of HIV. It is no longer possible to invoke culture and tradition in order to continue oppressing women, they contend. Cultural practices that compromise women's health and well being in the wake of HIV should be interrogated and discarded or modified, they insist.

Where African women have been sacrificed to placate patriarchal desires, Circle writers have demanded justice. They have not hesitated to expose and name forces of death that have been baptised and sponsored in the name of "preserving African identity". Where some male African theologians contend that the African sense of community protects everyone, African woman theologians highlight gender oppression and patriarchal selfishness. Where most male African theologians valorise African culture, African women theologians employ the hermeneutics of suspicion to draw attention to the vulnerability of women.

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<sup>30</sup>Brigalia Bam, "Women and the Church in (South) Africa: Women are the Church in South Africa," in Isabel A. Phiri and Sarojini Nadar, eds., *On Being Church: African Women's Voices and Visions*, 13.

### **“Your Daughters Shall Prophesy”:<sup>31</sup> African Women Theologians and HIV**

Writing on theology/religious studies and HIV in Africa without interacting in some way with publications by African women theologians is strange.<sup>32</sup> This is because African women theologians have been consistent and systematic in their focus on the subject. The foregoing sections have drawn attention to the Circle’s engagement with HIV. Scholars researching on religion and HIV in Africa need to interact with the reflections of the Circle on this theme. To refuse to do so on grounds that the material is “too theological” or “full of lament” is to take the easy (non-academic) way out.

How has the Circle been able to gain so much ground? The Circle’s focus on HIV and AIDS is a result of planning and the desire to transform the lives of most African women. In 2002, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, the Circle held its third pan-African meeting. The theme of the meeting was, “Sex, Stigma and HIV & AIDS: African Women Challenging Religion, Culture and Social Practices.” The Circle drew up a four-year strategic plan (2002 — 2006) where the theme of HIV and AIDS occupied centre stage. Similarly the Circle’s Pan African Conference held at Yaounde, Cameroon, in September 2007 focused on HIV and AIDS. The theme was, “The Girl-Child, African Women, Religion and HIV and AIDS: Gender Perspectives.”

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<sup>31</sup>I am indebted to Puleng LenkaBula for her inspired reading of Joel 3:28 in a paper presented at the Southern African Missiological Society Congress, 19-22 January 2007, at the University of Pretoria, Pretoria South Africa. See also, Puleng LenkaBula, “A Journey on the Path of an African Feminist Theologian and Pioneer, Mercy Amba Oduyoye: Continuing the Pursuit for Justice in the Church and Society,” *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 34, 2008, 1-27, especially 22-24.

<sup>32</sup>Contributions to the *Journal of Religion in Africa* 37, 1, 2007, “AIDS and Religious Practice in East Africa” do not cite any publications by African women theologians.

The Circle has prioritised research and publication on HIV and AIDS, as well as transforming the curricula of theology and religious studies to reflect the reality of the epidemic. Between 2003 and 2006, the Circle had published five edited books on theology and HIV and AIDS. Isabel A. Phiri, Beverley Haddad and Modipoane Masenya edited a volume entitled, *African Women, HIV and AIDS and Faith Communities*<sup>33</sup> which appeared in 2003. It examines the role of faith communities in transforming the lives of African women in the era of the epidemic. In 2004, the volume edited by Dube, *Grant Me Justice: Gender Readings of the Bible*,<sup>34</sup> appeared. The chapters provide valuable insights into African womanist biblical interpretation in the wake of HIV and AIDS.

*People of Faith and the Challenge of HIV/AIDS*, edited by Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Elizabeth Amoah, was published in 2004.<sup>35</sup> Elizabeth Amoah, Dorcas Akintunde and Dorothy Akoto edited the book *Cultural Practices and HIV/AIDS: African Women's Voices*.<sup>36</sup> It also appeared in 2004. *African Women, Religion and Health: Essays in Honor of Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduyoye*, edited by Phiri and Nadar, was published in 2006.<sup>37</sup> Teresia Hinga *et al* edited the volume *Women, Religion and HIV/AIDS in Africa:*

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<sup>33</sup>Isabel A. Phiri, Beverley Haddad and Modipoane Masenya, eds., *African Women, HIV/AIDS and Faith Communities*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 2003.

<sup>34</sup>Musa W. Dube and Musimbi Kanyoro, eds., *Grant Me Justice: HIV/AIDS & Gender Readings of the Bible*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2004.

<sup>35</sup>Mercy A. Oduyoye and Elizabeth Amoah, ed., *People of Faith and the Challenge of HIV/AIDS*. Ibadan: Helicon Press, 2004.

<sup>36</sup>Elizabeth Amoah, Dorcas Akintunde and Dorothy Akoto, eds., *Cultural Practices and HIV/AIDS: African Women's Voices*. Accra: SWL Press, 2005.

<sup>37</sup>Isabel A. Phiri and Sarojini Nadar, eds., *African Women, Religion and Health: Essays in Honor of Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduyoye*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006.

*Responding to Ethical and Theological Challenges*<sup>38</sup> that appeared in 2008. These books reaffirm the Circle's commitment to research, publication and curriculum transformation in the era of HIV and AIDS. Circle chapters in the Francophone and Lusophone regions have also published on the theme of theology and the HIV pandemic.

Circle publications on the HIV epidemic are not abstruse theological reflections. Rather, they speak to the actual realities of women, children and men. They constitute a passionate plea to the church and society to deal justly with women in the face of a devastating epidemic. Utilising the story-telling method, case studies, biblical interpretation and other devices, African women theologians prophetically speak truth to power. They denounce a Barabbanian spirit that entices African communities to sometimes choose death ahead of life.<sup>39</sup>

African women theologians have been eloquent and articulate in expressing women's vulnerability to HIV. Where some have been content to document and expose practices that worsen the situation, African women theologians have been willing to engineer social transformation. Their work demonstrates the value of socially engaged scholarship, as I have argued above.

### **African Women's Theology is African Theology:<sup>40</sup> An Appreciation in the Era of HIV**

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<sup>38</sup>Teresia M. Hinga, *et al.*, eds., *Women, Religion and HIV/AIDS in Africa: Responding to Ethical and Theological Challenges*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 2008.

<sup>39</sup>I am indebted to Kä Mana for his interpretation of Mark 15:15 in the era of HIV and AIDS in a paper presented at the Circle Pan African Conference, September 2007 in Yaounde, Cameroon.

<sup>40</sup>This evokes the sub-title of Brigalia Bam's article, "Women and the Church in (South) Africa: Women are the Church in (South) Africa," in Isabel A. Phiri and Sarojini Nadar, eds, *On Being Church: African Women's Voices and Visions*, 8.

Any serious student of African theology who seeks to establish its response to HIV will have to interact with the work of the Circle. If the general trend has been to tuck away African women's theologies as a footnote under the "real" or "bigger" African theology,<sup>41</sup> the reality on the ground now demands acknowledgement that African women's theologies are the key aspect of African theology. In the specific case of HIV and AIDS, African women's theologies now define and set the pace for African theology.

The academic and activist leadership of the Circle in the response to the HIV epidemic has rescued African theology. Most of the leading male African theologians have not published on the HIV epidemic, as I have noted. It remains difficult to establish why this has been the case. To begin with, all theologians are free to select particular themes for reflection. The theme of HIV and AIDS therefore might simply not have appealed to most male African theologians. However, in chapter one, we noted that African theology places emphasis on contextual relevance. The HIV epidemic is a contemporary African reality. The question therefore still remains: why have most male African theologians not offered in-depth reflections on the HIV pandemic, as has been the case with African women theologians?

It is important to appreciate the generational shift that has occurred in African theology. The third phase of African theology, spanning the period 1990 to the present, has been characterised by a decrease in publication by the second-generation African theologians. The observable trend has been for some of them to move from university settings into church leadership or administration in ecumenical bodies. It would therefore be unfair to expect them to publish specifically on HIV and AIDS when they have generally reached a position to say that they have "fought the good fight, finished the race and kept the faith" (II Timothy 4:7). Perhaps now

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<sup>41</sup>Anna Chitando and Ezra Chitando, "Weaving Sisterhood: Women African Theologians and Creative Writers," *Exchange* 34, 1, 2005, 22-38.

the task falls to “younger” theologians or those who are still actively involved in teaching, research and activism.

African women theologians have stepped up to promote theological reflections on the HIV pandemic. In this section, I seek to identify some of the factors that have facilitated the Circle’s growing visibility and impact in the field of HIV and AIDS. This is a preliminary analysis: other authors, including the Circle, are likely to come up with additional factors.

Firstly, the Circle has evolved into a highly visible organization at the heart of a movement. The idea of having coordinators for the linguistic regions (Francophone, Anglophone and Lusophone) facilitates collaboration. Circle General Coordinators, Musimbi Kanyoro (1996 – 2002), Isabel Phiri (2002 – 2007) and Fulata L. Moyo (2007-) have been passionately committed to the emancipation of African women. The fact that the Circle is an organised entity, with members and coordinators, enables it to address specific issues like HIV and AIDS more effectively.

Secondly, Circle planning and communication facilitates focus on identified issues. A good example is how the 2002 Circle pan-African meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, clearly outlined the Circle engagement with HIV and AIDS. Having a clear vision about the Circle’s focus on research, publication and curriculum transformation in the wake of HIV and AIDS has enabled the group to remain focused. The *Circle Newsletter* plays a major role in disseminating the latest developments in the field. It also avails information on new publications, research and funding opportunities and activities by members and chapters.

Thirdly, the Circle has taken up the challenge of mentoring seriously. Many of the leading African women theologians have actively supported the academic careers of emerging colleagues. They have provided opportunities to other women theologians to attend conferences, publish journal articles and chapters in books. Circle publications on HIV and AIDS have given voice to some emerging African women theologians. This “sister-to-sister” solidarity has

enabled the Circle to emerge as the leading producer of African theology.

Fourthly, African women theologians have networked with organizations that share similar concerns and interests. The Circle's collaboration with the Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiative in Africa (EHAIA) and the World Council of Churches (WCC) is a good case in point. Such networks have enabled the Circle to be at the heart of moves to make the churches "HIV competent".<sup>42</sup> The partnership between the Circle and Yale Divinity School also enhanced the Circle's capacity to research and publish on HIV and AIDS. A number of African women theologians were funded as Yale research fellows, through the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research (CIRA).<sup>43</sup> This initiative enabled some African women theologians to get access to the latest developments in the field of HIV and AIDS, and to publish on the theme.

The creativity, commitment and competence that the Circle has shown in its engagement with the HIV epidemic must be applauded. This has catapulted African women's theologies from the margins to the centre of the field. Their reflections on liberating readings of the Bible, ethics, AIRs and other fields in the era of HIV have provided valuable insights. The Circle has emerged as the key player in efforts to respond to the pandemic in Africa.

### **Enhancing the Circle's Engagement with HIV: Some Reflections by an Outsider**

One of the most important aspects of the work of the Circle is that it invites dialogue and critique. Circle authors have done well to avoid special pleading. They might have employed a strategy whereby they could claim, "we are women theologians, emerging against

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<sup>42</sup>The Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiative in Africa (EHAIA)'s vision is to ensure that churches become "HIV and AIDS Competent."

<sup>43</sup>See for example, Margaret A. Farley, "The Yale Divinity School Initiative on AIDS," in Robin Gill, ed., *Reflecting Theologically on AIDS: A Global Challenge*. London: SCM Press, 2007, 139-151.

formidable odds; please be sensitive and kind in your criticism.” Male theologians and activists who do not interact with Circle under the guise of “non-interference” are perpetuating the condescending attitude towards African women’s theologies. Circle authors possess more than adequate intellectual resources to defend their theological enterprise.

Peer evaluation has been an integral part of the Circle’s activities. Dube has undertaken a comprehensive review of the Circle’s engagement with the HIV epidemic. She observes that the Circle has become the leading body in the production of theological reflections on HIV and AIDS. Circle members have played major roles in the integration of HIV and AIDS in theological programmes, she contends. However, she identifies a number of issues that require attention. These include the need for methodological rigour in fieldwork, avoiding generalizations, paying attention to positive terminology, avoiding negative and colonizing images of African indigenous religions, and broadening the scope to include reflections on HIV and AIDS from other disciplines.<sup>44</sup>

Alongside the issues raised by Dube, I would like to make some observations regarding the Circle’s engagement with the HIV pandemic. First, the available scholarly reflections are more effective within academic contexts, that is, universities and theological institutions. The Circle might wish to consider producing HIV and AIDS materials that reach women and girls within churches. This is not to endorse the verdict that the Circle is elitist;<sup>45</sup> it is to request that the Circle diversify. The popularity of Dube’s *Africa Praying* bears witness to the need for publications that address non-professional theologians in the era of HIV and AIDS. The Circle

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<sup>44</sup>Musa W. Dube, ‘In the Circle of Life: African Women Theologians’ Engagement with HIV and AIDS,’ EHAIA Consultancy Report submitted to the Harare Theology Consultant Office, 2006.

<sup>45</sup>Carrie Pemberton, *African Women Theologians in Dialogue with the West*. Leiden: Brill, 2003.

can provide theological reflections on gender-based violence, prevention, treatment literacy and other themes.

Second, the Circle needs to build on its efforts to converse with African male theologians. While it remains true that many male African theologians are trapped in patriarchal comfort zones, HIV calls for urgent dialogue. The cooperation of men will enhance gender justice. Theologies of African women need to grant some space to the liberation of masculinities. Collaboration with men in the project of creating a "new heaven and a new earth" might yield favourable results.

Third, HIV challenges the Circle to invest heavily in political literacy. Although some Circle activists like Oduyoye and Dube have addressed socio-economic and political issues, the bulk of Circle literature focuses on culture. While this is valuable, the struggle against HIV calls for a critical analysis of politics at the local, national and international levels. Leadership makes a difference in the response to HIV. It is therefore crucial for Circle authors to address political issues in their reflections on HIV.

Fourth, there is ample space for diversity as the Circle analyses the impact of the HIV on African women. As matters currently stand, most of the contributions critique African culture and patriarchy in churches, and adopt a re-reading of the Bible. These approaches have been helpful in putting HIV firmly on the African theological agenda. There is now room for experimentation with other approaches. Circle members with backgrounds in African philosophy could apply African feminist ethics to the HIV epidemic. African women theologians trained in religious studies could also examine how the teachings of the different religions could be appropriated in the struggle against HIV. New Circle publications must provide a sense of freshness. However, there remains much to be gained in repetition as it suggests that issues raised earlier would not have been dealt with (adequately).

Fifth, and critically, the first phase of the Circle's engagement could largely be characterised as the deconstruction phase. As I have argued throughout, African women theologians have been

instrumental in making HIV and AIDS a major theme in African theology. The overall thrust has been to identify religio-cultural beliefs and practices that increase women's vulnerability to HIV. The next phase of the Circle's engagement with HIV might shift towards reconstruction. How do we, as women and men of Africa, rehabilitate our cultures and rebuild our communities against the background of the devastation caused by HIV and AIDS? What are some of positive cultural beliefs and practices that we can utilise in the quest to recover from the effects of the epidemic?

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has summarised the views of African women theologians concerning the need to transform African cultures in the era of HIV. I have argued that when one looks for the African theological response to HIV, one must necessarily (and almost exclusively) focus on the work of the Circle. However, I have also argued that there is ample and promising space for dialogue between women and men engaged in African theology. The congruence between the thoughts of Dube and Waliggo regarding the identification of positive cultural beliefs and practices illustrates this point. The following chapter discusses the challenge of HIV to black and African liberation theologies.

## CHAPTER FOUR

# **Walking with the Walking Wounded: Black and African Liberation Theologies in the HIV Era**

### **Introduction**

**T**he previous chapter focused on African women's theologies and HIV. This chapter shifts attention to black and African liberation theologies. How is HIV challenging them to expand and deepen their scope? Why do black and African liberation theologians appear hesitant to reflect on the pandemic?

### **Black Theology: Upholding the Humanity of Blacks**

In its heyday, South African black theology was militant, robust and articulate. It asserted its presence and was highly visible. Addressing itself primarily to the struggle of black people against apartheid in South Africa, it was unambiguous in its insistence that blacks were full human beings, created in the image of God. Drawing inspiration from the suffering of black people and invigorated by the vision of freedom, black theology was vibrant from the 1970s to the early 1980s.

Chapter one described the major issues that have characterised black theology. Black theology emerges out of the context of the denial of the humanity of black people. It is informed by the memory and experience of the subjugation, enslavement and humiliation of

blacks in their encounters with, especially, whites, and other races. Desmond M. Tutu, one of the leading exponents of black theology, explains its key concerns:

Black Theology arises in a context of Black suffering at the hands of rampant White racism. And consequently Black Theology is much concerned to make sense theologically of the Black Experience whose main ingredient is Black suffering, in the light of God's revelation of Himself in the Man, Jesus Christ. It is concerned with the significance of Black Existence, with liberation, with the meaning of reconciliation, with humanization, with forgiveness. It is much more aggressive and abrasive in its assertions, because of a burning and evangelistic zeal, as it must convert the Black man out of the stupor of his subservience and obsequiousness, to the acceptance of the thrilling and demanding responsibility of full personhood, to make him reach out to the glorious liberty of the sons of God.<sup>1</sup>

Although Tutu uses masculine language (as was the trend during the time), he makes it clear that the lived experience of black people constitutes the "raw material" for black theology. The starting point has always been the existential reality facing black people. Black theology addresses itself to the humiliation of blacks, their poverty and hopelessness. It endeavours to lift black people from being "the wretched of the earth"<sup>2</sup> to their rightful status as full human beings. Black theology wages war against all forces that prevent black people from enjoying their humanity in full.

The building blocks used in constructing black theology include the daily struggle of the black community. It is motivated by the desire to liberate black people wherever they endure social injustice. Black theology makes a preferential option for poor blacks, whose

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<sup>1</sup>Desmond M. Tutu, *Hope and Suffering: Sermons and Speeches*. Johannesburg: Skotaville, 1983, 58-59.

<sup>2</sup>Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Groove Press, 1968.

lives are dominated by suffering and early death. It is the concrete problems facing the black community that inspire black theology. According to its African-American proponent, James Cone:

There is only one principle which guides the thinking and action of black theology: an unqualified commitment to the black community as that community seeks to define its existence in light of God's liberating work in the world.<sup>3</sup>

Although black theology strives for the highest levels of sophistication, it insists that theological reflections must be relevant to the struggles of the black community. Black people in different parts of the world face poverty, racial discrimination and marginalization. They are stereotyped and caricatured as intellectually inferior, driven by instinct and morally bankrupt. Black people have been forced to fight for freedom and justice. This struggle continues. Black theology has been a powerful medium for expressing the black struggle for freedom and dignity.

In South Africa, black theology proclaimed "farewell to innocence"<sup>4</sup> and called upon the church to be in active solidarity with the oppressed black majority. It recognized black people's "unquestionable right to be free".<sup>5</sup> Black theology has therefore entailed "resistance and hope".<sup>6</sup> Evoking the titles of these key publications in black theology serves to highlight the point that it

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<sup>3</sup>James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986, 10.

<sup>4</sup>Allan Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence: A Socio-Ethical Study on Black Theology and Power*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1976.

<sup>5</sup>Itumeleng J. Mosala and Buti Tlhage, eds. *The Unquestionable Right to be Free*. Braamfontein: Skotaville, 1986.

<sup>6</sup>Charles Villa-Vicencio and John de Gruchy, eds., *Resistance and Hope: South African Essays in Honour of Beyers Naude*. Cape Town: David Phillip, 1985.

was very much attuned to the struggles of black people. However, black theology appears to have fallen on hard times.

### **Exhausted and Irrelevant? Challenges Facing Black Theology**

Black theology in South Africa has experienced a slump since the 1990s. Most of its practitioners have not been publishing. Only a few younger black theologians like Tinyiko Sam Maluleke have continued to publish. Although Alistair Kee might have overstated the case when he deemed black theology in both the United States of America and Africa redundant,<sup>7</sup> it is certainly true that black theology faces a major crisis.

There are a number of indicators or manifestations of the crisis that black theology in South Africa is facing currently. First, as indicated above, the production line of black theology appears to have stopped. One of the key distinguishing features of an academic discipline is visibility through publication. Books, journals, electronic debates, conferences and other communication strategies demonstrate the vibrancy of a discipline. In the particular case of black theology, there have been no major books, journals, nor conferences since the 1990s. Critics may therefore feel justified to argue that the discipline has undergone a decisive decline.

Second, the leading voices in black theology are no longer as audible as they were previously. As noted above, there is a worrying absence of literature that consciously locates itself within the matrix of black theology. Individuals who used to publish black theological reflections like Desmond Tutu, Alan Boesak, Frank Chikane, Simon Maimela, Mokgethi Motlhabi and others are no longer doing so. Their voices have become inaudible in the new political dispensation. This has fuelled the perception that black theology has run out of steam.

Third, and closely connected to the foregoing, the emergence of the majority government in South Africa in 1994 appears to have

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<sup>7</sup>Alistair Kee, *The Rise and Demise of Black Theology*. London: Ashgate, 2006.

plunged black theology into uncertainty. Gabriel Setiloane had hinted that black theology was too dependent on the Black and White scenario. He suggested that as soon as the blacks attained their liberation, black theology “would go out of business”.<sup>8</sup> The reality of political independence for the black majority and the end of apartheid appears to have wrong-footed black theology in South Africa.

Fourth, and closely related to the point raised above, a good number of black theologians have been absorbed into various positions since the emergence of democracy in South Africa. This is clearly understandable as they have skills to contribute to the process of nation building. However, as I noted in the discussion on African theologians and the HIV epidemic, taking up other responsibilities has left black theologians with no time to publish their reflections. This has resulted in a significant gap in the discipline. Maluleke expresses his feeling of having been abandoned in the following words:

As a young theologian in post-apartheid South Africa and post-Cold War Africa, I suddenly experience intense and acute spiritual and intellectual “loneliness”. This is both bad and good. Bad because I miss the defiant, passionate and humorous “image of God” *ubuntu* theology of Desmond Tutu. There is a huge, gaping hole that has been left by my esteemed mentors and colleagues, Itumeleng Mosala, Takatso Mofokeng, Simon Maimela, Simangaliso Mkhatswa, Frank Chikane and others – all of whom have gone “secular” by becoming all manner of administrators and state functionaries.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Gabriel M. Setiloane, “Theological Trends in Africa“, *Missionalia* 8 (2), 1980, 49.

<sup>9</sup>Tinyiko Sam Maluleke, “The Rediscovery of the Agency of Africans: An Emerging Paradigm of the Post- Cold War and Post-Apartheid Black and African Theology,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 108, 2000, 21.

While some younger black theologians like Maluleke have continued to publish and to be actively involved in theological issues, it is fair to state that, on the whole, black theology no longer enjoys the prominence it used to. The inability to confront contemporary issues like poverty, unemployment, violence and others has left many lecturers using the past tense to refer to black theology. As I shall argue below, the HIV pandemic brings to the fore many themes that are of interest to black theology and could reinvigorate the discipline.

### **Searching for Inspiration: African Liberation Theology**

The paralysis that has gripped black theology has also affected African liberation theology. African liberation theology has been dominated by the quest to ensure that political liberation translates to freedom and prosperity for the majority of the citizens. With a particular interest in sociology, African liberation theologians trained have paid particular attention to the wretched conditions under which the majority of Africans continue to survive. This is so despite the courage that they demonstrated in the struggle against colonialism and the high hopes they had upon the attainment of political independence.

One theme that has come up consistently in the works of African liberation theologians such as Engelbert Mveng of Cameroon, Laurenti Magesa of Tanzania, and Canaan Banana of Zimbabwe and others is that the transfer of power from the colonialists to the indigenous elite has not resulted in a dramatic improvement in the quality of life for most Africans. Consequently, “the struggle” has not ended. Africans must continue to fight for economic liberation and social justice.

As Maria Cimperman, a North American ethicist observes, “African liberation theology implicates and challenges the Church.”<sup>10</sup> In particular, African liberation theologians call upon the church to take up its prophetic role. They are critical of the African church

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<sup>10</sup>*Maria Cimperman, When God's People Have HIV/AIDS: An Approach to Ethics.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005, 30.

leadership's tendency to befriend the ruling elite in the different countries. This prevents them from challenging corruption, dictatorship and other excessive practices by politicians. Patrick Ryan provides a detailed description of the churches' failings:

By and large the leadership of our church does not have a strong prophetic tradition. Church leaders have attended rallies of ruling parties; they have prayed sycophantically and celebrated domesticated liturgies that entrenched rather than challenged the wrongdoing of elites; they have accepted cash donations without enquiring into their source; they have not demanded transparent and accountable election procedures, fixed terms of office, and monitoring procedures for themselves; they have facilitated church structures that in some way parallel the hegemonic and authoritarian civil structures; they have withheld offering institutional and legal protection to grassroots activists being persecuted for their justice ministry; they have remained silent when confronted with issue after issue that called for an urgent public response. Most disturbingly was the failure to discern and denounce the disproportionate suffering of women as victims of male power.<sup>11</sup>

I have cited Ryan at length as he catalogues the challenges facing African churches. The failure to speak truth to power has eroded the church's standing as a powerful member of civil society. African liberation theology calls upon churches to protest when African politicians transform the revolutionary slogan, "*Aluta continua*" to "A looter *continua*". It challenges churches to call political leaders to account and to ensure that resources are distributed equitably.

Despite the worsening socio-economic situation in most African countries, liberation theology's profile has not grown significantly. Reflections by Mveng, Marc-Ela, Banana, and Mageza remain definitive to date. As with black theology, one may also assert that

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<sup>11</sup>Patrick Ryan, "The Shifting Contexts of Sin", in Patrick Ryan, ed., *Structures of Sin, Seeds of Liberation*. Tangaza Occasional Papers No. 7. Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 1998, 16.

African liberation theology has undergone considerable decline. Since the 1990s, there have been very few, if any, publications that can be classified as African liberation theology. However, as I shall illustrate below, there have been useful reflections that provide glimpses of the way forward. Unlike black theology, it is more difficult to establish why, given its relevance, African liberation theology has not become more prominent on the continent. In the paragraphs below, I seek to explain the decline of African liberation theology at a time when its insights are most needed.

To begin with, it must be acknowledged that African liberation theology has always been the less dominant trend, with inculturation tending to be more popular. Organizations like the Ecumenical Association of Third-World Theologians (EATWOT) that are heavily influenced by Latin American liberation theologians have promoted African liberation theology.<sup>12</sup> However, it has not enjoyed a lot of growth and popularity. Most African theologians have operated within the paradigm of inculturation.

Second, the general decline of liberation theology in different parts of the world has affected African liberation theology. Liberation theology drew considerably from Marxist analysis. Although John Parratt is correct in observing that the African context has not been preoccupied with classical Marxist social analysis,<sup>13</sup> it is worth noting that the decline of Marxism as a political ideology in the late 1980s affected liberation theology. African liberation theology lost its impetus and is now almost extinct. However, the challenge of HIV has brought many of its key themes to the fore.

Third, most African governments have been ruthless in handling dissent. It is much safer for African theologians to write about culture and the need to promote an African Christian identity. Despite the

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<sup>12</sup>See for example contributions to the journal, *Voices from the Third World*.

<sup>13</sup>John Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity: African Theology Today*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995, 21.

wave of democratisation that swept through many parts of Africa in the 1990s, many governments remain intolerant. African liberation theology poses a danger to their grip on power. As a result, the discipline has not been very popular among African theologians as it can entail persecution, and even assassination.<sup>14</sup>

Fourth, the emergence of reconstruction theology (which deals with similar themes) might have drawn more theologians to it, leaving liberation theology less subscribed. Reconstruction theology sounds more forward-looking and appealing. African liberation theology has found it difficult to achieve prominence, although it remains highly relevant.

### **A Preferential Option for Blacks? HIV, Race and Theology**

Black people are by far more disproportionately affected by HIV and AIDS than any other race. The pandemic continues to leave a trail of destruction among blacks in Africa and in the diaspora. It does appear that HIV has made “a preferential option for blacks”. While this has given rise to conspiracy theories, with some charging that blacks are genetically more vulnerable to HIV infection because of the nature of our CCR5 receptors, it remains clear that the dimension of race remains key to discourses on the pandemic.<sup>15</sup> For black people who have survived the horrors of slavery and colonialism, it is difficult to dismiss lightly the charge that HIV has been designed to obliterate the black race. While such conspiracy theories cause alarm and despondency, they should be understood within their historical context.

It is surprising to note that black theology has not devoted sufficient energy to exploring the significance of the very high rates of HIV infection among blacks. As I noted above, black theology

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<sup>14</sup>Many African governments are keen to promote church leaders who sing their praises, while actively persecuting those who criticise them.

<sup>15</sup>Richard C. Chirimuuta and Rosalind J. Chirimuuta, *Aids, Africa and Racism*. London: Richard Chirimuuta, 1987.

has placed the experiences of black people at the centre of theological reflection. It is therefore in a position to analyse the theological significance of HIV and AIDS seeming to set up a permanent base within the black community. Where is the God of liberation when millions of blacks succumb to AIDS? What does the pandemic do to the confidence of blacks, who have already had to endure racism and humiliation before HIV? To what extent does the pandemic provide an opportunity to bring to the fore perennial problems that confront black communities in different parts of the world? Does HIV challenge blacks in different parts of the world to form a united front to counter it and other destructive forces? One would assume that black theology would grapple with such questions as it seeks to interpret the epidemic.

Dube has argued that the racial aspect of HIV needs to be appreciated. According to her, “in these days one is seen to wear the ‘badge’ of HIV and AIDS by virtue of geographical and racial identity.”<sup>16</sup> It is institutional racism that allows some rich nations to impose travel restrictions on people living with HIV, the majority of whom are black. The non-availability of antiretroviral drugs to the majority of those who need them would be inconceivable if they were predominantly white. Dube is convinced that social injustice, globalisation, unjust international relations and other factors that increase vulnerability to HIV are underpinned by racism.<sup>17</sup>

In interrogating the disproportionate impact of HIV and AIDS on black communities, black theology needs to retrieve the dimensions of urgency and agency. Black theology has consistently argued that the liberation of black people cannot be postponed; not even by a single day! It is an urgent undertaking. The HIV epidemic also draws attention to the need for agency. Black people and those among us

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<sup>16</sup>Musa W. Dube, “Introduction: Little Girl, Get Up!” in Nyambura J. Njoroge and Musa W. Dube, eds, *Talitha Cum! Theologies of African Women*, 9.

<sup>17</sup>Musa W. Dube, “*Talitha Cum!* A Postcolonial Feminist and HIV/AIDS Reading of Mark 5: 21-43”, in Nyambura J. Njoroge and Musa W. Dube, eds, *Talitha Cum! Theologies of African Women*, 135.

with HIV must be actively involved in their/our own liberation. Agency underlines the active participation of the affected people in the process of liberation. It is built on the conviction that liberation cannot be outsourced. It is the responsibility of those experiencing oppression and marginalization to work for liberation.

As black theology considers the devastating impact of HIV among black communities, it must seek to reconnect with black existential philosophy. There has been a steady output by black thinkers on what it means to be black in a world that is principally anti-black. What are the implications of existence in black? More crucially, what does it mean to be black in a world that associates HIV with blackness? How can blackness be a signifier of liberation when the popular media ties it to backwardness, disease and death?

Black theology must once again enervate blacks on the continent and in the diaspora to be proud of their racial identity. HIV in particular exacerbates racial stereotypes that project blacks as carriers of disease. Emphasising the God of liberation who is intensely interested in the liberation of black people, black theology must empower black people to resist HIV. Black theology upholds the dignity of blacks and this dimension must be accentuated in the face of the pandemic.

Of all the strands of African theology, it is black theology that is strategically placed to spearhead prevention efforts. Without being alarmist, black theology must draw attention to the devastating impact of AIDS in the community. If the world appears to care little about who dies, black theology must promote self-care in the black community. Where blacks have been socialised to demean themselves, black theology must inculcate a sense of self-love and value. Where media images show black women as sex objects, black theology must promote respect for black women. Self-care entails black people seeing themselves in a new way. As ethicist Maria Cimperman argues, “three specific markers of self-care in terms of HIV and AIDS are commitment to growth, relationality and self-acceptance.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Maria Cimperman, *When God's People Have HIV/AIDS*, 50

Black theology must invest heavily in promoting awareness and prevention of HIV and AIDS in black communities. By encouraging black youth to defy negative images of themselves and their sexuality, black theology would be contributing effectively to prevention efforts. Individuals and communities with low self-esteem provide a healthy environment for the transmission of HIV. It is therefore crucial for black theology to reassert the value of blackness, and to equip communities to resist HIV.

While solidarity based on a perceived existential threat might be questionable in the eyes of some critics, it could be argued that the devastation caused by AIDS necessitates urgent joint action by black people throughout the world. Black theologians might wish to consider HIV as an opportunity to forge trans-continental solidarity among blacks. Given the impact of HIV among blacks, there is scope for black theology to consider policies and actions to stem back the tide. Black theology in Africa, the USA, Britain and other places needs to build synergies in the response to HIV.

Black theological reflections in the time of HIV must engage seriously with Christology. Who is Christ to millions of blacks whose lives have been touched by AIDS? What does Christ, who was rejected as an outcast, say to blacks who are stigmatised? How does Christ portray the liberator God for blacks whose lives are cut short by AIDS? Black theology needs to develop Christologies that reflect the reality of HIV and AIDS.<sup>19</sup>

### **Challenging Poverty, Promoting Abundant Life: Black and Liberation Theologies in the Era of HIV**

Both black theology in South Africa and African liberation theology have placed emphasis on overcoming poverty. Research has confirmed that HIV and poverty are mutually reinforcing. While

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<sup>19</sup>See for example Musa W. Dube, "Towards an HIV/AIDS Christology: Christ the Compassionate Healer and Liberation in the New Testament". Unpublished paper presented at EHAIA Conference, Johannesburg, November 2003.

poverty does not cause HIV, the disease thrives in contexts of poverty. It is therefore not surprising that the impact of HIV has been most severe in those parts of the world where poverty appears to have set up a permanent base. The WCC study document, *Facing AIDS*, provides a detailed analysis of the “covenant” between HIV and poverty.

At the root of the global socio-economic and cultural problems related to HIV/AIDS are unjust distribution and accumulation of wealth, land and power. This leads to various forms of malaise in human communities. There are more and more cases of economic and political migration of people within and outside of their own countries. These uprooted peoples might be migrant workers looking for better-paying jobs or refugees from economic, political or religious conflicts. Racism, gender discrimination and sexual harassment, economic inequalities, the lack of political will for change, huge external and internal debts, critical health problems, illicit drugs and sex trades, including an increase in child prostitution, fragmentation and marginalization of communities – all these factors, which affect “developed” as well as “developing” societies, form a web of interrelated global problems which intensify the vulnerability of human communities to HIV/AIDS.<sup>20</sup>

Black and African liberation theologies are expected to engage with the issues raised above. Their emphasis on structural sin(s) is well placed to clarify the vulnerability of blacks to HIV. It is by continuing to fight poverty that the struggle against HIV and other forces of death can post significant victories. Black theology needs to provide leadership to the fight against poverty and HIV by drawing attention to structural factors that sponsor these two forces of death.

Black theology needs to contribute to prevention efforts. African liberation theology has also sought to promote the quality of life in the postcolonial period. Poverty frustrates prevention efforts as it

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<sup>20</sup>World Council of Churches, *Facing AIDS: The Challenge: The Churches' Response A WCC Study Document*. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1997, 14-15.

minimises people's sense of value. Communities and individuals that wallow in poverty tend to adopt highly fatalistic attitudes to life. HIV thrives in contexts where communities and individuals feel constrained to make the right health choices. Thus:

It has been widely argued that the presence of social capital is linked to positive health outcomes. For example, the promotion of condom use and other safer-sex practices is most likely to succeed where young people feel that they are in command of their lives and are supported by trusted network and positive role models. In a context where violence, substance abuse and social divisions are the order of the day, social cohesion and a sense of community are stifled (and) prevention programmes are unlikely to gain wide acceptance.

Poverty and its associated consequences, social disempowerment, and lack of access to healthcare facilities and treatment for HIV infection hasten the spread of HIV in the most vulnerable sectors of society.<sup>21</sup>

Although the authors of the passage cited above quickly add that AIDS is not constrained by class, it is clear that its most fertile ground lies in context of poverty. Poverty leads to behaviour that increases vulnerability to HIV. Furthermore, individuals who are forced by circumstances to take up high-risk jobs tend to engage in sexual practices that make them more vulnerable to HIV. Men in the military, miners and truck drivers fall into this category. Black and African liberation theologies must provide viable strategies to overcome poverty and empower vulnerable individuals and groups.

It is poverty that forces many women (and some men) to engage in sex work. Poverty condemns many people with AIDS to their early deaths because they cannot afford antiretroviral drugs. Poverty

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<sup>21</sup>Liz Walker, Graeme Reid and Morna Cornell, *Waiting to Happen: HIV/AIDS in South Africa – The Bigger Picture*. London: Lynne Rienner, 2004, 74.

invites death in the time of AIDS. The challenge therefore is for black and African theology to refuse to grant the last word to poverty, disease and death. They must challenge corrupt systems and promote health and well-being.

One of the most popular biblical texts in black and African liberation theology is “I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians” (Exodus 3:7-8). In his reflections on this passage, Desmond Tutu argued that God is actively interested in human liberation.

This act of saving a rabble of slaves, this highly political act called the Exodus in the Bible became a paradigmatic event, one which came to be seen as the founding event of the people of God, what constituted them, His people and other divine events were described in the light of this event as the Christians later were to describe everything in their salvation history in the light of the death and resurrection event of Jesus Christ. God showed Himself there as a saving God, as a doing, an active kind of God, not one who was fond of delivering eloquent speeches, as a gracious God (they did no deserve to be saved, they could not merit being saved); and he showed himself to be a God of liberation, the great Exodus God, who took the side of the oppressed, the exploited ones, the down-trodden, the marginalized ones.<sup>22</sup>

Black theology must retrieve the idea of the God who hears the cry of the oppressed in the era of HIV. African liberation theology must champion the concept of a God who hears the cry of orphans in Africa. It must proclaim the God who stands with those who face premature deaths because they cannot access antiretroviral drugs. Black theology must reclaim the God who intervenes on behalf of those who find themselves vulnerable to HIV.

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<sup>22</sup>Desmond M. Tutu, *Hope and Suffering*, 60-61.

In his reflections on the theme of the Exodus, Moiseraele P. Dibeela, a young African theologian and church leader, adopts an HIV and AIDS perspective. He maintains that the Jubilee movement that calls for the forgiveness of debts owed by Third-World countries to Western economies is critical to the struggle against HIV and AIDS. Crucially, in the spirit of black theology, he detects an act of divine and human partnership in the liberation process. This evokes the concept of agency that I referred to earlier. God enters into partnership with humans in the act of saving them. Dibeela also contends that international injustice sponsors the HIV epidemic. According to him:

God continues to be interested in the plight of the people of the world who suffer injustices. Most of these people are in the Third World, and they suffer at the hands of globalisation and the elite in the West. Many of these people are denied affordable anti-retroviral drugs to delay their deaths from AIDS, they suffer from being used as cheap labour, and are watching the degradation of their environment. Despite these, God says ‘I have seen the misery of my people,’ and invites human agents to partner with God to release them.<sup>23</sup>

Black theology and African liberation theology must promote abundant life in the era of HIV. They must challenge unemployment and landlessness<sup>24</sup> — factors that fuel poverty and increase vulnerability to HIV. Furthermore, they must prophetically uphold the rights and dignities of those among us with HIV.

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<sup>23</sup>Moiseraele P. Dibeela, “International Injustice”, in Musa W. Dube, ed., *Africa Praying: A Handbook on HIV/AIDS Sensitive Sermon Guidelines and Liturgy*. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2003, 259-260.

<sup>24</sup>Takatso Mofokeng, “Land is Our Mother: A Black Theology of Land”, in M. Guma and L. Milton, eds., *An African Challenge to the Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Cape Town: South African Council of Churches, 1997, 42-56.

### **Transforming Gender: Black and African Liberation Theologies in the Time of HIV**

In the discussion on Musa W. Dube's approach to liberation in the era of HIV in the next section, I shall argue that she has a definite bias towards the vulnerability of African women, noting that African liberation theology has been dominated by men. Black theology has been equally dominated by men, although the need to listen to women's voices has been raised.<sup>25</sup> In the USA, womanist theologians have been critical of the tendency to privilege the experiences of black men over those of women.<sup>26</sup>

Alongside the reflections by the Circle, black and African liberation theologies need to highlight the predicament of black women in the face of HIV. They need to take heed of the observation by Ruth Muthei James that, "the crisis of HIV and AIDS makes the plight of women even bleaker and heightens the urgency with which the issues of poverty and discriminatory cultural practices must be addressed."<sup>27</sup> It is critical that African women's quest for abundant life be embraced in other strands of African theology. Refusing to get involved on the basis that "the Circle is already doing it" would be irresponsible, especially for theologies that are concerned with total hu

Black and African liberation theologies are called upon to reflect on the multiplicity of challenges that African women have to contend with in the era of HIV. Apart from increased vulnerability to infection,

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<sup>25</sup>See for example Roxanne Jordan, "Black Feminist Theology in South Africa", in Simon Maimela and Duright Hopkins, eds., *We are One Voice: Black Theology in the USA and South Africa*. Braamfontein: Skotaville, 1989, 51-59.

<sup>26</sup>See for example Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-talk*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

<sup>27</sup>Ruth Muthei James, "Factors that Render the Girl-Child Vulnerable to HIV/AIDS in Kenya", in T.M. Hinga, A.N. Kubai, P. Mwaura and H. Ayanga, eds., *Women, Religion and HIV/AIDS in Africa: Responding to Ethical and Theological Challenges* Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 2008, 15.

the burden of care has fallen disproportionately on women. It is mainly women who care for the increasing number of orphans, do voluntary work in home-based care and have to endure an increased workload, for example, in the fields.<sup>28</sup>

As Dube's critique of globalisation illustrates (I elaborate on this theme below), African women have been forced to engage in desperate acts for the sake of survival. African women theologians have argued that theology in the context of globalisation must highlight its negative consequences on the majority of African women.<sup>29</sup> Such theological reflections must be incorporated in black and African liberation theologies.

### *Challenging Masculinities*

Perhaps black and African liberation theologies will become more relevant in the time of HIV if they dare to liberate masculinities. It is by transforming unequal gender relations that the struggle against HIV will post impressive results. In a preliminary study on the African churches and masculinities in the time of HIV, I argued that serious engagement with men is required if women, children and men are going to thrive.<sup>30</sup>

Dwight N. Hopkins, a black theologian, argues that for black theology of liberation, the emphasis must be on the presence or absence of liberation and the practice of freedom in gender relationships. He argues that white male culture in the USA has perpetuated stereotypes about the black male gender. It creates myths that many black men have embraced. According to him:

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<sup>28</sup>Sonja Weinreich and Christoph Benn, *AIDS – Meeting the Challenge: Data, Facts, Background*. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2004, 29.

<sup>29</sup>Philomena N. Mwaura and Lilian. D. Chirairo, eds, *Theology in the Context of Globalisation: African Women's Response*. Nairobi EATWOT Women's Commission, 2005.

<sup>30</sup>Ezra Chitando, *Acting in Hope: African Churches and HIV/AIDS*, Vol 2. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2007, chapter four.

Black men, in the broader culture, are portrayed as being more physical, powerful and stronger, meaning more sensuous and sexy. As the perfect sexual supermen, African American males are seen as connoisseurs of the sexual act, having the most endurance and physical equipment, and possessing a being (i.e., an ontology) motivated by a life in pursuit of the sexual act. Black men, in the logic of these myths, are more emotional, volatile and unpredictable.<sup>31</sup>

Hopkins challenges the dangerous masculinities that are promoted by such myths. He proposes a more liberating approach to masculinity; one that places emphasis on mutuality. He urges black men to embrace self-love (a concept that resonates with self-care discussed above) and work towards liberation. Like Dube, Hopkins finds Jesus as a role model for today's new black heterosexual male. He admires how "Jesus talked to, spent time with, listened to, answered questions of, healed and empowered women to become their full selves."<sup>32</sup>

For Hopkins, a reconstructed black masculinity no longer subscribes to male chauvinism, male privileges and patriarchy. Black and African liberation theologies need to take the theme of reconstructing and liberating masculinities seriously in the time of HIV. Masculinities that do not subject women, children and other men to violence are an asset. Masculinities that are rooted in respect for women and responsible use of power are a valuable resource in the response to HIV.

Black and African liberation theologies therefore need to expand their scope to include the transformation of gender relations in African contexts of HIV. Together with inculturation and African women's theologies, they must promote the attainment of gender justice. The tendency to relinquish reflections on gender to African women theologians must be challenged. The reality of HIV requires that all

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<sup>31</sup>Dwight N. Hopkins, "A New Black Heterosexual Male", *Voices from the Third World* 24,1, 2001, 29.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 32.

strands of African theology contribute to the struggle for gender justice. Two African theologians, Musa W. Dube and Tinyiko Sam Maluleke, have provided valuable insights into how African liberation theology can respond to HIV and AIDS. The following sections focus on their reflections.

### **Musa W. Dube and Liberation Theology in the Era of HIV**

Although she has made her mark as a New Testament scholar<sup>33</sup> and African woman theologian, Musa W. Dube's work has a strong liberationist strand. It is fair to state that among African women theologians, her work comes closest to African liberation theology. While a longer narrative is required to try and account for this aspect of her work, in this preliminary study I will raise two factors. First, Dube locates herself firmly in postcolonial discourse.<sup>34</sup> One of the key themes in post colonialism is the uneven power relationship between former colonial subjects and their oppressors. The economic injustice suffered by formerly colonised nations features prominently in post colonialism. Dube has built on this background to draw attention to Africa's marginalization in the global economic order. This has increased Africa's vulnerability to HIV, she argues.

Secondly, Dube's location in Botswana, a fairly stable African democracy, facilitates her awareness of the value of good governance. Hers is a more tolerant community where opposing political views are not regarded as a danger to the survival of the state. She acknowledges that comparatively, she is "much more empowered than Africans from other countries".<sup>35</sup> Dube has been militant in her

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<sup>33</sup>Lovemore Togarasei, "Musa W. Dube and the Study of the Bible in Africa", *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 34, 2008, 55-74.

<sup>34</sup>See for example Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretations of the Bible*. St Louis: Chalice, 2000.

<sup>35</sup>Musa W. Dube, "Social Location as a Story-telling Method of Teaching in HIV/AIDS Contexts", in Musa W. Dube, ed., *HIV/AIDS and the Curriculum: Methods of Integrating HIV/AIDS in Theological Programmes*. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2003, 105.

call for the few wealthy nations to deal fairly with Africa. She bemoans Africa's poverty and exclusion from global economics.

In a number of essays on the HIV and AIDS, Dube has highlighted the value of applying liberation hermeneutics. Whilst the church has tended to interpret HIV narrowly in terms of personal sin, Dube, in line with liberation theology, places more emphasis on structural sin. As male African liberation theologians have argued, "economies of death" have sponsored devastation and dehumanisation. Dube has charged that the church has not been as keen to address structural sin as it has been to address individual sin. According to her:

Clearly, the challenge confronting the church and its mission in the HIV/AIDS and its mission in the HIV/AIDS and globalisation era is the need to address structural sins with an equal commitment with which individual sin is addressed. Members of society/church may very well know and believe in the values of abstinence and faithfulness, but social injustice does not always allow them to live by these values. Theological strategies of confronting structural sin are therefore vital, for HIV/AIDS is not just about individual lack of morality, but also an individual's lack of social justice in their lives.<sup>36</sup>

Dube rightly argues that the church has the responsibility to dismantle oppressive structures. One key text that helps to unlock Dube's approach to mission in the era of HIV is Luke 4:16-20. This is the "Jesus manifesto", where Jesus spells out his mission. This entails preaching good news to the poor, proclaiming release to the captives, recovering of the sight to the blind, setting at liberty those who are oppressed and proclaiming the acceptable year of the Lord. Dube has been heavily influenced by this passage, and regards it as paradigmatic for the church's prophetic ministry, especially in the

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<sup>36</sup>Musa W. Dube, "Theological Challenges: Proclaiming the Fullness of Life in the HIV/AIDS and Global Economic Era", *International Review of Mission* 91, 363, 2002, 542.

time of HIV and AIDS.<sup>37</sup> At the heart of the prophetic ministry is active resistance to all life-denying forces and systems. This locates Dube's reflections on the church's mission in the era of HIV firmly within liberation theology.

Dube places liberation at the centre of the church's response to the HIV epidemic. Confronted with an oppressive patriarchal system, the church has a responsibility to stand with women in their struggle for liberation, she argues. When rich countries reduce Africa to a source of cheap labour and raw materials, the church must protest. When adults do not recognize the rights of children, the church must follow the example of Jesus and honour children.<sup>38</sup> Total human liberation – inclusive of all those who are marginalized and dehumanised – must become the focus of the church in the time of HIV.

### **Dube's Critique of Globalisation in the Era of HIV**

In common with liberation theology's emphasis on the socio-economic context, Dube has been a consistent critic of globalisation. Indeed, it is instructive to note that in most of her writings, she discusses globalisation and the HIV epidemic together. For her, both are authors of death. Dube charges:

Clearly, a number of social conditions, encouraged by globalisation, such as poverty, lack of education, entrenchment of gender inequalities and cultural views of inequality, decreased access to health services, mobility, sex work industry, girl trafficking, unemployment makes globalisation the fertile ground for the spread of HIV/AIDS. Globalisation also decreases quality care for the infected since health services are privatised and profit oriented.

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<sup>37</sup>See for example, Musa W. Dube, "Sermon: The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me", Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, USA, March-April 2006. Unpublished.

<sup>38</sup>Musa W. Dube, "Fighting with God: Children and HIV/AIDS in Botswana", *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 114, 31-42.

For example, anti-retroviral [drugs] remain unaffordable and unavailable to millions of people who need them.<sup>39</sup>

For Dube, while God created the world and saw that it was good, giant multi-national companies and monetary bodies (the International Monetary Fund and World Bank) were colonising God's creation.<sup>40</sup> Dube sees globalisation as an iniquitous system that prevents the majority from partaking freely of the fruits that are available in God's garden. She explodes the myth of the global village, arguing that there is no equality but injustice in the new world economic order.<sup>41</sup>

As an African woman theologian, Dube brings to the fore a theme that is often glossed over by male liberation theologians. This is the impact of the unjust global economic system on African women. In her dramatic "Twenty-Two Years of Bleeding and Still the Princess Sings!", Dube vividly shows the impact of globalisation on African women. Crushed by patriarchy, globalisation and HIV, African women survive against the odds.<sup>42</sup> Dube's work consistently underscores how globalisation and the HIV epidemic have left African women extremely vulnerable. In her re-reading of the story of the Samaritan woman in John 4:1-42, she maintains that the history of African women is not a happy one. Alongside enduring the humiliation

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<sup>39</sup>Musa Dube, "Talitha Cum! Calling the Girl-Child and Women to Life in the HIV/AIDS and Globalisation Era", in Isabel Apawo Phiri, Beverley Haddad and Madipoane Masenya, eds, *African Women, HIV/AIDS and Faith Communities*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2003, 79.

<sup>40</sup>Musa Dube Shomanah, "Praying the Lord's Prayer in the Global Economic Era", *The Ecumenical Review* 49,4, 1997.

<sup>41</sup>Musa W. Dube, "Inhabiting God's Garden: Are We in the Global Village or in God's Garden", *Ministerial Formation* 96, 2002, 31-37.

<sup>42</sup>Musa W. Dube, "Twenty-Two Years of Bleeding and Still the Princess Sings!", in Musa W. Dube and Musimbi Kanyoro, eds., *Grant Me Justice! HIV/AIDS and Gender Readings of the Bible*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2004, 186-199.

suffered by the whole continent, African women have been the hardest hit. According to Dube:

In colonial times, African women were systematically marginalized from education, church roles and clerical jobs, and, like the whole continent, they were dispossessed and denied their basic human rights. In contemporary times, African women are the hardest hit: they are in refugee camps, they live with poverty and starvation; they are caught in the violent civil and ethnic wars and oppressive international financial policies; and they live with and die of AIDS.<sup>43</sup>

Dube contends that African women endure double oppression; alongside the marginalization of the continent, they are also oppressed on account of their gender. Unfortunately, the church has not been prophetic in challenging globalisation, patriarchy and HIV. Dube calls upon the church to be in active opposition to forces that deny life to the majority of Africans. In line with liberation theology's focus on dismantling stifling systems, Dube's work envisages a new era when poverty and disease will be vanquished. Globalisation will give way to more equitable economic relations between nations, and gender justice will be achieved.

### **Liberating Masculinities in the Era of HIV: An Overview of Dube's Vision**

It is critical to note that, unlike African male liberation theologians, Dube includes the liberation of men from patriarchy within the scope of her definition of liberation. Crucially, African male liberation theologians have tended to concentrate on political and economic themes. The major reason is historical. Parratt is right when he asserts that, "in common with American black theology (and indeed Latin

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<sup>43</sup>Musa Wenkosi Dube, "John 4: 1-42 – The Five Husbands at the Well of Living Waters: The Samaritan Woman and African Women", in Nyambura J. Njoroge and Musa W. Dube, eds., *Talitha Cum! Theologies of African Women*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2001, 42.

American liberation theology), women's issues were not in the forefront in the early debates about African theology."<sup>44</sup> Dube writes at a time when gender justice has become a major theme, especially in the wake of HIV.

Men's own liberation from patriarchy is a salient feature of Dube's liberation theology. This is a major departure from the liberation theology articulated by men. Although the Circle has not yet begun to pay more attention to the theme of masculinities,<sup>45</sup> a number of authors have drawn attention to the need to engage men. Kwok Pui-Lan observes that Oduyoye decried the fact that those theologians who argue passionately for liberation are talking about the liberation of only half of the African population if they neglect the abject poverty of African women.<sup>46</sup> Oduyoye is therefore calling for holistic liberation. Musimbi Kanyoro yearns "for a time when the men in the churches of Africa will be prophetic about the things that adversely affect the lives of African women!"<sup>47</sup>

Dube therefore expands the concept of liberation to embrace the notion of men's liberation from patriarchy. Both black and liberation theology argue that the oppressor is also a victim of his/her oppression. As long as the oppressed person is not free, the oppressor is oppressed! Liberation sets both the oppressed and the oppressor free. Dube utilizes this concept to argue that men need to resist patriarchy in order for them to be free. As a New Testament scholar, Dube mines the biblical text to find examples of men who defied patriarchal values and norms.

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<sup>44</sup>John Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity*, 50-51.

<sup>45</sup>For preliminary reflections, see for example Ezra Chitando, *Acting in Hope: African Churches and HIV/AIDS*. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2007, chapter four.

<sup>46</sup>Kwok Pui-Lan, "Mercy Amba Oduyoye and African Women's Theology", *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 20, 1, 2004, 10.

<sup>47</sup>Musimbi R.A. Kanyoro, "Engendered Communal Theology: African Women's Contribution to Theology in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century", in Njoroge and Dube, eds., *Talitha Cum! Theologies of African Women*, 176-177.

In her re-reading of Mark 5: 23-43 where Jesus restores life to Jairus' daughter, Dube detects a model of using one's power to empower others. She argues that Jairus and Jesus are liberated men who are willing to use their strength to empower others. She suggests that men in different contexts need to emulate such role models and facilitate the liberation of others.

Both Jairus and Jesus are powerful men, but they used their power to empower the powerless. I believe that this model highlights that the powerful men in our families, churches, academy and society, do have a role in building gender empowerment and in fighting against the forces of death that globalisation and HIV/AIDS unleash against the girl-child of today.<sup>48</sup>

Alongside incorporating the gender dimension, Dube regards liberation in the era of HIV as recognizing the full rights of people living with HIV or AIDS. An outspoken activist against HIV-related stigma and discrimination, Dube has promoted the active involvement and visibility of people living with or affected by HIV. Her theology of compassion entails respect for and recognition of people living with HIV. Throughout her writing, Dube insists that liberation in the era of HIV and AIDS remains elusive if communities do not show compassion. For her, meaningful and total liberation in Africa currently implies availing medication to all those whose very lives depend on it. Dube's focus on people living with HIV or AIDS amplifies the concept of liberation in African theology.<sup>49</sup>

### **Black Theology and HIV: An Overview of Tinyiko Sam Maluleke's Reflections**

Although I have argued that black theology appears to be in decline, and that it has not responded to the HIV epidemic, the work of Tinyiko

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<sup>48</sup>Musa Dube, "Talitha Cum! Calling the Girl-Child and Women to Life in the HIV/AIDS AND Globalisation Era", in Phiri *et al*, eds. *African Women, HIV/AIDS and Faith Communities*, 88.

<sup>49</sup>See especially, Musa W. Dube, *Theology of Compassion*.

Sam Maluleke deserves recognition. A professor of black and African theology at the University for South Africa (UNISA), Maluleke has published widely on the subject. He is a much sought-after speaker at conferences and workshops in Africa and abroad. In 2007, Maluleke became the President of the South African Council of Churches. At the time of writing (2008), Maluleke was Executive Director of Research at UNISA.

Maluleke stands out as one of the very few male African theologians or scholars of religion who have taken African women theologians seriously and have proceeded to dialogue with them (others would include John S. Pobee and Ogbu U. Kalu). Perhaps this would explain his engagement with HIV, given the fact that the Circle has published widely on the theme. Maluleke provides valuable insights into how black theology can address the HIV epidemic in an effective way.

In an article originally published in 2001 entitled, “Towards an HIV/AIDS — Sensitive Curriculum”, Maluleke offered some creative proposals. He charged that the HIV pandemic has precipitated a crisis in black and African theology. He argued that the pandemic presented a new *kairos* and was destined to affect the discipline in a fundamental way. He maintained that as contextual and liberation theologies had asserted themselves by the sheer force of their timeliness and relevance, they were now called upon to address HIV and AIDS. He went on:

Given the devastation and havoc that HIV/AIDS is causing in much of Africa, it is amazing that the curricula of institutions of theological education in Africa have not been “invaded” by HIV/AIDS issues in a powerful way. What could be more relevant for theology in Africa today than the question of HIV/AIDS?<sup>50</sup>

Maluleke’s call for the development of an HIV and AIDS-sensitive curriculum for theological institutions in Africa was an inspired one.

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<sup>50</sup>Tinyiko Sam Maluleke, “Towards an HIV/AIDS – Sensitive Curriculum”, in Musa W. Dube, ed, *HIV/AIDS and the Curriculum*, 62.

He appealed to theological educators to include the pandemic on their teaching and research agenda. He wondered how theological education in Africa could afford to neglect the most prominent issue of our time. This could only worsen “theological impotence,” he charged.

As one of the pioneers in the field of mainstreaming HIV in African theological programmes, Maluleke’s intervention was a crucial one. Although many theological educators were persuaded that “something” needed to be done, there were very few proposals of “what” could be done, and “how” it could be accomplished. Using his familiarity with black and African theologies, Maluleke counselled that there was no need to imagine that a theology of HIV and AIDS in Africa would have to be formulated “from scratch”. He contended that African theology would provide guidelines for the theology of HIV and AIDS, especially in relation to the themes of race, class and gender. His application of the black theology lenses becomes clear in the following statement:

Although no one is immune from AIDS, it is the poor in the world’s poorest sections who are most at risk. Africans are no more promiscuous than, for example, Europeans, but they are much poorer and therefore much more vulnerable to the pandemic. It might not be far-fetched to suggest therefore that a theology of HIV/AIDS is the face of a new “theology of liberation”.<sup>51</sup>

The last sentence in the citation is significant. Maluleke hoped that the HIV epidemic would inform a new theology of liberation. Unfortunately, this has not yet happened, apart from reflections by Dube and Maluleke himself. As I have argued, African women theologians have put forward some creative proposals, but these mainly relate to culture. Socio-economic and political issues have not featured prominently in the writings of the Circle. Puleng

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid, 68

LenkaBula, a black feminist ethicist, couches her critique in the following words:

There are other life concerns that emerge from unjust economic systems, such as hyper-capitalism or economic globalisation, the entrenchment of violence through miniaturization, the vulgar commoditisation of life (including the ownership of life forms; the abuse of women, children and vulnerable boys and men through unjust and exploitative practices of human trafficking; sexual violence) which also require our analyses and/or transformation. When cultural hermeneutics is used as if it is the only means of discerning the theological or moral experiences of women and those who are on the receiving end of injustices in Africa, it runs the risk of not attending to other issues that undermine fullness of life for God's people and creation in Africa.<sup>52</sup>

Maluleke's location as a black theologian is also clear in his entries in *Africa Praying*. He places emphasis on overcoming oppressive political and economic systems that promote HIV and AIDS. Maluleke identifies with the marginalized and downtrodden: people living with HIV, children and women. He notes that there are millions who are excluded from the global meal table due to poverty, patriarchy, racism, sexism and the HIV epidemic.<sup>53</sup> He challenges the church, governments and society to partner with God in the struggle against oppressive systems that fuel HIV and death.

In his interpretation of the story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), Maluleke reiterates the close connection that exists between poverty and HIV. In typical black theology fashion, he refuses to spiritualise poverty, insisting that it is the prevailing economic model that condemns many people to poverty. He reckons

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<sup>52</sup>Puleng LenkaBula, "A Journey on the Path of an African Feminist Theologian and Pioneer, Mercy Amba Oduyoye: Continuing the Pursuit for Justice in the Church and in Society", *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 34, 18-19 (1-27).

<sup>53</sup>Tinyiko Sam Maluleke, "Lord's Supper", in Musa W. Dube, ed, *Africa Praying*, 64.

that the global economic order that facilitates the spread of HIV is clearly unsustainable:

How many poor people will be able to endure the indignity of poverty, to smell delicious food from the next door and not rise to demand, rob or plunder? How many poor people will not succumb to the temptation of selling their bodies and souls in exchange for a little food on the table? This is what makes poor people so susceptible to HIV/AIDS in our times. In this sense, Lazarus is an exception who cannot be used as a role model. For many poor people are not able to wait for heavenly rewards. Yet even as the poor rise in protest and are forced to use survival tactics, they can only put themselves in further risk and danger.<sup>54</sup>

### **Liberating Masculinities: Maluleke and the Call for a “New Man” in the Time of HIV**

If Dube has been preoccupied with African women’s vulnerability in the time of HIV, Maluleke has sought to transform masculinities. He has reflected on the need for a “new man” who actively resists HIV and stands with women and children. He observes that men have enjoyed physical and emotional power, as well as the power of authority, to lead and make decisions. Unfortunately, men have abused this power, as seen in child abuse, domestic violence and rape. For him, men need to regard power as an opportunity to make a difference.

Maluleke is convinced that there is a lot of work to be done before men become effectively involved in the struggle against the HIV epidemic. He contends that there is a crisis of masculinity. As a solution, he suggests that men must be taught new ways of being men. For him, men must be weaned from distorted notions of masculinity that thrive on power and dominance. Men should be liberated from the false belief that they must rule and command.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>Tinyiko S. Maluleke, “Poverty and Destitution”, in Musa W. Dube, ed, *Africa Praying*, 228.

<sup>55</sup>Tinyiko S. Maluleke, “Men and Fatherhood”, in Musa Dube, ed, *Africa Praying*, 185-187.

Maluleke challenges the church and society to re-socialise men to value relationships and embrace new concepts of power. Like Dube, he suggests that liberating masculinities are characterised by positive uses of power, rather than dominance and control. He lambasts the insatiable thirst to own, possess and conquer, suggesting that it leads to sexual violence in the time of HIV.<sup>56</sup> Maluleke also argues that there are religious and cultural resources in Africa that can be utilized to reconstruct masculinities. Scholars of religion and theologians in Africa have the responsibility to provide leadership in the liberation of masculinities in the time of HIV.<sup>57</sup>

Maluleke is a highly creative and analytical black theologian who has interrogated systems that promote disease and death in Africa. He has challenged the church to move from the graveyard to abundant life.<sup>58</sup> In contexts where considerable ingenuity has been shown in making collapsible coffins,<sup>59</sup> Maluleke calls for a celebration of life. Where communities enter into covenants with death<sup>60</sup> and conspire to condemn women to lives of violence and misery, Maluleke proclaims freedom. Where Africa has been written off because of HIV, corruption and other forces of death, Maluleke remains convinced that “God wishes to transform the valley of death into a valley of life and hope.”<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>Tinyiko S. Maluleke, Presentation during the track on “Liberating Masculinities” at the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians.

<sup>57</sup>Tinyiko S. Maluleke, Plenary Address to the African Association for the Study of Religion Conference, Gaborone, Botswana, 08-13 July 2007. Unpublished paper.

<sup>58</sup>Tinyiko S. Maluleke, “The Graveyard, the ‘Escaped Convict’ and the Girl Child: A Mission of Awakening, An Awakening of Mission”, *International Review of Mission*, 363, 2002, 550-557.

<sup>59</sup>Tinyiko S. Maluleke, “Of Collapsible Coffins and Ways of Dying”, *Ecumenical Review* 54, 3, 2002, 313-332.

<sup>60</sup>Tinyiko S. Maluleke and Sorojini Nadar, guest editors. 2002. *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 114.

<sup>61</sup>Tinyiko S. Maluleke, “Hope: ‘Prophesy to these Bones’”, in Musa W. Dube, ed, *Africa Praying*. 104.

It requires a longer study to do justice to Maluleke's reflections on HIV. What needs to be emphasised in this study is that he is one of the few leading male African/black theologians who have interpreted HIV as a major theological issue of our time. He has courageously engaged the Circle in dialogue, and has been a consistent proponent of gender justice in the time of HIV. His pioneering work provides critical insights into black theology's engagement with the epidemic.

### **Dube and Maluleke: Challenging African Liberation and Black Theology to Address HIV**

It is of course significant that Dube and Maluleke have played pioneering roles in theological reflections on HIV and AIDS. The two belong to the fourth generation of African theologians. They do qualify to be classified as young African theologians as they rose to prominence in their mid-thirties. They peaked very early in their academic careers. These are intellectually gifted, hard-working and politically-conscious individuals. They have been able to provide academic leadership on a complex subject.

Second, their social location<sup>62</sup> as young people in Southern Africa implies that HIV is not for them a far-fetched, abstract concept. Botswana, Dube's country, and Maluleke's South Africa have some of the highest HIV infection rates in the world. Their settings in life are therefore different from those of African theologians in, say, most parts of West Africa. Living in contexts where death has become a way of life, the two theologians have had to confront, negotiate with and reflect on HIV.

Third, although Dube is trained in the New Testament and Maluleke in black and African theology, they take the African milieu seriously. They are willing to critique globalisation and its negative impact on Africans. They interrogate international and national

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<sup>62</sup>Musa W. Dube, "Social Location as a Story-telling Method of Teaching in HIV/AIDS Contexts", in Musa W. Dube, ed, *HIV/AIDS and the Curriculum*, 101-112.

corruption, injustice and other negative factors. They are not narrow or regimented in their theological focus. This enables them to examine the impact of HIV from the perspective of African liberation and black theology.

Fourth, the two theologians retain the original meaning of the concept of gender. While many scholars have reduced gender to “women’s issues”, Dube and Maluleke do not lose sight of the role of men in responding to the HIV epidemic. Maluleke questions the tendency to associate power with domination: “Are there more positive, more life- and community-affirming notions and practices of power?”<sup>63</sup> Both scholars challenge the church and society to nurture redemptive masculinities.

Fifth, the works of Dube and Maluleke make a preferential option for people living with HIV, the marginalized and the poor. They illustrate the possibilities for African liberation and black theology to tackle HIV. By pressing for fair trade practices, challenging rampant injustices and upholding the rights of people living with HIV, black and African liberation theology would be making valuable contributions to the overall response to the epidemic.

Sixth, Dube and Maluleke include cultural liberation in their reflections on HIV. They effectively overcome the perennial division of African theology into inculturation and liberation. Their holistic approach to liberation is important in the time of HIV. It serves as a reminder of the fact that liberation in the context of HIV must include all dimensions. Dube and Maluleke confirm that the HIV epidemic makes the convergence of the inculturation and liberation strands of African theology an urgent undertaking.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have argued that black and African liberation theologies have undergone stagnation and decline since the 1990s.

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<sup>63</sup>Tinyiko S. Maluleke, “The Graveyardman, the ‘Escaped Convict’ and the Girl-Child: A Mission of Awakening: An Awakening of Mission”, 552.

Black theology in South Africa has been affected by the demise of apartheid, the absorption of some of its practitioners into government and the retirement of others. On the other hand, African liberation theology has not been able to raise its profile at a time when postcolonial Africa's problems have multiplied. As a result, these strands of African theology have not been able to spearhead reflections on HIV and AIDS. I have argued that the works of Dube and Maluleke offer exciting opportunities to black and African liberation theologies in the era of HIV. In the following chapter, I shift attention to the role of reconstruction theologies in contexts of HIV in Africa.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **“Let Us Rebuild”: Reconstruction Theology and HIV**

**T**his chapter seeks to outline the key themes in reconstruction theologies and illustrate their relevance to the struggle against the epidemic. It is important to consider the role of reconstruction theology in facing HIV, as it is the latest strand in African theology. The All Africa Conference of Churches 8<sup>th</sup> General Assembly held in Yaounde, Cameroon, 22-27 November 2003, had the theme, “Come let us rebuild”.<sup>1</sup> In fact, it is surprising that reconstruction theology, which emerged in the 1990s when the effects of the pandemic became pronounced, has hardly begun to reflect on this theme in a direct way. This situation requires urgent attention, hence the reflections in this chapter.

#### **Re-launching Africa: An Overview of Reconstruction Theology**

The militant and hard-hitting critiques of postcolonial Africa’s social, political, economic and religious paralysis have not been enough to reposition Africa. The continent has continued to languish under the label of “underdeveloped countries”, that are euphemistically being (re)classified as “emerging economies”. Instead of emerging, most

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<sup>1</sup>See, Kasonga wa Kasonga and Margaret Mukuna, eds., *Come Let Us Rebuild: A Report of the AACC 8<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, Yaounde, Cameroon, November 22-27, 2003*. Nairobi: AACC, 2006.

African economies are submerging under the deluge of globalisation, mismanagement, corruption and a litany of other problems. Poverty, extreme human rights violations and civil unrest appear to have attained permanent resident status in Africa.

Emerging in the 1990s, reconstruction theology seeks to offer a “new start” to Africa.<sup>2</sup> As indicated in chapter one, reconstruction theology in Africa is predominantly associated with Jesse N.K. Mugambi,<sup>3</sup> Charles Villa-Vicencio<sup>4</sup> and Kä Mana.<sup>5</sup> Although these three male African theologians have clear differences in their understanding of the task of reconstruction theology, they have a lot in common. They are all convinced that reconstruction theology offers the greatest opportunity to the church in Africa to transform society.

First, reconstruction theology emerged from an optimistic phase in the history of Africa. The early 1990s promised so much for the continent. In many countries, the one-party state gave way to multiparty democracy. In 1994, South Africa became a democracy, following Namibia’s independence in 1990. There were high hopes that the continent would build on the emerging democratic systems to achieve unprecedented economic growth. Reconstruction theology emerged within this context, with its proponents anticipating the church’s contribution to Africa’s prosperity. The fall of the Berlin

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<sup>2</sup>In Zimbabwe, Voluntary Counselling and Testing Centres are called “New Start Centres” as they assist individuals to come to terms with their HIV status (especially if they are HIV positive).

<sup>3</sup>See for example Jesse N.K. Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology after the Cold War*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1995 and Jesse N.K. Mugambi, *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction*. Nairobi: Acton, 2003.

<sup>4</sup>Charles Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

<sup>5</sup>Kä Mana, *Christians and Churches of Africa Envisioning the Future: Salvation in Christ and the Building of a New African Society*. Yaounde: Editions Cle, 2002.

Wall in 1989 was seen as allowing Africa to determine its own political destiny.

Second, reconstruction theology voices dissatisfaction with liberation theology. In the previous chapter I highlighted the key concerns of liberation theology, which has sought to challenge underdevelopment and dictatorship. It utilises the Exodus motif in which God identifies with the struggling blacks. Mugambi and Villa-Vicencio are particularly strident in their criticism of liberation theology. Mugambi contends that liberation theology has been preoccupied with dismantling oppressive systems, but is not helpful in taking the continent forward. For him, reconstruction theology places the continent on a forward-looking platform and overcomes the inherent limitations of previous theological paradigms. He says of reconstruction theology:

This theology should be reconstructive rather than destructive, inclusive rather than exclusive; proactive rather than reactive; complementary rather than competitive; integrative rather than disintegrative; programme-driven rather than project-driven; people-centred rather than institution-centred; deed-oriented rather than word-oriented; participatory rather than autocratic; regenerative rather than degenerative; future-sensitive rather than past-sensitive; co-operative rather than confrontational; consultative rather than impositional.<sup>6</sup>

Mugambi’s contention is that liberation theology lacks a proactive agenda. It tends to concentrate on overcoming oppression, but is not capable of rolling out a programme for moving ahead. Villa-Vicencio shares Mugambi’s criticism of liberation theology. He contends that black theology has been essentially a theology of resistance. According to him:

Liberation theology in South Africa has been essentially a theology of saying “NO”. It required us to say a simple and firm

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<sup>6</sup>Jesse N.K. Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction*, xv.

“NO” to apartheid, racism, sexism, exploitation and all phoney forms of reform. We did not have to be very thoughtful or intelligent to get this right. A little guts was all that was required of most of us.<sup>7</sup>

Although Villa-Vicencio simplifies black and liberation theology, he is in basic agreement with Mugambi regarding the need to go beyond it. Reconstruction theology is presented as a more sophisticated successor to black theology. Proponents of reconstruction theology contend that it is better suited to meet Africa’s contemporary challenges. Whereas black and liberation theology were relevant during the struggles for independence, they aver that the new situation requires a different approach. Advocates of reconstruction theology are persuaded that it offers an ideal platform for re-launching Africa on a more promising platform.

Third, reconstruction theology resonates with political, economic and ideological programmes that have been proposed in efforts to lift Africa out of its economic problems. Thabo Mbeki of South Africa has been promoting the idea of Africa’s Development (NEPAD). NEPAD has been touted as the programme that will transform Africa’s fortunes. Theologians operating within the reconstruction paradigm project a new era when Africa will become prosperous. Julius K. Murage contends that NEPAD is in line with the theology of reconstruction. He argues:

In fact, NEPAD is an articulation of politicians in an attempt to reconstruct Africa while the theology of reconstruction is an attempt by theologians to respond to the renewal and transformation of Africa. NEPAD as a reconstructive development model attempts to give hope to Africa like the reconstruction theology.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Charles Villa-Vicencio cited in, Valentin Dedji, *Reconstruction and Renewal in African Christian Theology*, Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2003, 75.

<sup>8</sup>Julius K. Murage, “Development and Reconstruction Theologies of Africa”, *Swedish Missiological Themes* 95, 2, 2007, 155.

Fourth, reconstruction theology embraces most of the themes in other strands of African theology. This is understandable, since inculturation, black theology and African women’s theology are concerned with transformation. Inculturation seeks to reconstruct Christianity so that it reflects an African ethos. Black and liberation theologies seek to reformulate Christianity so that it becomes life-giving to black Africans. African women’s theologies seek to overcome patriarchy and reconstruct gender relations. It is the presence of these themes that has led Julius M. Gathogo to suggest that all African theology be subsumed under African Theology of Reconstruction.<sup>9</sup> As noted below, this is a problematic proposal.

Fifth, it is significant to note that most African women theologians have not embraced reconstruction theology. To a very large extent, they have ignored it completely. Others, like Musa Dube, contend that proponents of reconstruction theology are unrealistic regarding Africa’s opportunities in the age of globalisation. They also feel that reconstruction theology has not paid attention to patriarchy.<sup>10</sup> As a result, the notion that reconstruction becomes the dominant paradigm in African theology is highly debatable, as other strands of African theology do not feel adequately represented.

**O, Sheol, Where is Your Destruction? (Hosea 13:14):  
Reconstruction Theology and HIV**

Reconstruction theology is well placed to respond to HIV as it addresses the issue of rebuilding after destruction. AIDS has brought death and devastation to Africa and continues to decimate Africa’s young adults. It has left millions of children orphaned. Many economies have been weakened as the labour force succumbs to the pandemic. Agriculture has been severely affected, while child-headed households have become a reality in many communities. The

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<sup>9</sup>Julius M. Gathogo, “A Survey on an African Theology of Reconstruction (ATOR)”, *Swedish Missiological Themes* 95,2, 2007, 148.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid, 128, note 22.

pandemic continues to threaten development across most parts of sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>11</sup>

The task facing reconstruction theology in the time of HIV is how to mitigate the impact of the pandemic. It is striking to note that the proponents of reconstruction theology have not provided detailed reflections on how HIV threatens Africa's vitality. There is some need to examine factors that enable the spread of HIV in Africa and to propose strategies that will unleash Africa's energy to counter forces of death and destruction. Njongonkulu Ndugane, a church leader from South Africa, looks forward to a reconstructed future when he writes:

We can educate our children and help them develop the life skills that will keep them from ever becoming infected. We can rebuild our nations as just and caring societies and we can show the world that Africans can bring life out of death, order out of chaos and hope out of hopelessness. We can secure the future, today. But we must never lose sight of the prize: a generation without AIDS.<sup>12</sup>

Reconstruction theology has an important role to play in Africa's efforts to overcome the negative impact of the pandemic. In his reflections on reconstruction theology, Mugambi sees reconstruction as taking place at different levels: personal, cultural and ecclesial reconstruction. I reflect on these and other themes in the context of HIV and AIDS below.

### **Rebuilding Individuals and Families**

HIV has had a devastating impact at an individual level. Stigma and discrimination endured by many people living with HIV has resulted

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<sup>11</sup>John Iliffe, *The African AIDS Epidemic: A History*. Oxford: James Currey, 2006.

<sup>12</sup>Njongonkulu Ndugane, *A World with a Human Face: A Voice from Africa*. Geneva: WCC, 2003, 63.

in loss of confidence. Others have been weighed down by self-stigmatisation. Africa will not be able to move forward when millions of its citizens are unable to realise their full potential due to the negative effects of HIV.

Reconstruction theology must galvanise people living with HIV. It must equip people living with the virus to adopt positive lifestyles. It must empower these people to overcome negative thoughts and facilitate the adoption of productive lives. Where HIV paralyses individuals, reconstruction theology must energise them. Even in the absence of antiretroviral drugs, people living with HIV must have the confidence to face life with courage and hope.

Personal reconstruction in the time of HIV is not restricted to people living with HIV. There is need for men in particular to invest in self-care, as argued in the previous chapter. As part of the process of personal reconstruction, men must review their attitude to sexuality and power. Men need to adopt safer sexual practices and invest in love and intimacy. Men who have reconstructed their values are assets in Africa’s struggle against poverty and under development.

Alongside the reconstruction of individuals, families in Africa are in dire need of rebuilding. African Catholic theologians have proposed the African family as a model for the church.<sup>13</sup> However, the HIV pandemic has had an indelible impact on the African family. Child-headed households are indicative of this crisis. The absence of men in stories of families affected by HIV and AIDS in Kwazulu-Natal<sup>14</sup> reinforces the idea of crisis in families. Reconstruction

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<sup>13</sup>See for example Agbonkhanmeghe E. Orobator, *The Church as Family: African Ecclesiology in its Social Context*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2000.

<sup>14</sup>Philippe Denis and Radikobo Ntsimane, “Absent Fathers: Why Do Men Not Feature in Stories of Families Affected by HIV/AIDS in Kwazulu-Natal?” in Linda Richter and Robert Morrell, eds; *Baba: Men and Fatherhood in South Africa*, Cape Town: Human Sciences Research Council, 2006, 237-249.

theology must provide insights into the empowerment of families in the era of HIV.

Fatherhood requires urgent attention in the face of HIV. Values relating to responsibility and care must be inculcated. It is shocking to read about fathers raping their daughters and failing to provide effective leadership. Without succumbing to patriarchy, it could still be argued that fathers need to take their responsibilities seriously in the era of HIV.<sup>15</sup>

### **Empowering Communities and Nations**

African communities and nations have demonstrated remarkable resilience in the face of the devastation caused by HIV and AIDS. However, there are clear fault lines that have emerged. Reconstruction theology has a definite role to play in assisting African communities and nations to literally pick up the pieces in the aftermath of the pandemic.

If reconstruction theology is to overcome the charge of being too academic, its practitioners must come up with concrete and practical proposals on how to rebuild African communities and nations. One of its proponents, Murage, finds resonance between reconstruction theology and NEPAD.<sup>16</sup> However, Africa has had its fair share of brilliant economic blueprints that have not been implemented. Instead of taking Africa out of its poverty, they have pushed the continent deeper and deeper into the abyss of underdevelopment.

The “recreation of Africa”<sup>17</sup> following the impact of the HIV pandemic is inextricably tied to Africa’s apparently never-ending

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<sup>15</sup>See for example, Linda Richter and Robert Morrell, eds., *Baba: Men and Fatherhood in South Africa*. Cape Town: Human Science Research Council, 2006.

<sup>16</sup>Julius K. Murage, “Development and Reconstruction Theologies of Africa”, 155.

<sup>17</sup>See for example Ezra Chitando, “The Recreation of Africa’: A Study of the Ideology of the African Apostles of Zimbabwe”, *Exchange* 32, 3, 2003, 239-249.

struggle against poverty. African economists, social scientists, liberation theologians and other experts have underscored the point that HIV and poverty are Siamese twins. To say this is not to allege that poverty causes HIV, but it is to acknowledge the fact that poverty increases vulnerability to HIV. According to Christo Greyling, an African religious leader living with HIV:

HIV and poverty are closely linked and each in turn increases the other; HIV/AIDS increases poverty, and poverty increases the risk of HIV infection and the impact of HIV/AIDS on families and communities.<sup>18</sup>

Africa will not successfully overcome the challenge of HIV and AIDS without engaging with the issue of poverty in a creative way. The pandemic has made a “preferential option for the poor”, who in most cases are black. As with black and African liberation theologies, reconstruction theology must provide a “way forward”, out of Africa’s apparent covenant with poverty. Human rights and HIV and AIDS activist Justice Edwin Cameron’s comments on the shocking statistic that two thirds of all those living with HIV are in sub-Saharan Africa highlight the need to fight against poverty. He stresses this point by saying:

Those figures starkly mirror the more general disparities in our world between those who control and those who have been dispossessed; those who have, and are surrounded and are well attended, and those whose circumstances are the opposite. AIDS therefore mirrors, but it also accentuates, the disparities of our world.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Christo Greyling, *Poverty, HIV and AIDS: The Challenge to the Churches in the New Millennium*. London: Catholic Institute for International Relations, 2002, 13.

<sup>19</sup>Edwin Cameron, “Foreword”, in Liz Walker, Graeme Reid and Morna Cornell, *Waiting to Happen: HIV/AIDS in South Africa: The Bigger Picture*. Cape Town: Double Storey Books, 2004, 7-8.

Reconstruction theology must guide African communities and nations as they seek to rebuild in the aftermath of HIV. It must provide new and creative strategies for the continent's economic development. After too many false starts, the time has come for Africa to mobilise its God-given natural resources to achieve economic growth. Emerging out of the crisis brought about by the pandemic, Africa must "step forth in faith"<sup>20</sup> and hope.

### **Revamping Governance Systems**

Some African political leaders like Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe are quick to dismiss ideas like "human rights", "good governance", "democracy" and others as concepts of Western glamour that are of no relevance to the lives of millions of contemporary Africans. These are ideological smokescreens used to gloss over neo-colonialism, Mugabe charges. Using powerful anti-colonial rhetoric, he wonders whether the West can teach Africa any lessons about democracy and human rights. Can perpetrators of the slave trade and colonialism claim to be paragons of human rights? Can those who "bomb democracy" into Afghanistan claim to be champions of democracy?

While the rhetoric from postcolonial African leaders and intellectuals like Mugabe is impressive, reconstruction theology must expose the hypocrisy of most of these leaders. They give the wrong perception that somehow Africans deserve less than the rest of humanity. Although globalisation has disadvantaged Africa seriously, Africa's leaders remain largely responsible for the sad state of affairs. At a time when HIV is placing a major strain on their countries' health systems, they find time and money to fight senseless wars. When children orphaned by AIDS struggle to find food, they shamelessly speed away in the latest and flashiest luxury vehicles

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<sup>20</sup>"Africa Step Forth in Faith" was the theme of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) ninth Assembly in Maputo, Mozambique, December 2008. See Nicholas Otieno, ed., *Africa, Step Forth in Faith: Sub-themes in the Theological Imperatives of the AACC Ninth General Assembly*. Nairobi: AACC, 2008.

imported from Europe. When people living with HIV struggle to access life-saving drugs, many African leaders are willing to add a new wing to the state house!

Reconstruction theology must provide insights into the leadership question as the continent counts its losses due to HIV. Nyambura Njoroge has argued that the pandemic brings the leadership issue in Africa to the fore.<sup>21</sup> Africa is in dire need of effective and charismatic leadership in the face of HIV, poverty, violence and a plethora of other ills. Unfortunately, very few political and religious leaders have emerged to propel the continent to greater heights. The inspired leadership that characterised the struggle for independence has dissipated. The majority of African leaders are mediocre and uninspiring. To say this is not to lapse into Afro-pessimism: it is to state the truth that hurts!

Reconstruction theology must challenge postcolonial dictatorships that prevent citizens from enjoying abundant life. Alongside black and liberation theology, it must equip churches to advantage the poor. Since women constitute the majority of the poor as a result of the feminisation of poverty, reconstruction theology must engage African women’s theologies in a more deliberate way. All these theologies must guide the church in Africa to defeat poverty. Matthew Theuri makes the following valid observation:

One should note that when the African church addresses itself to the poor, it does so in an inclusive manner; the poor who die of hunger, those materially and economically poor, the sick, illiterate, unemployed, exploited and underpaid, those in drought and flood-stricken areas, victims of both tribal clashes as well as other persons whose rights to be fully humans have been violated due to ethnic

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<sup>21</sup>Nyambura J. Njoroge, “Theology of Stewardship in Times of Monumental Suffering”, in Nicholas Otieno, ed., *Africa, Step Forth in Faith*, 86 (66-87).

cleansing, detention, both physically and mentally harassed persons.<sup>22</sup>

By challenging oppressive postcolonial African governments and their misallocation of resources, reconstruction theology will provide a source of hope in the time of HIV. Revamping archaic and unresponsive governance systems will enable Africa to tackle HIV and other challenges more effectively. By promoting sensitivity to the plight of the poor and disadvantaged, democracy and good governance reconstruction theology will contribute immensely to Africa's revival.

### **Reconstituting Gender Relations**

Gender inequality facilitates the rapid spread of HIV in sub-Saharan Africa. I have outlined how African women theologians and some black theologians have demonstrated how gender inequality has left African women more vulnerable to HIV. Reconstruction theology must equip African communities with strategies to reconstitute gender relations in the time of HIV.

The task of remaking gender relations in African reconstruction theology emerges from the contention that gender is not handed down from heaven in a fixed form. Gender relations are a result of socialization. Culture plays a central role in prescribing how men and women act. According to Dube:

Something as deep and as pervasive as gender needs a range of social support that helps maintain it and keep it alive through the generations. It can only thrive through myth and cultural and

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<sup>22</sup>Matthew Teuri, "Poverty in Africa", in Mary N. Getui and Emmanuel A. Obeng, eds., *Theology of Reconstruction: Exploratory Essays*. Nairobi: Acton, 1999, 240.

religious beliefs that give a stamp of approval and a “blessing” to what is certainly a social contract.<sup>23</sup>

Gender activists regard the social construction of gender as providing a window of opportunity. If gender relations are a product of socialization, there is hope that human communities can reshape them. Oppressive behaviour can be unlearned by both women and men. Reconstruction theology must place emphasis on the emergence of gender justice in the face of HIV in Africa.

The HIV pandemic challenges the church in Africa to work with young men in particular.<sup>24</sup> Young people are more open to new ideas and ways of doing things. As Africa prepares to re-launch itself in the aftermath of HIV, young men must be encouraged to embrace alternative masculinities. Reconstruction theology must equip them to embrace gender-equitable values and practices. They must be trained to shun violence against women. This will enable African women to unleash their full potential and contribute to Africa’s economic growth.

### **Rebuilding Africa’s Confidence**

African politicians, philosophers and intellectuals have constantly struggled against Afro-pessimism. Global media networks specialise in beaming images of chaos and death from Africa. Genocide in Rwanda, famine in Ethiopia, record hyperinflation in Zimbabwe, harrowing narratives of rape in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, child soldiers in Sierra Leone; the list is endless. While defenders of Africa are at pains to insist that Africa is not a dark

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<sup>23</sup>Musa W. Dube, “Culture, Gender and HIV/AIDS: Understanding and Acting on the Issues”, in Musa W. Dube, ed; *HIV/AIDS and the Curriculum: Methods of Integrating HIV/AIDS in Theological Programmes*: Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2003, 88.

<sup>24</sup>Ezra Chitando, *Acting in Hope: African Churches and HIV/AIDS*. Vol. 2. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2007, 52.

continent,<sup>25</sup> the HIV pandemic appears to confirm that nothing good comes out of Africa.

Africa's confidence has been heavily dented by HIV and AIDS. This has worsened Africa's negative image in world affairs. Africa emerges from the pandemic as a diseased and dying continent, at least in the eyes of those who have always associated it with backwardness. Alongside the stigma of being black (in the eyes of racists), Africans now carry the additional burden of being perceived as disease carriers. Reconstruction theology has the pressing responsibility of restoring the confidence of Africans that has been shattered by HIV. Africans have been criticised for having low standards of sexual ethics. They have been lampooned as uncreative, in continuing to succumb to AIDS in large numbers when infection is avoidable for the most part. Reconstruction theology must equip Africans to defy these negative perceptions and demonstrate that they (we) can achieve as much as other peoples and continents. Yes we can!

The HIV pandemic has left Africa devoid of confidence. A continent that has been reeling from a plethora of problems has found itself facing a devastating enemy. Apart from destroying families and communities through death, the pandemic has left the region unsure of itself. Reconstruction theology must revive the spirit of Africa. It must empower Africans to emerge from the crisis with renewed hope.

How can reconstruction theology achieve the lofty goal of rebuilding Africa's confidence? The HIV pandemic provides a remarkable opportunity for theology to move from the ivory tower to address the daily struggles of the people. Proponents of reconstruction theology are being challenged to engage churches and communities in the "journey of hope". They need to ensure that their message reaches the grassroots and strikes a chord with the lived reality of Africans.

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<sup>25</sup>See for example Fritz Stenger, ed; *Africa is not a Dark Continent*. Tangaza Occasional Papers No. 17. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa.

Although the call for reconstruction theology has been well received within the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC),<sup>26</sup> very few non-specialists are familiar with its central message. This is unfortunate, as Africa desperately needs the message of reconstruction. Alongside the established scholarly channel of communication through books and journals, practitioners of reconstruction theology need to utilise the print and electronic media. They must also appropriate oral theology to ensure that new songs, plays, sermons and liturgies that celebrate reconstruction are performed.

### **African Agency and Africa’s Reconstruction**

Africa is littered with grandiose blueprints. African visionaries have continued to imagine a new continent. Sadly, most of the impressive plans remain locked up in office cabinets. This is due to a number of factors, including the refusal by most politicians to entertain new ideas. African political élites have tended to monopolise power and frustrate technocrats. More crucially, Africans have waited for external players to bring their developmental agendas to fruition.

African reconstruction theology should remind Africans that we are our own liberators. The task of fighting HIV is squarely ours; we cannot outsource it to others. The challenge of rebuilding Africa falls on the shoulders of Africans. Cardinal Renato R. Martino makes it clear that African agency is crucial to Africa’s reconstruction and development. It is necessary to cite him at considerable length:

But nobody can save Africa from oblivion without the collaboration of Africans themselves. Saint Augustine said that God created you without you, but will not save you without you. If yesterday the history (of) Africa was shaped one way or another by foreigners, what Africa will be tomorrow will largely depend on

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<sup>26</sup>Jose B. Chipenda, A. Karamaga, J. N. K. Mugambi and C. Omari, eds., *The Church of Africa: Towards a Theology of Reconstruction*. Nairobi: AACC, 1991.

your efforts today. Therefore, work hard towards the construction of a living environment for all, with a special thought to your children who will be your pride tomorrow. Struggle to leave them a harmonious society founded on the recognition of the dignity of each person, where transparency and honesty prevail and where attention is given to the weak and the most vulnerable.<sup>27</sup>

The passage cited above makes it clear that what Africa will be is down to what *we* will do as Africans. Emerging from the ashes of HIV, genocide, xenophobia, ethnic cleansing, gender oppression and other challenges, a new generation of Africans must take responsibility for the future of the continent. Yes, the memory of the slave trade, colonialism, neo-colonialism and the negative effects of globalisation must be kept alive. Yes, the ongoing racism against blacks in most parts of the world must be underlined. But the world does not owe Africa a living. We Africans must stop mourning and get on with the task of rebuilding our beautiful continent.

Reconstruction theology must reiterate the responsibility of Africans in rebuilding Africa after the destruction brought about by HIV and other challenges. For too long, Africa has searched for salvation from outside. Believing the myth that it is a poor continent, Africa has perfected the art of carrying the begging bowl. It is high time the continent utilised the available resources creatively and efficiently. Africa is endowed with more than adequate resources to climb out of poverty.

Of course, the human family has the responsibility to travel with Africa as it seeks to recover from the devastating effects of HIV and AIDS. Debt cancellation will go a long way in freeing African budgets to channel resources towards reconstruction. Reforming the global economic system will allow Africa to compete more favourably. However, the onus is still upon us as Africans to transform the economic fortunes of our continent.

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<sup>27</sup>Renato R. Martino, "The Church in International Organizations", in Fritz Stenger, ed; *Africa is not a Dark Continent*, 23.

### **Embracing Information Technology and Realigning Education Systems**

Africa continues to lag behind the information revolution. Although a few countries like Rwanda have invested heavily in information technology, most African countries have proceeded as if computers were never invented! Where ministries of science and technology exist, they are severely under-funded, and many departments in such ministries do not even have computers. How does Africa hope to compete in the global village when it is way behind in information technology? Information is power, goes the adage.

Reconstruction theology needs to remind African educationists of the value of relevant education systems. Notable steps have been undertaken to mainstream HIV and AIDS in the school curricula. There is need for more creativity to ensure that young people in Africa receive life skills education. The vulnerability of the girl-child must feature prominently in order to prevent their abuse by older people. Young people must be empowered with knowledge about human sexuality and the prevention of HIV.

The church in Africa owns educational institutions, including universities.<sup>28</sup> Reconstruction theology requires the church to transform these institutions into centres for the recreation of Africa. Graduates of African educational institutions, especially the church-related ones, must be creators of wealth. They must not specialise in mastering information that is of little or no relevance to African condition.

Reconstruction theology needs to provide insights into how to ensure that Africa’s education systems address the African existential reality. Whose questions do these systems answer? Do they find sustainable solutions to pressing issues like poverty, hunger, HIV and AIDS and other challenges? Do African education systems answer the questions that African communities are asking, or do

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<sup>28</sup>See for example Solomon Zwana, “Church-related Universities as a Manifestation of New Frontiers in Mission: The Zimbabwe Experience”, *Missionalia* 35, 2, 2007, 71-88.

they sheepishly follow debates generated elsewhere? As Paulo Freire suggests, oppressed communities need to embark on problem-solving education, which is revolutionary and prophetic.<sup>29</sup>

The training of pastors and other church administrators equally needs to undergo transformation in the wake of HIV. Reconstruction theology requires that the personnel to undertake the rebuilding of Africa be technocrats with multiple talents. Gone must be the days when the minister could only proclaim the word of God, important though this task is. The era of reconstruction demands that the minister must provide leadership in the various spheres. Theological education must equip the minister to enable her/him to collaborate with the community in re-launching Africa.

### **Ensuring Africa's Food Security**

In 2008, the global food crisis became a major issue. For some African countries, this was nothing new. They have lived with food shortages for the most part. In Southern Africa, HIV has had a major impact on agriculture. By attacking the productive age group, it has decimated the labour force. This has had a negative impact on food production. Furthermore, many caregivers are forced to leave the fields to attend to the needs of people living with AIDS.

The increase in the number of people taking antiretroviral drugs in Africa also makes the question of food security an urgent one. People in treatment need to eat well if the medication is to be effective. It is therefore crucial for the continent to invest heavily in food security. This is a viable strategy in mitigating the impact of the pandemic. African agricultural systems must be revamped in order to enable them to meet the growing demand for food.

“Give us our daily bread” is an integral part of the Lord's Prayer. Hunger is a violation of human rights. Especially in the time of HIV, the right to food must be high on the agenda of all African theologians.

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<sup>29</sup>Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition with an Introduction by Donaldo Macedo. New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004, 84.

Africa has adequate land and expertise to feed its people. It is therefore a scandal that many Africans do not have access to food. In her analysis of the food crisis in Africa, Mary N. Getui argues that African theologians must address the food crisis. According to her:

It is an issue that is relevant for Theology of Reconstruction for it is recognized that there is a problem, and there is a possibility of resolving it. The solution can only come from and within Africa and particularly the Church and more so theologians who have a responsibility, to make the gospel relevant and meaningful to the peoples of various situations.<sup>30</sup>

The church must put the land it owns in many countries to maximum use in order to address the food crisis in the time of HIV and AIDS. Unfortunately, in most instances the land has been retained as a status symbol. Reconstruction theology must challenge the church to demonstrate leadership in effective land utilisation and employing more efficient agricultural practices. An Africa that can feed itself will be more confident and will also achieve more on the global platform.

### **Conclusion**

Reconstruction theology has emerged as the latest trend in African theology, with some commentators like Gathogo suggesting that it should now unite all other approaches. Despite emerging at a time when HIV had been a reality in Africa, reconstruction theology has not grappled with the pandemic. Perhaps this is due to the fact that reconstruction theology is a “happy and optimistic” theology. HIV contradicts its vision of a robust and successful Africa. However, in this chapter I have identified a number of themes that reconstruction theology needs to interact with as it seeks to guide the continent out of the devastation caused by HIV. It needs to provide insight into the

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<sup>30</sup>Mary N. Getui, “The Food Crisis in Africa”, in Mary N. Getui and E. Obeng, eds., *Theology of Reconstruction*.

rebuilding of individuals, families and communities and the transformation of governance systems. It must work towards equitable gender relations, rebuilding Africa's confidence and emphasise Africa's agency in reconstruction. Reconstruction theology needs to challenge Africa to embrace information technology and transform education systems. It must guide churches to ensure the continent's food security. By responding to the challenges posed by HIV, reconstruction theology will become more relevant to Africa's struggle for health and well-being.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Summary, Evaluation and Conclusion

Since its appearance as a viable academic discipline, African theology has attracted considerable scholarly attention. Its guiding ideology has been to ensure that African issues and concerns are at the top of the theological agenda in Africa. It has called for the Africanization of Christianity. This call has been based on the observation that the gospel was brought to Africa clothed in European attire. Through inculturation, black, African women's, and reconstruction theologies, African theology has made a significant contribution to theology.

Despite its focus on African issues, African theology has not grappled with HIV and AIDS in a satisfactory manner. Perhaps only African women theologians can be applauded for their consistent focus on the theme. Only a few male African and black theologians, like Tinyiko S. Maluleke on the Protestant side and Agbonkhianmeghe Orobator on the Catholic side, have explored the implications of HIV on the theological task in Africa. The material that has been published so far tends to be exploratory in character.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter seeks to provide an evaluation of African theology's engagement with HIV. It identifies the main issues that have been covered in the different strands of African theology as discussed in the foregoing chapters. It then proceeds to identify areas for further

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<sup>1</sup>Martha T. Frederiks, "HIV and AIDS: Mapping Theological Responses in Africa", *Exchange* 7,1, 2008, 22.

reflection. It argues that there is ample scope for African theology to examine the implications of HIV and AIDS.

### **A Struggling Person Has Got to Move On: African Theology and HIV**

#### *The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians*

After the initial hesitance in the 1980s and 1990s, African theology has undertaken positive steps to analyse HIV and AIDS. Of particular significance are the publications of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians. In chapter three I discussed the Circle's engagement with the pandemic. I noted that African women theologians and scholars of religion have highlighted the impact of inequitable gender relations on women's vulnerability to HIV. I also drew attention to factors that have enabled the Circle to have such a consistent focus on the pandemic.

Through the writings of the Circle, African theology has described the role of religion and culture in aiding the spread of HIV. The Circle has also catalogued harmful cultural practices that endanger the welfare of girls and women. By capturing the central part gender dynamics play in one's vulnerability to HIV, the Circle has made a valuable contribution to global discourses on gender, religion and health.

The Circle has made some creative breakthroughs in the area of the Bible and HIV. Biblical scholars in the Circle like Musa W. Dube,<sup>2</sup> Madipoane Masenya<sup>3</sup> and others have brought fresh insights into the role of the Bible in responding to the pandemic. They have illustrated the importance of utilising gender lenses to understand

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<sup>2</sup>See for example, Musa W. Dube and Musimbi Kanyoro, eds; *Grant Me Justice! HIV/AIDS and Gender Readings of the Bible*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 2004, and Musa W. Dube, *The HIV and AIDS Bible: Selected Essays*. Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 2008.

<sup>3</sup>See for example, Madipoane Masenya (ngwan'a Mphahlele), "Seeking Security through Marriage: Ruth 1: 6-18 Placed under an African Woman's HIV and AIDS Lens", *Journal of Constructive Theology* 13, 2, 2007, 57-70.

illness and health in the time of HIV. The Circle's HIV and AIDS biblical criticism offers a new approach to biblical studies.

Through the Circle's writings, African theology has put HIV firmly on the agenda of theology. Circle writers have explored various themes that highlight the need for theology to respond to the pandemic. The Circle's partnership with institutions abroad and the writing of dissertations and theses on Circle contributions to discourses on HIV also confirm African women theologians' success in tackling HIV and AIDS.

As I argue in chapter three, African women theologians have rescued African theology in relation to its engagement with HIV. Against patriarchal control in the church, homes, theological institutions and departments of religious studies, African women theologians have raised the flag of the discipline. They have demonstrated leadership and creativity in responding to the pandemic. They have also challenged men to change their behaviour in the wake of HIV.

### *Inculturation Theologies*

The strands of African theology that have been dominated by men have not been as forthcoming as African women's theology in addressing HIV. However, there has been notable progress. Inculturation theology mainly seeks to ensure that Christianity in Africa takes an African flavour. It entails taking African rituals practices and religious beliefs seriously.

As noted in chapter two, John Mary Waliggo, a Catholic theologian from Uganda, has offered useful principles of inculturation in the time of HIV. He suggests upholding genuine African values and practices that are useful to the struggle; those that need modification and purification; those that must be replaced by newly thought-out Christian ceremonies and symbols, and those that must be fully abolished or controlled by our societies.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>John Mary Waliggo, "Inculturation and HIV/AIDS Pandemic in the AMECEA Region", *African Ecclesial Review* 47,4,2005 and 48,1,2006, 290-308.

Although the Organisation of African Instituted Churches (OAIC) has not published on the activities of its members, many AICs are implementing inculturation in the time of HIV. Their church leaders have become alert to traditional beliefs and practices that increase vulnerability to HIV. In Zimbabwe, the Union for the Development of Apostolic Churches in Zimbabwe (Africa) (UDACIZA) adopted an HIV and AIDS policy that discourages polygamy and the early marriage of girls, and promotes the empowerment of women.<sup>5</sup> This is a good example of inculturation theology.

Inculturation theologians have generally failed to match the creativity that local communities have demonstrated in addressing HIV. Non-professional theologians have applied Waliggo's principles of inculturation while systematic theologians in seminaries and universities remain at a loss as to how to reformulate African beliefs and practices in the time of HIV. They have proceeded to uphold valuable African values and practices, and have modified, replaced and abandoned others in the face of HIV.

The HIV pandemic offers a remarkable opportunity to practitioners of inculturation theology to demonstrate their relevance. They need to dialogue with African women theologians to identify problematic cultural beliefs and practices. By working with church leaders and community elders, inculturation theologians could help in the process of transforming African culture in the time of HIV. This will also change the communities' perception of theologians as individuals who focus on everything else but their pressing existential needs.

### *Black and African Liberation Theologies*

Black and African liberation theologies focus on the need to ensure that the church in Africa enables the poor to climb out of poverty and lead wholesome lives. In chapter four, I observed that black and

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<sup>5</sup>UDACIZA, "HIV and AIDS Policy", Harare, 2005. Sponsored by USAID and Futures Group.

African liberation theologians have, surprisingly, remained detached from HIV and AIDS issues. This is a major disappointment, given the close connection between blackness, poverty and HIV.

Maluleke, a South African black theologian, has emerged as one of the few voices on the theme of black theology and HIV.<sup>6</sup> He has challenged the church to work hard to eliminate poverty and promote the rights of people living with HIV. Maluleke provides valuable perspectives on how black and African liberation can tackle the pandemic. Through re-reading biblical passages and taking the interests of the marginalized as a priority, Maluleke illustrates the importance of black and African liberation theology to discourses on HIV. Orobator, a Catholic priest from Nigeria, has applied insights from black theology in his reflections on the mission of the church in the time of HIV, refugees and poverty.<sup>7</sup>

Although material on HIV and black/African liberation theologies is limited, it serves to confirm the extent to which race and class accentuate vulnerability to HIV. Dube has successfully highlighted the extent to which black African women, the majority of whom are poor, struggle to survive in the time of HIV. This has raised the importance of reflecting on gender, race and class in contexts of HIV. It challenges the proponents of globalisation, showing how HIV has shown “a preferential option” for poor blacks in Africa and other parts of the world.

African liberation theology is well placed to contribute to the struggle against HIV due to its emphasis on challenging oppressive and wasteful postcolonial governments. If the struggle against the pandemic is to be won, Africa will need intelligent, creative and

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<sup>6</sup>See for example, Tinyiko S. Maluleke, “Poverty and Destitution”, in Musa W. Dube, ed., *Africa Praying: A Handbook on HIV/AIDS Sensitive Sermon Guidelines and Liturgy*. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2003, 225-228.

<sup>7</sup>Agbonkhanmeghe E. Orobator, *From Crisis to Kairos: The Mission of the Church in the Time of HIV/AIDS, Refugees and Poverty*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2005.

sensitive leaders. They must be willing to channel resources towards education, health and social services. They must outgrow the depressing habit of building status symbols and engaging in military adventurism. African liberation theologians can play a crucial advocacy role in the time of HIV.

### *Reconstruction Theologies*

Emerging in the 1990s, reconstruction theologies initially offered a lot of excitement and promise to the continent. They sought to lead the church and community out of the depths of hopelessness and despair to a new era of hope and prosperity. However, the devastation caused by AIDS appears to have taken the gloss off theologies of reconstruction. Practitioners of reconstruction theologies have not been keen to examine the implications of HIV to the project of reconstruction in Africa.

Reconstruction is an appealing concept, given the destruction caused by HIV and AIDS in most parts of sub-Saharan Africa. Scholars in African theology will need to undertake patient analysis of the role of reconstruction theology in responding to HIV. They will need to examine its significance to efforts to re-launch the continent on a more optimistic footing after too many failed attempts.

### **Now We See in Part: Areas for Further Research**

The area of African theology and HIV is wide. Many themes have received cursory treatment, and await more detailed analysis. Although Martha T. Frederiks suggests that “nowadays the market is inundated with material on AIDS and theology”,<sup>8</sup> a critical analysis shows that much more remains to be done. In this section, I seek to highlight some areas for further research.

### *Oral Theology and HIV*

African theologians need to invest considerable energy in exploring the role of oral theology in responding to HIV. In chapter one I

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<sup>8</sup>Martha T. Frederiks, “HIV and AIDS”, 22.

indicated that oral theology is indeed an integral part of African theology. Of all the various strands of African theology, oral theology appears to be the best placed to make an effective contribution to the struggle against the pandemic. Oral theology speaks to the heart of the African. It communicates through poetry, song, dance and other strategies. Communicating HIV and AIDS prevention messages through these channels is likely to reach more Africans than through books and journal articles.

The challenge facing African theologians in the time of HIV is how to mobilise oral theology to defeat the pandemic. How are communities using songs, sermons, dance, names, paintings and chants to promote life and hope in the time of HIV? For example, what is the theology behind giving names like Miracle, Hope, Doubt<sup>9</sup> and others to children who are born with HIV? When communities are “singing for life”<sup>10</sup> and mocking death, what are the theologies of life that they are developing?

Oral theology has an important role to play in the struggle against HIV in Africa. Researchers need to document the extent to which individuals and communities of faith have deployed oral theology in response to the pandemic. What are some of the lasting images that they have drawn? Have they used carvings to express their lament? How has the preaching integrated HIV and AIDS?

In many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, electronically recorded gospel music dominates the airwaves. This is connected to the rapid spread of Pentecostalism in the region.<sup>11</sup> How is the theme of HIV

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<sup>9</sup>I am indebted to Manoj Kurian for his poem, “A Prophet Called Doubt” for this name.

<sup>10</sup>Gregory Barz, *Singing for Life: HIV/AIDS and Music in Uganda*. New York: Routledge, 2006.

<sup>11</sup>See for example, Ezra Chitando, *Singing Culture: A Study of Gospel Music in Zimbabwe*. Research Report no. 121. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2002 and John Collins, “Ghananian Christianity and Popular Entertainment: Full Circle”, *History in Africa* 31, 2004, 407-423.

and AIDS addressed in gospel music? Does it fuel stigma and discrimination for people living with HIV, or does it promote the ethics of compassion? What is the underlying theology of HIV in African gospel music?

Prayers, especially spontaneous ones, are a wonderful resource for ascertaining the prevailing theological attitudes towards the pandemic. African theologians need to record the prayers that address HIV and AIDS. They need to pay attention to the intonation, style, theological assumptions and attitudes towards the pandemic. They must also suggest prayers that promote care and support towards people living with HIV.

In many parts of Africa, young people have staged plays that seek to raise awareness of HIV and AIDS in church and society. The power of performance rooted in local culture facilitates the communication process. However, very few researchers have examined the theologies embodied in these performances. This theology that is “acted and danced out” might have greater power to transform society than esoteric theological reflections on HIV and AIDS.

### *Christology and HIV*

The theme of Christology has received considerable attention in African theology. Various African titles/concepts have been applied to Christ. Black theologians and African women theologians have described who Christ is to them. The HIV pandemic challenges African theologians to explore its implications to Christology. Who is Christ to a person living with HIV, an orphan in the time of HIV, a caregiver or a pastor who is always visiting the sick and burying the dead?

The area of Christology in the time of HIV promises rich rewards to scholars who are willing to explore it. In fact, there could be close connections between this theme and oral theology discussed above. What are the dominant images of Christ that are communicated in songs, sermons, dances, names and paintings? Who is Christ to an African continent that is dying from AIDS and living with HIV?

*Ecclesiology and HIV*

As with Christology, some scholars have examined ecclesiology in an African context. However, very few scholars have proceeded to analyse what the HIV pandemic means to the church in Africa. What does it mean to be “one body” when some members of that body are living with and affected by HIV? How can the church claim to be the body of Christ when some of its members have to endure stigma and discrimination? Crucially, what is the mission of the church in the time of HIV and AIDS?

Researches on ecclesiology in contexts of HIV and AIDS in Africa will need to explore the extent to which the pandemic calls for a restructuring of the church. Should women continue to be marginalized in leadership positions when they are running home-based care programmes and looking after the sick?<sup>12</sup> Can there be a church in Africa that addresses HIV without the critical role of women? Why has women’s outstanding leadership in the response to HIV not translated to leadership in the formal church structures?

The HIV pandemic challenges the male leadership of the church to rethink the concept of power. Male dominance has prevented the church from providing effective responses. Children, youth and women’s groups have shown a lot of creativity in responding to the pandemic, while the “official” male leadership has been hesitant to get involved. Unfortunately, some male African theologians have not been willing to delegate authority to vibrant groups within the church that are keen to respond to HIV.

*Ecumenism and HIV*

HIV has precipitated grassroots ecumenism. Women’s church groups defy the rigid denominational barriers that the male leadership guards so jealously. As they visit the sick, at funerals and memorial services, African Christian women demonstrate Christian unity in a practical

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<sup>12</sup>Isabel Apawo Phiri and Sarojini Nadar, ed; *On Being Church: African Women’s Voices and Visions*. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2005.

way. In some instances, they show Christian hospitality by sharing the communion at a time when the “learned” male theologians are still debating whether it is appropriate to do so. Researchers need to document and reflect on how ecumenism has been generated by “ordinary” believers in the time of HIV.

The need to pose a united front against the pandemic has seen Catholics, Protestants, AICs and Pentecostals sharing HIV and AIDS resources.<sup>13</sup> African theologians need to carry out further research into the extent to which the pandemic has promoted ecumenism in Africa. By paying attention to formal and informal collaboration by churches as they respond to HIV, researchers will help to clarify this promising development. The crisis has offered new possibilities for working together across faith traditions.

#### *Theological Reflections by People Living with HIV*

People living with HIV are a valuable resource to the church’s response.<sup>14</sup> However, African theologians have not compiled/facilitated theological reflections by people living with HIV. If theology places emphasis on experience (as it must), it is vital for theological reflections by people living with HIV to be accorded top priority in African theology.

African theology will benefit immensely from theological reflections by people living with HIV. These reflections would address themes related to stigma and discrimination, the image of God, suffering, salvation, hope and others.<sup>15</sup> Researchers and activists

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<sup>13</sup>Ezra Chitando, *Acting in Hope: African Churches and HIV/AIDS*. Vol.2. Geneva, World Council of Churches, 2007, 77.

<sup>14</sup>World Council of Churches, *Plan of Action: The Ecumenical Response to HIV/AIDS in Africa*. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2001, 7.

<sup>15</sup>For an analysis of the book of Job by an African Catholic theologian, see for example Ghislain T. Matadi, *Suffering, Belief, Hope: The Wisdom of Job in an AIDS – Stricken Africa*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2005.

need to document the thoughts and ideas of people living with HIV. These would become a rich resource for African theologians and others.

### *Masculinities, Gender-based Violence and HIV*

The role and responsibility of men in the time of HIV has become an important theme. I have highlighted how Maluleke has challenged men in Africa to provide sensitive responses to the pandemic. Men enjoy power and authority in the home, church and community. African theologians need to explore men's responsibility in the era of HIV. They need to suggest programmes to transform masculinities.

While African women theologians have passionately and eloquently written about gender-based violence and how it exposes women to HIV, male theologians have been hesitant to contribute to the discourse and to suggest effective interventions. Reflections on masculinities, gender-based violence and HIV will broaden the scope of African theology.

### *Theology of Children and HIV*

To a very large extent, African theology has been adult-centred. After expressing frustration with male perspectives, African women's theologies irrupted in the 1990s. Although they have included children in their reflections, they remain focused on adult issues. The HIV pandemic calls upon African theology to place children at the centre.

As African theology extends its scope, it needs to grant space to the voices of children. How do children living with HIV view God and Christ? What do children who head households say about the church? What do children who have been abused say about life on this earth? African theology needs to interact with children if it is to contribute meaningfully to the creation of a child-friendly world in the era of HIV.

### *HIV: Dominating African Theology?*

This study might give rise to the unfortunate conclusion that African theology's value solely depends on the effectiveness of its response

to the HIV pandemic. Far from it: African theology has an independent and autonomous existence apart from its engagement with HIV. However, African theology prides itself as being contextually sensitive. HIV dominates the African context. Therefore, one would expect African theology to tackle HIV and AIDS in an informed and liberating way.

The story of HIV and AIDS in Africa is not a happy one. In fact, it is depressing. If African theology is to be overwhelmed by the pandemic, there is a high possibility that this might create the impression that the story of Africa is only one of disease and death. There is therefore need for creativity in African theology's response to HIV.

African theology has the opportunity to reframe the story of HIV and AIDS in Africa. It must celebrate Africa's resilience in the face of a formidable adversary. African theology needs to highlight how Africa's values have enabled it to survive in the face of death. Africa's creativity, determination and solid faith must be celebrated in African theology's engagement with HIV. From the tragedy of HIV and AIDS has come a story of courage, creativity and the determination to live and defy death. Africa's response to the pandemic bears testimony to the never-say-die spirit of the Africans.

Can anything good come out of Africa? Are there any positive developments from HIV in Africa? These are questions that lead to straightforward answers for Afro-pessimists. They would contend that nothing good comes out of Africa and that the story of HIV is entirely negative. I would like to suggest an alternative interpretation. African theology must highlight the extent to which the pandemic provides a valuable opportunity for reflecting on the injustices that characterise the world today. According to Japhet Ndhlovu and others:

AIDS has become a mirror that reflects the injustices and inequalities, stigmatisation and prejudices that already exist in society. In severely affected regions, it is a cultural phenomenon that is turning the world upside down and challenging the institutions of society at every level. Reflecting on HIV and AIDS

is therefore also a matter of recognizing deep-seated cultural, political and economic realities.<sup>16</sup>

African theology needs to approach the HIV pandemic as an opportunity to transform the world. Inculturation theology must examine how cultural beliefs and practices increase or reduce vulnerability to HIV. Women's theologies need to continue to interrogate gender relations in society. Black and African liberation theologies must critique the impact of poverty and race on vulnerability to HIV. Reconstruction theology needs to explore resources for re-launching Africa as it responds to HIV and other crisis.

### **Africa: Rise Up and Walk**

HIV has found fertile ground in Africa. Significantly, Africa has refused to be written off. Communities have been staggering from the devastating effects of the pandemic, but they are still standing. This is significant, for, according to Shona ancestral wisdom, "*Kudzadzarika hakuzi kudonha*" — "Staggering is not falling". African theologians need to work with local communities in the spirit of Peter at the gate of the temple; "I have no silver and gold, but I give you what I have; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk" (Acts 3:6).<sup>17</sup> African communities need to utilise resources that are available locally to defeat HIV.

Africa is paradoxically poor and yet incredibly rich. To a very large extent, its situation is similar to the story of the man who languished for thirty-eight years next to the pool because he had

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<sup>16</sup>Japhet Ndhlovu *et al*, "North-South Collaboration in a Time of AIDS: The Challenge of Stigma", in Elizabeth Knox-Seith, ed., *One Body: North – South Reflections in the Face of HIV and AIDS*. Volume 1. Copenhagen: Nordic-Focccisa Church Cooperation, 2005, 5.

<sup>17</sup>I am indebted to Nicta Lubaale, General Secretary of the Organisation of African Instituted Churches (OAIC) for his reflection on this theme in Durban, South Africa, 12 October 2008.

nobody to assist him (John 5:1-9). Africa has all the resources that can lift it out of poverty and misery. What is required is creativity and effective leadership. African theologians need to be actively involved in mobilizing the church and other religious communities to ensure that this vision becomes a reality.

Refusing to succumb to HIV and a cocktail of ills, Africa must “rise up and walk”. It has had too many false starts. Doom and gloom must be replaced by optimism and hope. The children of Africa must live! The women of Africa must live! The men of Africa must live! Africa’s resources must be utilised in a sustainable way!

### **African Theology and HIV: Troubled but not Destroyed**

The chapters in this book confirm that African theology has responded to the HIV pandemic in an uneven manner. Without granting too much power to HIV, it appears reasonable to argue that Africa’s prospects for development are closely linked to how the continent responds to the pandemic. It is therefore crucial for African theology to address the pandemic. This will equip graduates of African theological institutions and departments of religious studies to work with African communities to respond to the pandemic effectively.

Africa is bleeding from the devastating effects of HIV and AIDS. Like the woman who had endured a flow of blood for twelve years (Luke 8:43-48), Africa searches for healing. Economic programmes developed by outsiders have left Africa poorer. Experiments by Africa’s own sons and daughters, many of whom have been obsessed with power, have not pulled the continent out of the dungeons of poverty. African theology of reconstruction might yet guide Africa in the context of HIV.

Africa theology, like most disciplines on the continent, has struggled with HIV and AIDS. It is required to provide direction and hope. It must recharge communities where cries of mourning dominate the soundscape. It must equip communities to believe that after the final “no” comes a “yes!” African theology must refuse to allow HIV and the forces of death it collaborates with to defeat life. It must mobilise the entire continent to declare:

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed... (II Corinthians 4:8-9).



# Appendix<sup>1</sup>

## Course Syllabi

### Theology of HIV and AIDS

Instructor: Dr. Lilian Dube, Assistant Professor, University of San Francisco, Department of Theology and Religious Studies

#### I. Course Description

This course discusses the role of religion in the context of HIV and AIDS. It presents the challenges of HIV and AIDS to contemporary African theology in particular, and Christian theology in general. The course redefines what it means to be the church in a world where AIDS ravages the lives and dignity of millions. Thus the course introduces theology of HIV and AIDS as a theology of passion, compassion, hope and life.

#### II. Learning Objectives

This Course seeks to:

- Study and understanding HIV and AIDS pandemic that has socio-political, economic, cultural and religious causes and effects.
- Contextualize HIV and AIDS (Africa) in order to gain in-depth insights and still be able to relate with the global picture.

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<sup>1</sup>I am grateful to Lilian Dube and the University of San Francisco for permission to use this course outline. Lecturers in other institutions can adapt the course outline as per their institution's guidelines.

- Examine the church's involvement with communities that are infected and affected by HIV and AIDS
- Illustrate the importance of community praxis in doing theology of HIV and AIDS.
- Propose a theological campaign against HIV and AIDS that has a global appeal.

### **III. Instructional Procedures**

- Lecture/discussion
- Reading assignments
- Written assignments
- Play
- Research

### **IV. Book List**

#### **Required Texts**

- Elias K. Bongmba. *Facing a Pandemic: The African Church and the Crisis of AIDS*. Baylor University Press, 2007.
- Musa W. Dube. Ed., *HIV/ AIDS and the Curriculum: Methods of Integrating HIV/AIDS in Theological Programmes*, WCC Publications, 2003.
- Ezekiel Kalipeni, Susan Craddock, Joseph R. Oppong, and Jayati Ghosh, *HIV and AIDS in Africa. Beyond Epidemiology*, Blackwell Publishing, 2006.
- Ogbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, *From Crisis to Kairos: The Mission of the Church in the Time of HIV/AIDS, Refugees and Poverty*. Paulines Publication, 2005.

### **V. Course Requirements**

#### **a) Participation and Discussions (10%)**

##### **Attendance policy**

Class participation is based equally on *attendance* and class *interaction*. Attendance at all class sessions is mandatory. Regular class/group discussions are a key component of the learning process in this course. They will supplement and integrate the readings rather

than repeat that material. For this reason, missing a class damages the learning process and subsequently, your grade. Students are allowed two absences without question. After that, grades will be penalized 1/3 of a grade for each absence (i.e., from a B+ to a B). Students missing more than 4 class sessions will be asked to withdraw from the course, or risk failure. Students learn as much from in-class discussion as in reading the texts.

Late papers will not be accepted unless submitted with a valid reason (which must be accompanied by a memo from the Dean's Office). It is difficult to write make-up exams that test the same body of knowledge provided on the first exam. As a result, I will not give make-up exams but will instead assign a research paper to count for the missed exam. Students must complete every assignment in order to pass the class. As a rule, I will return papers to you within one week of their submission to me. I am happy to read drafts of papers. They should be submitted to me at least three days before the paper is due. I can generally get them back to you within 24-48 hours.

### **Assessment Criteria**

- Regular attendance, sleeping in class counts as an absence
- Critical reading before each class for a knowledge of main themes
- Attentive respectful listening to the instructor and others' views
- Share insights and judgments based on reflective reading/listening
- Raise critical questions and articulate them in class

### **Confidentiality**

Students bring a variety of personal and professional experiences to the classroom environment. Given the quality of, and, frequently, the sensitivity of, issues raised in class projects and discussions, the matter of confidentiality embraces the students, as well as faculty. Unless specifically authorized by the class member, fellow students

should hold any sensitive information shared in strict confidence. Such information is not to be considered open for discussion or dissemination outside the classroom context.

**b. Written Assignments**

Careful attention must be given to spelling, grammar and overall mechanics as these will affect your grade. Papers are due on the assigned date at the beginning of the class period. Late papers will be dropped a full letter grade for each week day that it is late, so, start writing early.

**Quizzes (20%)**

Quizzes focus on the level of comprehension of the themes and issues in the assigned literature and how it relates to the lectures and class discussions. There will be FOUR unannounced quizzes with short-answer questions to be taken during class only. NO outside class arrangements will be made for quizzes. Missing class will therefore adversely affect your overall grade in an extensive manner.

**AIDS Campaign Play (40%)**

This class project requires the students to work together in designing an HIV and AIDS campaign play. The play is developed in the last 45 minutes of every Wednesday class beginning Week 6. My role is to facilitate discussions and moderate proceedings while students take charge. The following will therefore only serve as a guideline:

**Week 6:**

In groups of fives students brainstorm and identify a campaign theme for a local audience in San Francisco with an international appeal. They make an argument to justify their theme.

**Week 7:**

Groups take turns to present their play proposals to the class followed by a class discussion aimed at clarifying issues and collapsing similar themes to determine the number of scenes.

**Week 8:**

The class create binding working rules that will guide grading and appoint two directors who will take charge of the play proceedings making sure that the group themes are all included and the cast is well involved.

Week 9: Rehearsal (1)

Week 10: Rehearsal (2)

Week 11: Rehearsal (3)

Week 12: Rehearsal (4)

Week 13: Rehearsal (5)

Week 14: Dress Rehearsal (open to the university community)

Week 15: Final Presentation

Exams (15% each)

There will be two final assignments, one take home movie-based assignment and a sit in exam covering material from lectures, readings and discussions. They will test student comprehension of the subject as well as their reflective and analytical skills.

**VI. Academic Integrity:**

Any and all forms of academic dishonesty will result in an automatic “F” for the entire course, and the student will be reported to the Committee on Student Academic Honesty as well as the Dean of Arts and Sciences. Every student has an obligation to understand how to properly cite sources in a research paper, and to know what plagiarism is. Pleading ignorance in the case of plagiarism does not, therefore, constitute a legitimate excuse. All papers submitted in the course are subject to inspection by turnitin.com, an online resource

designed to detect unoriginal material. By remaining in this course, it is the responsibility of every student to understand and accept full responsibility for any acts of plagiarism.

## **VII. Grading Scale**

A = 90 - 100%

B = 80 - 89%

C = 70 -79%

D = 60 - 69%

F = Below 60%

## **VIII. Class Schedule and Reading Assignments:**

### **Week 1:**

Introduction

- Housekeeping
- Theology defined

Student Theological Statement/Journey (to be revisited twice in the term).

### **Week 2:**

Theology of HIV/AIDS

- Definition
- Objectives

Musa Dube, Ed., *HIV/AIDS and the Curriculum: Methods of Integrating HIV/AIDS in Theological Programmes*, 2003: (59-83; 77-83).

Elias K. Bongmba. *Facing a Pandemic: The African Church and the Crisis of AIDS*. Baylor University Press, 2007: (41-70).

**Week 3:**

The HIV and AIDS Pandemic in Africa

- AIDS History
- Stigma and Spread

Ezekiel Kalipeni, Susan Craddock, Joseph R. Oponng, and Jayati Ghosh, *HIV and AIDS in Africa. Beyond Epidemiology*, Blackwell Publishing, 2006: (1-10, 15-28)

Elias K. Bongmba. *Facing a Pandemic: The African Church and the Crisis of AIDS*. Baylor University Press, 2007: (9-40).

**Week 4:**

Children of AIDS

- Child-Headed Households
- Grandparents

Ezekiel Kalipeni, Susan Craddock, Joseph R. Oponng, and Jayati Ghosh, *HIV and AIDS in Africa. Beyond Epidemiology*, Blackwell Publishing, (2006: 305-322).

**Week 5:**

Sexuality and HIV and AIDS in Africa

- Migrant Masculinities
- Invisible Homosexuality

Musa Dube, Ed., *HIV/ AIDS and the Curriculum: Methods of Integrating HIV/AIDS in Theological Programmes*, WCC Publication, 2003: (1-9).

Ezekiel Kalipeni, Susan Craddock, Joseph R. Oponng, and Jayati Ghosh *HIV and AIDS in Africa. Beyond Epidemiology*, Blackwell Publishing, 2006: (144-154, 155-166).

**Week 6:**

## Cultural Entrapments

Ezekiel Kalipeni, Susan Craddock, Joseph R. Oppong, and Jayati Ghosh *HIV and AIDS in Africa. Beyond Epidemiology*, Blackwell Publishing, 2006: (89 -121).

Movie: Yesterday

**Week 7:**

## Poverty, Sex and HIV and AIDS

- Risky Behaviour in Slums
- The Role of IMF & World Bank

Ezekiel Kalipeni, Susan Craddock, Joseph R. Oppong, and Jayati Ghosh *HIV and AIDS in Africa. Beyond Epidemiology*, Blackwell Publishing, (2006: 167-174, 192-212).

**Week 8:**

## African Religions and HIV and AIDS

- Conceptions and Misconceptions
- Therapy

**Week 9:**

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